

Poetry 101: A refresher course.

Shutta Crum, Jackson, MI., WordWise Conference, Oct., 2007.

Types of metric feet:

Pyrrhic:	uu
Spondee:	//
Tribrach:	uuu
Molo'ssos:	///
IAMB:	u/
TROCHEE:	/u
ANAPEST:	uu/
DACTYL:	/uu
Ba'cchius:	u//
Antiba'cchius:	//u
Amphi'macer (cretic):	/u/
Amphibrach:	u/u
Ionic a minore:	uu//
Cho'riamb:	/uu/
Antispast:	u//u
First Paeon:	/uuu
2nd Paeon:	u/uu
3rd Paeon:	uu/u
4th Paeon:	uuu/

* (Note: the four in caps are the most common.)

Poetic technique: **Alliteration**

Definition: The repetition of sounds within words. Most often defined as repeated initial sounds and letters. Subdivisions include assonance and consonance. *Assonance:* repeated vowel sounds. *Consonance:* repeated consonant sounds.

Related/opposite techniques: Rhyme.

Example(s): I. Ruth Stone. From “**Mantra**”

“ . . . When I forget to weep
I hear the peeping tree toads
creeping . . . ”

II. Shutta Crum. From **Who Took My Hairy Toe?**

“On All Hallows’ Eve, when the wind is whipping through the gap and the trees are scratching at the sky, the folks round here say you can hear Old Tar Pocket’s screaming . . . ”

Extended examples:

Poems: Robert Frost. “**Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening.**”
e. e. cummings. “**in Just spring...**”
Ruth Stone. “**Mantra**”

Pict. Books: **Eek! Creak! Snicker, Sneak.** Rhonda Gowler Greene.
Piggie Pie. Margi Palatini.
Zoom! Zoom! Zoom! I’m off to the Moon! Dan Yaccarino.
Many alphabet books.

Writing starter: Make an alphabet of sounds in your poetry journal. Designate a whole page, or more, for each letter of the alphabet and jot down the impression each letter gives you when you say the letter aloud, and then words associated with that impression. Ex.: “b” (ba—eeeeeee...) makes me think of starting quickly and then zooming off into the distance like race cars at the dragway. So when I think of being at a race, the “b” words that sound right to me are, brake, bench, blare, brace, brands, etc. Keep the lists going and find words for poems.

Poetic technique: **Caesura**

Definition: A pause or break in a line caused by a space, comma, dash, ellipsis, or other punctuation such as an exclamation point. Often used for emphasis as it can make the reader pause. Can slow the rhythm.

Related/opposite techniques: Enjambment.

Example(s): I. Marilyn Chin. From “*The Last Woman with Lotus Feet.*”

“ . . . while she, still virgin, sat and brewed

Chrysanthemum tea . . . ”

II. **The Holy Bible.** From “*Genesis I. 1.*”

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep . . . ”

Extended examples:

Poems: Emily Dickinson. “*I Heard a Fly Buzz—When I Died.*”
Eve Merriam. “*Weather.*”
e. e. cummings. Various poems.
Marilyn Chin. “*The Last Woman with Lotus Feet.*”

Pict. Books: **Going to Sleep On the Farm.** Wendy Cheyette Lewison.
Company’s Coming. Arthur Yorinks. (See last four pages.)
All on a Sleepy Night. Shutta Crum (See faucet section.)

Writing starter: Find a point of amassed emotion, a transitional point, or a place where you feel a decision is made within a poem. Insert a caesura—a comma, dash, space, etc. Does this facilitate understanding of the poem, create a different meaning, or relocate the emphasis? Try the reverse on poems you find with caesuras. What is the effect? Write a poem with at least three caesuras in it.

Poetic technique: **Enjambment**

Definition: A turning of the line so that the sense and movement of the line moves into the next line. Can give a sense of rushing. Can also be used to give a disruptive or playful feel to the poem.

Related/opposite techniques: Opposite of an end-stopped line. Also, see section on *Caesura*.

Example(s): I. Anonymous.

“This is the farmer sowing the corn,
That kept the cock that crowed in the morn,
That waked the priest all shaven and shorn,
That married the man all tattered and torn,
That . . .”

II. William Carlos Williams. From “*The Red Wheelbarrow.*”

“so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow . . .”

Extended examples:

Poems: e. e. cummings. Various poems.
Sharon Olds. “*Bestiary.*”
William Carlos Williams, “*The Red Wheelbarrow.*”

Pict. Books: **Pierre: a cautionary tale.** Maurice Sendak.

