

The Compositional Elements of Poetry

Use this checklist to analysis the assigned pieces as well as your own poetry for this module.

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_____ **Form:** There are three common forms for poems: narrative, lyrical and descriptive.

- A **narrative poem** tells a story and is predominantly structured around the narrative elements like plot, character, conflict, etc.
- A **lyrical poem** generally conveys strong thoughts and feelings.
- A **descriptive poem** describes the world (or an aspect of the world) of the speaker—as opposed to lyrical poems (which are introspective), descriptive poems are outwardly focused.

_____ **Balance of Content and Structure:** In poetry, the balance between structure and content is much more equal. What a poem “says” (content) is quite often no more important than *how* the poem is “saying” it (structure).

_____ **Word Choice:** Very basically, word choice is exactly what it sounds like. It’s not just the specific meaning of the word but also how it sounds in relation to other words around it, it’s tone, its emotional resonance, even how it looks on the page.

_____ **Line Breaks:** A line break is another form of punctuation that is only available in poetry. Instead of simply writing linearly from idea to idea as we do in prose, in poems you have the opportunity to break the line in the middle of a sentence or an idea. This structure works to slow down the sentence a bit and add emphasis. Try different line breaks, then ask yourself, “How does this change the feeling of that sentence?”

_____ **Meter:** Meter is the method a poet employs for connecting sound to the style of their poetry. Meter is established in a number of ways—through word choice, line breaks, rhyme, rhythm, etc.—but more generally a poem’s meter is on display whenever it employs a scheme of sound that communicates independently from the meaning conveyed by the definitions of the words being used.

Don’t forget to consider **Poetic Devices** that writers and readers of poems can employ. For a list of those devices with brief descriptions of each, click here:

<https://www.poets.org/poetic-devices>