

Half Rhyme

Definition of Half Rhyme

Half [rhyme](#) is one of the major poetic devices. It is also called an “imperfect rhyme,” “slant rhyme,” “near rhyme,” or “oblique rhyme.” It can be defined as a rhyme in which the stressed syllables of ending consonants match, however the preceding vowel sounds do not match.

For instance, in words such as “shape” and “keep” the [consonance](#) is very strong. The final consonant sounds remain similar, but the ending vowel sounds are different in half rhyme. Similar to these two words “moon” and “run,” and in the words “hold” and “bald,” the ending consonant sounds are similar, whereas vowel sounds are different.

It is generally used to give an inharmonious feeling in a [rhyme scheme](#). Poets can bring variations in their choice of words by using half rhymes. It is also known as an imperfect, near, off, or sprung rhyme. Half rhyme is exclusively used as a poetic device.

Difference with Para Rhyme and Assonance

Half rhyme is not a perfect rhyme. And it must not be confused with para-rhyme or [assonance](#). Although these two [literary devices](#) are, to some extent, similar to half rhyme, there is a slight difference between them. In para-rhyme, the ending and beginning consonant sounds are similar, such as in the words “rod” and “red.” In assonance, the vowel sounds are similar also, such as in “shot” and “lot.”

Examples of Half Rhyme in Literature

Henry Vaughan was the first English poet who used half rhyme in his poetry. However, half rhyme was not commonly used in literary works before Gerard Manley Hopkins and W. B. Yeats, who introduced this device in their works. Slant/half rhyme became very popular among the literary

writers and English poets since then. They started using this poetic device extensively in their works specifically in the 20th century.

Let us have a look at some examples of half rhyme:

Example #1: *To My Wife* (By George Wolff)

“If love is like a **bridge**
or maybe like a **grudge**,
and time is like a river
that kills us with a shiver,
then what have all these mornings meant
but aging into love?
What now is straight must have been bent;
what now is whole must have been rent.
My hand is now your glove.”

The poet here throws a subtle curve ball in the first two lines of this [stanza](#), in which the closing consonant sounds of “bridge” and “grudge” are similar. These two do not rhyme completely, however, making them perfect examples of half rhyme.

Example #2: *Lines written in Dejection* (By W. B. Yeats)

“When have I last looked **on**
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the **moon**?
All the wild witches, those most noble ladies...”

Here, in the first and third lines, the half rhyme is used in words **on** and **moon**.

Example #3: *Sailing to Byzantium* (By W. B. Yeats)

“That is no country for old men. The **young**
In one another’s arms, birds in the trees
– Those dying generations – at their **song**,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer **long**
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.”

The rhyme scheme of this poem is ABABABCC, there is an altered irregular rhyme following a [couplet](#). If Yeats had not used the altered half rhyme [style](#) in this poem, it would have become the Italian form, which is used specifically for heroic epics.

Example #4: *Emily Dickinson* (By Not any Higher Stands the Grave)

“Not any higher stands the Grave
For Heroes than for **men**—
Not any nearer for the Child
Than numb Three Score and **Ten**—”

The words “men” and “ten” rhyme and show us an example of a perfect rhyme in this first stanza. But, we can compare this stanza to the next, in order to understand imperfect or half rhyme then, as the poet goes on:

“This latest leisure equal lulls
The beggar and his queen;
Propitiate this democrat
By summer’s gracious mien.”

Function of Half Rhyme

Half rhymes help a poet create an unusual range of words to give a variety of rhyming effects, particularly when they are used with other poetic devices and rhyming schemes. They help poets avoid using the typical sing-song chiming effects of full rhymes, and give them creative freedom.

does not give absolute harmony, but which offers variation in tone, and creates a good impact on the readers. When half rhymes are used with other poetic devices, they give shocking effects to the reader about the actual rhyme scheme.