Basic poetry terms

Βασικοί όροι της ποίησης

A quick reference for reading and discussing poems. Learn the terms, notice examples and explain how a poet creates meaning.

1 Understanding a poem

Poem Ποίημα	Writing that expresses ideas, feelings or a story through carefully chosen language.	A poem about freedom.
Stanza Στροφή	A group of lines in a poem, usually separated from other groups by a space.	Like a paragraph in prose.
Line or verse Στίχος	One line of a poem. The word “verse” can also mean poetry in general.	“The stars shine over me.”
Rhyme Ομοιοκαταληξία	Words with the same or similar ending sounds.	night / light sea / free
Theme Θέμα	A central idea explored in a poem.	Love, loss, nature, freedom.
Tone Τόνος ή στάση	The speaker’s attitude towards the subject or the person addressed.	Hopeful, bitter, ironic, nostalgic.
Mood Ατμόσφαιρα ή συναισθηματική διάθεση	The atmosphere of a poem and the feeling it creates for the reader.	Peaceful, tense, gloomy, joyful.

Tone and mood A speaker’s sorrowful tone may create a gloomy mood. Ask: “What is the speaker’s attitude?” and “How does the poem make the reader feel?”

2 Who is speaking

Poet | Ποιητής / ποιήτρια The real person who writes the poem.
Persona or speaker | Ποιητικό προσωπείο / ποιητικό υποκείμενο The voice speaking in the poem. It may be an imagined character and does not necessarily express the poet’s own experiences or opinions.

Example “I stand alone beside the sea, / Remembering the days when I was free.”
The speaker seems lonely and nostalgic. We cannot assume that the poet feels the same way.

Questions to guide your reading

Who is speaking, and to whom? What is the poem about? What tone and mood can you identify? Which words support your interpretation?

Poetic devices and forms

Ποιητικές τεχνικές και είδη ποιημάτων

3 Figures of speech and poetic devices

Simile Παρομοίωση	Compares two things using “like” or “as”.	Her eyes shine like stars.
Metaphor Μεταφορά	Describes one thing as another to suggest a shared quality.	Time is a thief.
Personification Προσωποποίηση	Gives human qualities or actions to something non-human.	The wind whispered.
Onomatopoeia Ονοματοποιία	Uses words that imitate sounds.	buzz, bang, splash
Hyperbole Υπερβολή	Uses extreme exaggeration for emphasis.	I’ve told you a million times!
Imagery Αισθητηριακές εικόνες	Uses language that appeals to sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch.	The sweet smell of fresh roses.
Symbolism Συμβολισμός	Uses an object, image or action to represent a deeper meaning.	A dove can symbolise peace.
Irony Ειρωνεία	Creates a contrast between what is said and meant, or expected and actual.	A fire station burns down.
Repetition Επανάληψη	Repeats words or phrases for emphasis or rhythm.	“Never, never, never give up.”

4 Types of poems

Lyric | Λυρικό ποίημα	Expresses personal feelings or emotions.
Narrative | Αφηγηματικό ποίημα	Tells a story in verse.
Sonnet | Σονέτο	Traditionally has 14 lines and a set structure.
Ode | Ωδή	Praises or celebrates a person, thing or idea.
Elegy | Ελεγεία	Expresses sorrow, often for someone who has died.
Ballad | Μπαλάντα	Tells a story, often with rhythm and repeated lines.

Useful sentence for analysis

The poet uses [device] in “…” to suggest … / The speaker’s … tone creates a … mood.

Based on “Basic Poetry Terms” by Stelios Drakakis. Adapted for classroom use, with Greek translations of the terms and leaflet editing by Maria Papadaki.