Writing starter: Find a poem with enjambment. Undo the lines so they are end-stopped at natural breaking points. What is the effect on the poem? Is it more or less powerful? Has the tone of the poem changed? Enjamb a poem not been written that way. Analyze your response to the new enjambed poem. Write your own short poem with enjambment and again, without—which do you prefer? Why?

Poetic technique: **Hyperbole & Understatement**

Definition: *Hyperbole*: overstatement, such as in tall tales, or American slang. (“It killed me to pay that much!)

Understatement: not saying it all, a withholding of images. A way of holding back that can often draw your reader/listener closer into the work or illustrations.

Related/opposite techniques: Irony. Esp. effective in picture books that create irony through the interaction of an understated text and hyperbolic illustrations.

Example(s): I. (Hyperbole) Carl Sandburg. From “*The People, Yes.*”

“. . . They have yarns
Of a skyscraper so tall they had to put hinges
On the two top stories so to let the moon go by . . .”

“Of pancakes so thin they had only one side . . .”

II. (Understatement) Langston Hughes. From “*Poem.*”

“I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There is nothing more to say . . .”

Extended examples:

Poems: Anonymous. “*Old Joe Clark.*” (song)
Robert Frost. “*Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening.*”
Carl Sandburg. From “*The People, Yes.*”
Langston Hughes. “*Poem.*”

Pict. Books: **Shrek!** William Steig.
Pigs Aplenty, Pigs Galore! David McPhail.
Meanwhile Back at the Ranch. Trinka Hakes Noble.
Owl Moon. Jane Yolen.
Snowy Day. Ezra Jack Keats.

Writing starter: Choose a subject and write two sentences, one hyperbolic, one understated. Explore the variation in tone in some of your poems by practice-writing from both sides.

Poetic technique: **Imagery**

Definition: A concrete representation that creates a picture in the mind of the reader/listener. Using imagery we move from the abstract to the particular. e.e. cummings said, “. . . there is nothing as something as one.”

Related/opposite techniques: Other “figures of speech” like metaphors, similes, allusion, and personification. (Related, because they all create pictures in the mind’s eye.)

Example(s): I. Langston Hughes. From “*Winter Moon.*”

“. . . How thin and sharp and ghostly white
Is the slim curved crook of the moon tonight!”

II. Humbert Wolfe. From “*Autumn*”

“Listen! The wind is rising,
and the air is wild with leaves . . .”

III. Shutta Crum. From “*Funeral Procession*”

“. . . I trace these mountains against my heart.
They are old and crook-backed,
and as knotted with sorrow as my father’s hands.”

Extended examples:

Poems: Galway Kinnell. “*The Bear.*”
Gary Snyder. “*The Bath.*”
Carl Sandburg. “*Fog.*”
Robert Bly. “*Love Poem.*”
Alan Dugan. “*Love Song: I and Thou.*”
Langston Hughes. “*Winter Moon.*”

Pict. books: **Every Autumn Comes the Bear.** Jim Arnosky.
Owl Moon. Jane Yolen.

Writing starter: Choose an object and list sensory details about it—how it smells, tastes, feels, looks, sounds, etc. Then play with the words for poems and begin to decipher subjective reactions to those physical attributes. Also, if you can make your images do double duty as symbols your poems will be that much stronger. (See Dugan excerpt above for use of a symbol.)

Poetic technique: Metaphor & Simile

Definition: Figures of speech that compare one thing to another and expand our understanding. *Metaphor* is stronger as one thing directly assumes the characteristics of another. (“the mouth of a river,” or “table legs.”)
Similes use a connecting comparative word such as “like” or “as,” so it is a bit removed from the immediacy of the image.

Related/opposite techniques: *Analogy*: Extended reasoning based on metaphor.
Synesthesia: using one sense to portray another as in, “bitter smile.”

Example(s): I. (Metaphor) Ted Hughes. From **Crow**, “*Crowego*.”

“His wings were the stiff black of his only book
Himself the only page—of solid ink . . .”

II. (Simile) M. T. Anderson. From **The Game of Sunken Places**.

“About time you struck out on your own, instead of sticking to your friend like a tapeworm in a dowager’s belly!”

III. (Simile) Shutta Crum. From “*Funeral Procession*.”

“Along the railroad tracks cracked coal,
as sharp as a man’s dying, await loading . . .”

Extended examples:

Poems: Elisabeth Coatsworth. “*Rain Poem*.”
Billy Collins. “*Winter Syntax*.”
Ted Hughes. **Crow**, “*Crowego*.”
Lillian Moore. “*Dragon Smoke*.”

Pict. Books: **My Dad**. Anthony Browne.
Goodnight Horsey. Frank Asch.

