Poetry Terms:
Sound Devices, Figures of Speech, Elements of Literature, and Rhythm

*Sound Devices*

**Alliteration** – the repetition of constant sounds in words that are close together.

**Assonance** – the repetition of similar vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds, especially in words close together.

**Consonance** – the repetition of the same or similar final consonant sounds on accented syllables or in important words.

**Onomatopoeia** – the use of a word whose sound imitates or suggests its use or meaning.

**Refrain/Repetition** – a word, phrase, line, or group of lines that is repeated, for effect, several times in a poem.

**Rhyme** – the repetition of vowel sounds in accented syllables and all succeeding syllables. **Internal** – rhyme that occurs within a line of poetry or within consecutive lines. **End Rhyme** – rhyme that occurs at the ends of lines. **Slant Rhyme** – a rhyming sound that is not exact. **Couplet** – two consecutive rhyming lines of poetry.

*Common Figures of Speech* – a word or a phrase that describes one thing in terms of another and that is not meant to be taken literally.

**Cliché** – a word or phrase, often a figure of speech, that has become lifeless because of overuse.

**Conceit** – an elaborate metaphor or other figure of speech that compares two things that are startlingly different.

**Hyperbole** – a figure of speech that uses an incredible exaggeration, or overstatement, for effect.

**Metaphor** – a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things without the use of such specific words of comparison as *like, as, than*, or *resembles*. They may be directly stated, implied, extended, dead, or mixed.

**Metonymy** – a figure of speech in which a person, place, or things is referred to by something closely associated with it. Example – referring to a car as “wheels”

**Oxymoron** - a figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory terms in a brief phrase. “Sweet sorrow,” “deafening silence,” and “living death” are common oxymorons.

**Personification** – a figure of speech in which an object or animal is given human feelings, thoughts, or attitudes.

**Simile** – a figure of speech that makes an explicit comparison between two unlike things, using a word such as, *like, as, than*, or *resembles*.

**Symbol** – a person, place, thing, or event that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something more that itself. We can distinguish between public and personal symbols.

*Elements of Literature*

**Allusion** – a reference to someone or something that is known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, or some other branch of culture.
Atmosphere – the mood or feeling created in a piece of writing.

Connotation – the associations and emotional overtones that have become attached to a word or phrase, in addition to its strict dictionary definition.

Diction – a speaker or writer’s choice of words (formal, informal, colloquial, full of slang, poetic, ornate, plain, abstract, concrete, and so on).

Imagery – the use of language to evoke a picture or concrete sensation of a person, a thing, a place or an experience.

Irony – in general, a discrepancy between appearances and reality (verbal, situational, or dramatic).

Pun – a “play on words” based on the multiple meanings of a single word or on words that sound alike but mean different things.

Theme – the insight about human life that is revealed in a literary work (different from subject).

Tone – The attitude a writer takes toward the subject of a work, the characters in it, or the audience.

Style – the distinctive way in which a writer uses language. Examples in poetry – ballad – a song or poem that tells story; catalog – a list of things, people, or events; concrete poem – a poem in which the words are arranged on a page to suggest a visual representation of the subject; epic – a long narrative poem, written in heightened language, which recounts the deeds of a heroic character who embodies the values of a particular society; lyric poem – a poem that does not tell a story but expresses the personal feelings of thoughts of a speaker; ode – a lyric poem, usually long, on a serious subject and written in dignified language; and sonnet – a fourteen-line poem, usually written in iambic pentameter, that has one of two basic structure – Petrarchan – octave – abba, abba; and sestet – cde, cde, or Shakespearean – abab, cdcd, eef, gg.

Rhythm
Caesura – a pause or break within a line of poetry (indicated by punctuation or phrasing or meaning).

Rhythm – the alteration of stressed and unstressed syllables in language.

Meter – a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry. Scanning – the analysis of a poem to determine its meter. Stresses or accents are indicated by the symbol (‘) and unstressed syllables by the symbol (‘). Foot – a metrical unit of poetry. Iamb – a metrical foot in poetry that has an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, as in the word protect. Iambic Pentameter is a line of poetry that contains five iambic feet.

Dactyl – a metrical good of three syllables in which the first syllable is stressed and the next two are unstressed. The word tendency is a dactyl. Trochee – a metrical good made up of an accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable, as in the word taxi.

Spondee – the metrical good consisting of two syllables, both of which are stressed. The words true-blue and nineteen are made of spondees. Anapest – a metrical good that has two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable. The word coexist is an example of an anapest. Blank verse – Poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Cadence – the natural, rhythmic rise and fall of a language as it is normally spoken. Cadence is different from meter, in which the stressed and unstressed syllables of a poetic line are carefully counted to conform to a regular pattern. Free verse – poetry that does not conform to a regular meter or rhyme scheme.