

The following terms are ones you should know to ensure you appreciate the writing you read:

1. Basic Terms:

literal meaning: limited to the simplest, ordinary, most obvious meaning

figurative meaning: associative or connotative meaning; representational

meter: measured pattern of rhythmic accents in a line of verse

rhyme: correspondence of terminal sounds of words or of lines of verse

2. Figurative Language

hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis (the opposite of understatement)

Example: "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse."

metaphor: comparison between essentially unlike things without using words OR application of a name or description to something to which it is not literally applicable

Example: "[Love] is an ever fixed mark, / that looks on tempests and is never shaken."

metonymy: a closely related term substituted for an object or idea

Example: "We have always remained loyal to the crown."

oxymoron: a combination of two words that appear to contradict each other

Example: bittersweet

paradox: a situation or phrase that appears to be contradictory but which contains a truth worth considering

Example: "In order to preserve peace, we must prepare for war."

personification: the endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities

Example: "Time let me play / and be golden in the mercy of his means"

pun: play on words OR a humorous use of a single word or sound with two or more implied meanings; quibble

Example: "They're called lessons . . . because they lessen from day to day."

simile: comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as "like," "as," or "as though"

Example: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"

synecdoche: a part substituted for the whole

Example: "Friends, Romans, countrymen: lend me your ears"

3. Poetic Devices

irony: a contradiction of expectation between what is said and what is meant (verbal irony) or what is expected in a particular circumstance or behavior (situational), or when a character speaks in ignorance of a situation known to the audience or other characters (situational)

Example: "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea"

imagery: word or sequence of words representing a sensory experience (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory)

Example: "bells knelling classes to a close" (auditory)

symbol: an object or action that stands for something beyond itself

Example: white = innocence, purity, hope

alliteration: the repetition of consonant sounds, particularly at the beginning of words

Example: ". . . like a wanderer white"

assonance: the repetition of similar vowel sounds

Example: "I rose and told him of my woe"

onomatopoeia: the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe

Example: "crack" or "whir"

allusion: a reference to the person, event, or work outside the poem or literary piece

Example: "Shining, it was Adam and maiden"

4. Poetic Forms

open: poetic form free from regularity and consistency in elements such as rhyme, line length, and metrical form

closed: poetic form subject to a fixed structure and pattern

stanza: unit of a poem often repeated in the same form throughout a poem; a unit of poetic lines ("verse paragraph")

blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter

free verse: lines with no prescribed pattern or structure

couplet: a pair of lines, usually rhymed

quatrain: four-line stanza or grouping of four lines of verse

sonnet: fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter with a prescribed rhyme scheme; its subject is traditionally that of love