



# English 11

## Poetic Terms

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### Meter

In poetry, the meter (or metre) is the basic rhythmic structure of a verse. Many traditional verse forms prescribe a specific verse meter, or a certain set of meters alternating in a particular order.

*Example.* An important meter in English is the ballad meter, also called the "common meter," which is a four line stanza, with two pairs of a line of iambic tetrameter followed by a line of iambic trimeter; the rhymes usually fall on the lines of trimeter, although in many instances the tetrameter also rhymes.

“Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.”  
(-John Newton)

### Iambic Pentameter

Iambic pentameter is one of many meters used in poetry and drama. It describes a particular rhythm that the words establish in each line. That rhythm is measured in small groups of syllables; these small groups of syllables are called "feet." The word "iambic" describes the type of foot that is used. The word "pentameter" indicates that a line has five of these "feet."

An iambic foot is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The rhythm can be written as:

da            DUM

A line of iambic pentameter is five iambic feet in a row:

da    DUM   da   DUM   da   DUM   da   DUM   da   DUM

It's possible to notate this with a '˘'(Breve) mark representing an unstressed syllable and a '/'(Forward Slash) mark representing a stressed syllable. In this notation a line of iambic pentameter would look like this:

˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /

*Example:* John Keats' "Ode to Autumn"

˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /   ˘   /  
To   swell   the   gourd,   and   plump   the   ha-   zel   shells

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### Ballad Stanza

Ballad Stanza is the four-line stanza, known as a quatrain, most often found in the folk ballad. This form consists of alternating four- and three-stress lines. Usually, only the second and fourth lines rhyme (in an a/b/c/b pattern). Assonance in place of rhyme is also common.

*Example.* “The King sits in Dumferline Town,  
Drinking the blood-red wine:  
‘O where will I get a good sailor  
to sail this ship of mine?’”  
-anonymous

### Couplet

A couplet is a pair of lines of verse. It usually consists of two lines that rhyme and have the same meter. While traditionally couplets rhyme, not all do.

*Example.* “True wit is nature to advantage dress'd;  
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.”  
-Alexander Pope

### Elegy

An elegy is a mournful, melancholic or plaintive poem, especially a funeral song or a lament for the dead.

*Example.* “O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.”  
-Walt Whitman

### Ode

An ode is a form of stately and elaborate lyrical verse that expresses personal feelings and often rhymes. It can also often be characterized by a title containing the word, “Ode.”

*Example.* John Keats wrote “Ode to a Nightingale,” “Ode on Melancholy,” “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode to Psyche,” and “Ode to Autumn.”

### Quatrain

A quatrain is a stanza consisting of four lines.

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### Octave

An octave is a verse form consisting of eight lines of iambic pentameter (in English). The most common rhyme scheme for an octave is abba abba.

An octave is the first part of a Petrarchan sonnet, which ends with a contrasting sestet. In traditional Italian sonnets the octave always ends with a conclusion of one idea, giving way to another idea in the sestet.

*Example.* In Christina Rossetti's Sonnet "Remember," her Octave is about remembering her, no matter what, when she is gone.

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more, day by day,  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

- Christina Rossetti

### Sestet

A sestet is the name given to the second division of an Italian sonnet (as opposed to an English or Spenserian Sonnet), which must consist of an octave, of eight lines, succeeded by a sestet, of six lines. A sestet is also six lines of poetry forming a stanza or complete poem.

*Example.* Rossetti's Sestet in the above mentioned Sonnet begins with the lines, "Yet if you should forget me for a while/ And afterwards remember, do not grieve:" (9-10). This illustrates a change in Rossetti's tone, who is now saying that she does not want to be remembered if it causes the person remembering pain.

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The above definitions related to poetry are examinable in English 11.

These definitions were gathered from public domain content at wikipedia.org, dictionary.com, for students in the Saint Thomas Aquinas High School English Department.

Poetic language could be used in any communication resembling poetry in beauty or the evocation of feeling. While these terms will be used in the study of poetry, they could be applied in any written or verbal expression.

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<b>Alliteration</b>	<b>Imagery</b>
<b>Metaphor</b>	<b>Oxymoron</b>
<b>Onomatopoeia</b>	<b>Paradox</b>
<b>Personification</b>	<b>Symbol; symbolism</b>
<b>Rhyme</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>Rhyme Scheme</b>	<b>Atmosphere</b>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<b>Ballad</b>
<b>Simile</b>	<b>Blank Verse</b>
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Free Verse</b>
<b>Allusion</b>	<b>Lyric</b>
<b>Figurative Language</b>	<b>Mood</b>
<b>Hyperbole</b>	<b>Refrain</b>
<b>Image</b>	<b>Sonnet</b>
<b>Stanza</b>	<b>Tone</b>

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The above list constitutes the terms related to poetry that are have been covered in high school English and are examinable in English 11.