

Hip Hop Guide to Poetic Devices

Alliteration: Repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines

- Ex: “**S**aid I’m **s**o **s**ick of love **s**ongs/**S**o **s**ad and **s**low” --Ne-Yo, “So Sick”

Assonance: Repeated vowel sounds in words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines.

- Ex: “I **b**omb **a**tomically—**S**ocrates’ **ph**ilos**o**phies and **h**ypo**o**theses can’t define how I be **d**roppin’ these **m**ockeries.” --Wu-Tang Clan, “Triumph”

Allegory: A representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning; a symbolic narrative that has a literal meaning and an extended metaphorical meaning.

- Ex: “I met **this girl** when I was three years old/And what I loved most she had so much soul . . . If you don’t know by now, I’m talkin’ bout **Chi-Town!**” --Kanye West, “Homecoming”

Allusion: A reference to something else (a person, historical event, fictional character, etc)

- Ex: “I got me some rings like I’m **Bruce Bowen**/I’m ballin’ on you like I’m **Chris Paul**” --Young Thug, “Mixtape”

Ambiguity: A word or phrase that can mean more than one thing, even in context.

- Ex: “95 Air Max cause I’m a **dope runner**” --Gucci Mane, “Bricks”

Apostrophe: Speaking directly to a real or imagined listener or inanimate object, addressing them by name.

- Ex: “First thing’s first, rest in peace **Uncle Phil**/For real/**You’re** the only father that I ever knew” --J. Cole, “No Role Modelz”

Consonance: Repeated consonant sounds at the ending of words placed near each other, usually on the same or adjacent lines.

- Ex: “Way **back** when I had the red and **black** lumber**jack**/With the hat to match” --Notorious B.I.G., “Juicy”

Cacophony: A series of harsh, unpleasant sounds to convey disorder.

- Ex: “I’m not **cocky**, I’m **confident**” --Jadakiss, “New York”

Cliche: A figure of speech that, while once clever, is overused or outdated.

- “**Better late than never**/But never late is better.” --Drake, “Fancy”

Contrast: To juxtapose two things that are different from one another.

- Ex: “I’m rare like **Mr. Clean with hair**” --Lil Wayne, “Phone Home”

Euphony: A series of musically pleasant sounds to convey harmony and beauty.

- Ex: “I can go on for **days** and **days**/With rhyme **displays** that **engrave** deep as **X-rays**” --Rakim,

“Follow The Leader”

Euphemism: Substituting something inoffensive to lessen the effect of referring to something directly.

- Ex: “Stackin’ **cheese** till my **bread** right” --Wiz Khalifa, “It’s Nothin”

Hyperbole: Outrageous exaggeration used for effect.

- Ex: “If heaven had a height, **you would be that tall**” --Common, “The Light”

Metaphor: A direct comparison between two things.

- Ex: “I never sleep, cause **sleep is the cousin of death**” --Nas, “NY State of Mind”

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which a person, place, or thing is referred to by something closely associated with it.

- Ex: “It’s all about **the Benjamins**, baby” --Puff Daddy & The Family

Onomatopoeia: Words that sound like their meanings.

- Ex: “Start up that Maserati and **vroom vroom**, I’m racing” --Kendrick Lamar, “Backseat Freestyle”

Oxymoron: A combination of two words that appear to contradict each other.

- Ex: “If talk is cheap, then **my silence is diamonds**” --Lupe Fiasco, “Go To Sleep”

Paradox: A statement in which a seeming contradiction may reveal an unexpected truth.

- Ex: “Why am I **fighting to live** if I’m just **living to fight**?” --2Pac, “Runnin’ (Dying To Live)”

Personification: Attributing human characteristics to an inanimate object.

- Ex: “The **new moon** rose high in the crown of the metropolis/Shining, like ‘**Who on top of this?**’”
--Black Star, “Respiration”

Pun: Word play in which words have different meanings with similar sounds.

- Ex: “Couldn’t afford a car, so she named her daughter **Alexis**” --Kanye West, “All Falls Down”

Repetition: Purposeful re-use of words and phrases for effect.

- Ex: “I got loyalty, got royalty **inside my DNA**/I got hustle though, ambition flow **inside my DNA**”
--Kendrick Lamar, “DNA”

Simile: A direct comparison of two things using “like” or “as.”

- Ex: “Gettin’ funky on the mic **like** an old batch of collard greens” --Snoop Dogg, “Nuthin But a G Thang”

Symbol: An object, event, animal, or person which has more meaning to it.

- Ex: “I’m the **wolf**, where is **Little Miss Riding Hood?**” --Nicki Minaj, “Itty Bitty Piggy”

Synecdoche: Indicating a person, object, etc, but using one part to represent the whole.

- Ex: “These expensive, these is **red bottoms**” --Cardi B, “Bodak Yellow”