Writing starter: Find some similes you like and rewrite them as metaphors. Which do you prefer? Extend your metaphors. Settle on which two things you are going to compare, and then answer these questions in regard to the comparison: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? (For ex.: sunset=blood. When? As I leave the city. How? Spilled from a gash in the sky. Where/what? Staining the roads that lead away from you.) Keep your notes and write a poem.

Poetic technique: **Meter**

Definition: The rhythmic measure of a line of verse, or a group of lines, composing a measurable rhythm of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Related/opposite techniques: Many poetic forms such as ballads, sonnets, etc. create specific rhythms by keeping to a defined number of feet and type of meter.

Example(s): I. Lisa Wheeler. From **Sailor Moo**.

“ . . . They swam her to the nearest ship,
a crusty cattle barge.
Red Angus, handsome brawny bull
appeared to be in charge . . . ” (alternating iambic tetrameter/trimeter.)

II. Shakespeare. From “*Sonnet 18*.”

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date . . . ” (iambic pentameter)

Extended examples:

Poems: Edgar Allan Poe. “*The Raven*.”
Anonymous. “*The North Wind Doth Blow*.”
e. e. cummings. “*anyone lived in a pretty how town...*”
Robert Frost. “*Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening*.”
Shakespeare. “*Sonnet 18*.”

Pict. Books: **Bear Snores On**. Karma Wilson.
All on A Sleepy Night. Shutta Crum.
Sailor Moo. Lisa Wheeler.

Writing starter: Select a poem with a strong meter and vary it by deleting words and phrases, changing the line lengths, or adding words and phrases to create a new pattern. Analyze which ones you like best. How would “*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*” sound with just three feet per line instead of four? (He will not see me stop/to watch his woods fill up/...)

Poetic technique: **Personification**

Definition: To give human qualities to inanimate objects, abstractions, movements, events, etc. As used in everyday speech, “the economy demands,” or “instinct tells us...”

Related/opposite techniques: Anthropomorphism: Giving human qualities to animals.

Example(s): I. T. E. Hulme. From “*Autumn.*”

“... saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.” (Also, a simile.)

II. Shutta Crum. From “*Marriage Bed*”

“By the bed I stand,
bare feet on your blue shirt,
 and watch the jealous snow
 feign innocence against our window . . .”

III. Shutta Crum. From **Who Took My Hairy Toe?**

“Outside, the trees began to jerk about and claw at the sky.
Old Tar Pockets heard a question on the voice of the wind . . .”

Extended examples:

Poems: Carl Sandburg. “*Paper I*” and “*Paper II.*”
 Billy Collins. “*Dharma*” and “*The Lesson*”
 T. E. Hulme. “*Autumn.*”

Pict. Books: **Chicka Chicka Boom Boom.** Bill Martin.
 Who Took My Hairy Toe? Shutta Crum. (the wind and the trees)

Writing starter: Take something inanimate and give it a human background. List what kinds of friends it might have, phrases it might say, attitude toward its job/function, and memories or desires it might have. Once you have several lists, play with the ideas to make a poem.

Poetic technique: **Rhyme**

Definition: The repetition of sounds in a poem. Most often associated with end rhymes. However, there are many types of rhyme: internal rhyme (within the lines), slant or near rhyme (*pant* and *bent*), and sight rhymes (*enough* and *though*).

Related/opposite techniques: Alliteration, assonance and consonance.

Example(s):

I. Anonymous.

“Little Tommy **Tittlemouse**
Lived in a **little house**;
He caught **fishes**
In other men’s **ditches.**” (end and slant)

II. Robin Hirsch. From “*Eye Rhyme.*”

“Underneath a shady **bough**
I’m startled by a sudden **cough . . .**” (sight rhymes)

III. Shutta Crum. From “*A Dreamer’s Green*”

“. . . **Green**, a word that sailors **dream**;
the **dim** unwindings of **Flemished** rope,
a glint, a gleam, a grin, and **then**—

—the rakish tilt of verdant **brim**,
the **sheen** of velvet cape and glove,
the hand **unseen** that belays the barque . . .”
(internal and slant rhyme)

Extended examples:

Poems: Ruth Stone. “*Mantra*”
Mary Ann Hoberman. “*Brother*”
Rowena Bennett. “*The Witch of Willowby Wood.*”
Robin Hirsch. “*Eye Rhyme.*”

Pict. books: **Sheep in a Jeep.** Nancy Shaw.
 Bear Snores On. Karma Wilson.
 Sailor Moo. Lisa Wheeler.

Writing starter: Choose a poem with end rhymes and revise so the line lengths change and the rhymes are internal. What is the effect on the poem? Stronger? Weaker? Re-configure the lines in a poem with internal rhyme so the rhymes fall at the end of the lines. What is the effect?

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