

27 Poetic Devices You Can Use to Bring Your Poetry to Life

Emerging poets tend to fall into one of two schools of thought: the first, those who seek to embrace any and all poetic devices they can find and pile them one on top of the other, creating an architectural marvel not entirely dissimilar to a literary jenga puzzle — also known as Art.

The second, those who sit down at a desk/café table/riverside and throw up a beautiful storm of emotions onto the page, creating something so full of shadow and light and colour that it could easily be mistaken for either a post-impressionist painting or the remnants of a small child's lunch. This, they assure us, is also Art.

The truth is, most poetry will fall somewhere in the middle. Many poets will begin learning about the technical literary devices used in poetry, read other poets who have used poetic devices successfully, and practice them in their own work until they become a part of their poet's voice. Then they allow them to come out naturally as they put their emotions down onto the page. If you read any poetry at all (and if you haven't, stop reading this, go do that, and come back), you're probably well on your way. Many of the things we're going to show you in this poetic devices list are things you will probably recognize from other poems and stories you've read in the past. Now we'll show you how to use poetic devices and you can have the chance to put them into practice.

What Are Poetic Devices?

Poetic devices are the interlocking puzzle pieces that make up all poetry, from snappy haikus to Greek epics that go on for three volumes. These poetic devices work on the basic line and rhythm level, which make your poetry engaging and memorable, and they work on the deeper, thematic level, which makes your poetry matter to the people who are reading it or hearing it. They're what gives your poetry shape, brightness, and contrast.

Some of these poetic devices you probably use instinctively. All poetry comes from a place within ourselves that recognizes the power of story and song, and we've formed these poetic devices over time as a way for us to communicate that with each other. While you're reading about these elements of poetry, see if you can look back at your own work and find where these poetic devices are already beginning to shine through naturally. Then you'll be able to refine them even more to make your poetry the best it can be.

Here are some of the poetic devices you'll be able to add to your poet's toolkit.

- **Alliteration**

Harkening back to the days when poetry was mostly sung or read out loud, this poetic device uses repeating opening sounds at the start of a series of successive words, giving them a lovely musical quality. The *Wicked Witch of the West* is an example of alliteration. So are *political power play* and *false friends*. *Cold cider* is **not** an example of alliteration because even though the words begin with the same letter, they don't carry the same sound to the ear. *A sinking circus*, on the other hand, kicks off each word with the same sound even though they look different on the page.

- **Allusion**

Allusion is where the poet makes an indirect reference to something outside of the poem, whether that's a real person, a well-known mythological cycle, or a struggle that's happening in the world we know. Sometimes this is simply to draw a parallel that the reader will easily understand, but often allusions are used to hint at something that it would be insensitive, or even dangerous, to directly acknowledge.

In Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven*, the bird in question is described as *perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door*. Some of the poem's readers may recognize Pallas as a reference to Pallas Athena, Greek goddess of wisdom. This shows that the narrator has a high respect for learning.

- **Anaphora**

Anaphora is an older poetic device that many writers still use today instinctively, knowing in their ears that it lends a unique emphasis and rhythm even if they don't know the specific term for it. You may have used it yourself. Anaphora is simply the act of beginning a series of successive sentences or clauses (sentence fragments) with the same phrase.

One of the most famous uses of anaphora in literature comes from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness.* It goes on like this for a while, and the audience falls into not only a comfortable rhythm but a sense of audience participation; they begin to anticipate the words as they come, giving them a feeling of singing along to a song they have never heard. The repetition at the beginning of each line also draws attention to the contrasting ideas that Dickens is introducing.

- **Assonance**

Also called “vowel rhyme”, assonance is a poetic device that repeats vowel sounds in a word or phrase to create rhythm (we'll talk about rhythm a little more later on). *Go slow down that lonely road* is an example of well-balanced assonance: we hear the same “oh” sound in *go* and *slow*, and then later in *lonely* and *road* (there's also a bit of a clever eye rhyme in *slow down* — you'll learn about eye rhymes when we talk about rhyme down below). Don't the deep, repetitive vowels just make you want to snuggle down into them?

You'll probably find yourself using assonance in your poetry already, because the words just seem to naturally settle in together. As you progress, you'll be able to see where those balanced vowels are beginning to shine through and then emphasize them even more.