

Consonance

Definition of Consonance

Consonance refers to repetitive sounds produced by consonants within a sentence or phrase. This [repetition](#) often takes place in quick succession, such as in “pitter, patter.”

It is classified as a literary device used in both poetry as well as [prose](#). For instance, the words chuckle, fickle, and kick are consonant with one another, due to the existence of common interior consonant sounds (/ck/).

The literary device of consonance is inherently different from [assonance](#), which involves the repetition of similar vowel sounds within a word, sentence, or phrase. Another distinction to be appreciated is that between consonance and [rhyme](#). In the case of rhyme, consonant sounds can be present at the beginning, middle, or end of several successive words, rather than merely at the ends of words. Further, the device of consonance needs to be distinguished from [alliteration](#). In [contrast](#) to alliteration, consonance involves repetition of consonant sounds only.

William Harmon, his book *A Handbook on Literature*, notes that “most so-called *eye rhymes* (such as ‘word’ and ‘lord,’ or ‘blood,’ ‘food,’ and ‘good’) are the most common examples.

Common Consonance Examples

The ship has sailed to the far off sh
She ate seven sandwiches on a sunny Sunday last year.
Shelley sells shells by the seash

Examples of Consonance in Literature

Example #1: *Zealots* (By Fugees)

The following lines from a song also show how consonant sounds have been used repeatedly.

“Rap rejects my tape deck, ejects projectile
Whether Jew or gentile, I rank top percentile
Many styles, more powerful than gamma rays
My grammar pays, like Carlos Santana plays.”

Example #2: *T was later when the summer went* (By Emily Dickson)

” ‘T was later when the summer went
Than when the cricket *came*,
And yet we knew that gentle clock
Meant nought but going *home*.
‘T was sooner when the cricket went
Than when the winter *came*,
Yet that pathetic pendulum
Keeps esoteric *time*.”

It can be seen from these lines that Emily Dickinson has made use of the consonant “m” frequently in the italicized words.

Example #3: *Shall I Wasting in Despair* (By George Wither)

“Great, or *good*, or *kind*, or *fair*,
I will *ne’er* the *more despair*;
If she *love* me, this *believe*,
I *will* die ere she *shall grieve*;
If she *slight* me when I woo,
I can scorn and *let her* go;
For if she be *not for* me,
What care I *for* whom she be?”

Here, the use of consonance can be seen through in the letters r, d, and f.

Example #4: *As imperceptibly as Grief* (By Emily Dickinson)

This poem by Dickinson makes good use of consonance:

“A Quietness distilled
As Twilight long *begun*,
Or Nature spending with herself
Sequestered *Afternoon*—

Here, Emily Dickinson has relied on the consonant “n” to create the intended effect.

Function of Consonance

Consonance is commonly employed in a range of situations, from poetry to prose writing. However, as the examples given above highlight the use of consonance is significantly greater in poetry writing than in the prose form. The use of consonance provides the structure of poetry with a rhyming effect.

A writer normally employs the tool of consonance for the purpose of reiterating the significance of an idea or [theme](#). Further, the use of the device makes the structure of poetry or prose appealing for the reader. The poet generally makes use of consonance in an attempt to underscore the emotions behind their words that simple words cannot convey.

Furthermore, the use of consonance adds a lyrical feeling to the poetry that otherwise cannot be added. The significance of the use of consonance in poetry is enhanced by the fact that it is often used to make the [imagery](#) clearer. It acts as a tool that enables the poet to formulate a fine and powerful structure for his poetry, and to create a background for the themes underlying the poetry.

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