

Poetic Terms  
ENGL 1102  
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**Alliteration:** The repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the beginning of words. Example: "Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood." Hopkins, "In the Valley of the Elwy."

**Assonance:** The repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry or prose, as in "I rose and told him of my woe." Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" contains assonantal "I's" in the following lines: "How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick, / Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself."

**Aubade:** A love lyric in which the speaker complains about the arrival of the dawn, when he must part from his lover. John Donne's "The Sun Rising" exemplifies this poetic genre.

**Ballad:** A [narrative poem](#) written in four-line [stanzas](#), characterized by swift action and narrated in a direct style. The Anonymous medieval ballad, "Barbara Allan," exemplifies the genre.

**Blank verse:** A line of poetry or prose in unrhymed [iambic pentameter](#). Shakespeare's sonnets, Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and Robert Frost's meditative poems such as "Birches" include many lines of blank verse. Here are the opening blank verse lines of "Birches": When I see birches bend to left and right / Across the lines of straighter darker trees, / I like to think some boy's been swinging them.

**Caesura:** A strong pause within a line of verse. The following stanza from Hardy's "The Man He Killed" contains caesuras in the middle two lines:

He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,  
Off-hand-like--just as I--  
Was out of work-had sold his traps--  
No other reason why.

**Closed form:** A type of form or structure in poetry characterized by regularity and consistency in such elements as rhyme, line length, and [metrical pattern](#). Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" provides one of many examples. A single [stanza](#) illustrates some of the features of closed form:

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though.  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

**Couplet:** A pair of rhymed lines that may or may not constitute a separate [stanza](#) in a poem. Shakespeare's sonnets end in rhymed couplets, as in "For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings / That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

**Elegy:** A [lyric poem](#) that laments the dead. Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" is elegiac in tone. A more explicitly identified elegy is W.H. Auden's "In Memory of William Butler Yeats" and his "Funeral Blues."

**Enjambment:** A run-on line of poetry in which logical and grammatical sense carries over from one line into the next. An enjambed line differs from an end-stopped line in which the grammatical and logical sense is completed within the line. In the opening lines of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," for example, the first line is end-stopped and the second enjambed:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now....

**Free verse:** Poetry without a regular pattern of [meter](#) or rhyme. The verse is "free" in not being bound by earlier poetic conventions requiring poems to adhere to an explicit and identifiable meter and rhyme scheme in a form such as the sonnet or ballad. Modern and contemporary poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries often employ free verse. Williams's "This Is Just to Say" is one of many examples.

**Image:** A concrete representation of a sense impression, a feeling, or an idea. Imagery refers to the pattern of related details in a work. In some works one image predominates either by recurring throughout the work or by appearing at a critical point in the plot. Often writers use multiple images throughout a work to suggest states of feeling and to convey implications of thought and action. Some modern poets, such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, write poems that lack discursive explanation entirely and include only images. Among the most famous examples is Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro":

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

**Lyric poem:** A type of poem characterized by brevity, compression, and the expression of feeling. Most of the poems in this book are lyrics. The anonymous "Western Wind" epitomizes the genre:

Western wind, when will thou blow,  
The small rain down can rain?  
Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again!

**Narrative poem:** A poem that tells a story.

**Ode:** A long, stately poem in [stanzas](#) of varied length, [meter](#), and form. Usually a serious poem on an exalted subject, such as Horace's "Eheu fugaces," but sometimes a more lighthearted work, such as Neruda's "Ode to My Socks."

**Open form:** A type of structure or form in poetry characterized by freedom from regularity and consistency in such elements as rhyme, line length, [metrical pattern](#), and overall poetic structure. E.E. Cummings's "[Buffalo Bill's]" is one example. See also [Free verse](#).

**Parody:** A humorous, mocking imitation of a literary work, sometimes sarcastic, but often playful and even respectful in its playful imitation. Examples include Bob McKenty's parody of Frost's "Dust of Snow" and Kenneth Koch's parody of Williams's "This is Just to Say."

**Syntax:** The grammatical order of words in a sentence or line of verse or dialogue. The organization of words and phrases and clauses in sentences of prose, verse, and dialogue. In the following example, normal syntax (subject, verb, object order) is inverted:

"Whose woods these are I think I know."