

Assonance, Alliteration, and Consonance

Alliteration:

Alliteration is a term that describes a literary stylistic device. Alliteration is the repetition of one or more initial sounds, usually consonants, in words within a line. For example, “She sells sea-shells down by the sea-shore” or “Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers” are both alliterative phrases. In the former, all the words start with the “s” sound, while in the later, the “p’s” take precedence. Aside from tongue twisters, alliteration is also used in poems, song lyrics, and even store or brand names. The following examples of alliteration should make things a bit more clear.

Examples of Alliteration:

Identify the alliteration in the following examples to test your skills:

1. Alice’s aunt ate apples and acorns around August
2. Becky’s beagle barked and bayed, becoming bothersome for Billy.
3. Carries cat clawed her couch, creating chaos.
4. Dan’s dog dove deep in the dam, drinking dirty water as he dove.
5. Eric’s eagle eats eggs, enjoying each episode of eating.
6. Fred’s friends fried Fritos for Friday’s food.
7. Garry’s giraffe gobbled gooseberry’s greedily, getting good at grabbing goodies.
8. Hannah’s home has heat hopefully.
9. Isaacs ice cream is interesting and Isaac is imbibing it.
10. Jesse’s jaguar is jumping and jiggling jauntily.
11. Kim’s kid’s kept kiting
12. Larry’s lizard likes leaping leopards
13. Mike’s microphone made much music
14. Nick’s nephew needed new notebooks now not never
15. Orson’s owl out-performed ostriches
16. Peter’s piglet pranced priggishly
17. Quincy’s quilters quit quilting quickly
18. Ralph’s reindeer rose rapidly and ran round the room
19. Sara’s seven sisters slept soundly in sand
20. Tim’s took tons of tools to make toys for tots.
21. Uncle Uris’ united union uses umbrella’s
22. Vivien’s very vixen-like and vexing
23. Walter walked wearily while wondering where Wally was
24. Xavier’s x-rayed his xylophone.
25. Yarvis yanked you at yoga, and Yvonne yelled.
26. Zachary zeroed in on zoo keeping.

In each of these examples, the alliteration occurs in the words that have the same sound. As you can see, not every word must be alliterative. You can use prepositions, such as of and pronouns such as his and still maintain the alliterative effect. Alliteration does not need to be an entire sentence. Any two word phrase can be alliterative. Even some single words can be alliterative, if they have multiple syllables which begin with the same consonant sound.

Consonance:

Consonance is the repetition of two or more consonant sounds within a line. Often the consonant sounds come at the very end of the word, but they come in the middle as well. In the sample below, note the repetition of the letter d in the first line and the repetition of the letter s in the 2nd line.

And all is seared with trade; bleared smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur")

Consonance Examples in Poetry

In order to understand the concept of consonance as used in English language and literature, it is important to study different consonance examples. Given below are some of the consonance examples for kids and adults to understand this figure of speech.

"Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree
As Ireland is backed to England
And drives inland
Till all her strands are breathless." - Ocean's Love to Ireland by Seamus Heaney

In this poem, you can notice consonance examples in the use of the consonants b and d. This is one of the best examples of consonance in English literature.

"'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." - Emily Dickinson

In the example given above, consonance examples can be clearly seen as the use of the consonant m, repeatedly through the poem and the stress on the words that use the alphabet.

"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?" - Shall I Wasting in Despair by George Wither

This is a treasure house of consonance examples. There are many consonant sounds that are repeated throughout the poem like r, d, and l to name a few. When looking up different consonance examples in literature, this is one example that should definitely be quoted.

"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" - Zealots by Fugees

While it may be difficult to believe this but one genre of contemporary poetry that harbors many consonance examples is hip-hop music. In this example, there is a repetition of the sound ile, and ays.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. These vowel sounds come anywhere within the word. It is used to reinforce the meanings of words or to set the mood.

Assonance Examples

In this example by Carl Sandburg, in *Early Moon*, the long “O” sounds old or mysterious.

“Poetry is old, ancient, goes back far. It is among the oldest of living things. So old it is that no man knows how and why the first poems came.”

Assonance examples are sometimes hard to find, because they work subconsciously sometimes, and are subtle. The long vowel sounds will slow down the energy and make the mood more somber, while high sounds can increase the energy level of the piece.

Notice how the mood is set by using the long “A” in this excerpt from Cormac McCarthy's book, *Outer Dark*:

“And stepping softly with her air of blooded ruin about the glade in a frail agony of grace she trailed her rags through dust and ashes, circling the dead fire, the charred billets and chalk bones, the little calcined ribcage.”

The words "glade," "frail," "grace," and "trailed" help set the chilling mood of the work, and it is repeated and emphasized at the end with “ribcage.”

Here are a few short assonance examples:

- “Hear the mellow wedding bells” from Edgar Allen Poe
- “Try to light the fire”
- “I lie down by the side of my bride”
- “Fleet feet sweep by sleeping geese”
- Pink Floyd’s “Hear the lark and harken to the barking of the dark fox gone to ground”
- “It's hot and it's monotonous.” by Sondheim
- “The crumbling thunder of seas” by Robert Louis Stevenson

Edgar Allan Poe was a master of assonance, consonance, and alliteration. Here is one line from the poem *The Raven*:

“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain”

In this one line, assonance is the “ur” sound in “purple” and “curtain”, consonance is the “s” sound in “uncertain” and “rustling”, and alliteration is shown in the “s” sound at the beginning of "silken" and "sad."