

# Diacope



## DEFINITION

What is diacope? Here's a quick and simple definition:

Diacope is a [figure of speech](#) in which a word or phrase is repeated with a small number of intervening words. The first line of *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, "Happy families are all alike; every [unhappy](#) family is [unhappy](#) in its own way," is an example of diacope.

Some additional key details about diacope:

- There's no strict rule about *how* close repeated words have to be in order to count as diacope. Some examples of diacope might be separated by just a single word, while others might be separated by a handful.
- Because it is a very common repetition scheme, diacope often appears simultaneously with other figures of speech, including [epistrophe](#), [epanalepsis](#), [parallelism](#), [anaphora](#), and [epizeuxis](#).
- Diacope's Greek origins mean "cutting in two," reflecting how, in diacope, a pair of repeated words is divided by intervening words.

## Diacope Pronunciation

Here's how to pronounce diacope: **dye**-uh-kope

## Some Diacope Guidelines

There are some additional guidelines about diacope that are helpful to know in order to fully understand it.

### The Repeated Words of Diacope Can be Slightly Different

As in most types of rhetorical repetition, the repeated words of diacope don't have to be strictly identical—which makes sense, since repeated words often need to be altered for the tense or grammar of a sentence to work properly. The following sentence from Russell Baker's *Growing Up* is an example of diacope even though the word "prim" appears in slightly different form:

He wore [prim](#) vested suits with neckties blocked [primly](#) against the collar buttons of his [primly](#) starched white suits.

### Multiple Instances of Diacope Can Overlap

One instance of diacope might occur right beside another instance of diacope, or two examples of diacope might even overlap. For instance, the lyrics of Outkast's mega-hit "Hey Ya!" has overlapping and side-by-side examples of diacope. One example of the phrase "You think you've got it" is repeated with the word "Oh" inserted between repetitions. That's one example of diacope. Another

example of diacope is "you think you've **got it** but '**got it**' just don't get it," because the phrase "**got it**" repeats with the word "but" inserted between repetitions. A final example of diacope from this passage is "but '[got it](#)' just don't [get it](#)." This is an example of diacope even though the words don't repeat in identical form. As you can see from the [different highlights](#) and the **bolding**, some of these examples overlap, while others are simply adjacent.

You think you've got it  
Oh, you think you've got it  
But "**got it**" just don't [get it](#)  
'Til there's nothing at all

## Three Special Types of Diacope

There are three special types of diacope: **vocative**, **elaborative**, and **extended**. Not *every* example of diacope falls into these three categories. Some diacope is just plain old diacope. But many examples of diacope do fall into one of these three categories.

### Vocative Diacope

Vocative diacope refers to a common type of diacope that addresses a person directly by using their [name](#), [title](#), or [some other reference to a person or people](#) between the [repeated phrases](#) of diacope as in, "[Help!](#) [Somebody](#), [help!](#)" Other examples of vocative diacope include:

- "[Drill](#), [baby](#), [drill](#)." -Republican campaign slogan in 2008
- "[Run](#), [Toto](#), [run!](#)" -Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*
- We'll get our big break [any day now](#), [darling](#), [any day now](#).

In contrast to the examples above, the sentence "Yes, a thousand times, yes!" *isn't* vocative (though it is an example of diacope) because the intervening words "a thousand times" do not address anybody directly. The word "vocative" derives from the latin word "vocare," meaning "to call."

### Elaborative Diacope

Elaborative diacope is another type of diacope in which an [adjective or other piece of information](#) is inserted between [repeated phrases](#) as a way of elaborating on the diacope's subject. So, "It was [love](#), [true love](#)," is an example of elaborative diacope because the intervening words elaborate on the type of love being spoken about: it was *true* love. Here are more examples of elaborative diacope:

- From [sea](#) to [shining sea](#).
- That was a [beautiful time](#), a [very beautiful time](#).
- I want a [tropical vacation](#), a [long, decadent tropical vacation](#) with just my friends.

Note that while elaborative diacope often uses an adjective to elaborate on its subject, it doesn't have to. James Bond's famous introduction ("The name's **Bond**. **James Bond**.") is also an example of elaborative diacope, since by sharing his first name, Bond is elaborating on the incomplete information given the first time he states his last name.

### Extended Diacope

Extended diacope refers to a *threefold* repetition of a word or phrase, with intervening words before the final repetition. "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou **Romeo**?" is an example of extended diacope. This type of diacope can be used to heighten the emotion of speech even beyond what is accomplished by the double repetition of regular diacope.

Here are more examples of extended diacope:

- **Delightful, delightful**, simply **delightful**.
- "**Love me, love me**, say that you **love me**." –The Cardigans
- "**Free at last. Free at last**. Thank God almighty we are **free at last**." –Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Diacope and Other Rhetorical Devices

Diacope is one specific type of rhetorical device that makes use of repetition. There are *many* others—and sometimes they overlap. For instance, the following line from the movie *A Christmas Story* uses both diacope and [epistrophe](#), the repetition of words at the ends of sentences:

Scut Farkus staring out at us with his **yellow eyes**. He had **yellow eyes!** So help me, God, **yellow eyes!**

Similarly, the dying words of playwright Eugene O'Neill contain both diacope and [epanalepsis](#), the repetition of a phrase at the beginning and end of the same sentence.

I knew it. Born **in a hotel room** and—goddamn it—died **in a hotel room**.

Other rhetorical devices that make use of repetition include [parallelism](#), [epizeuxis](#), and [anaphora](#). It's important to keep in mind that the use of these devices is not mutually exclusive. In fact, the use of one of these devices often involves the use of another—so any example of diacope might also be an example of other devices as well.

### Diacope in James Joyce's "The Dead"

In the final paragraph of "[The Dead](#)," when the narrator describes snow falling in Ireland, diacope works to imitate the effect of snow falling gently, persistently falling on a quiet countryside. In this case, the form the writing takes (repetition) mimics its content (snow falling softly).

It was **falling** on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, **falling softly** upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, **softly falling** into the dark mutinous Shannon waves.

As writer Henry Peacham wrote in his 1593 book, *The Garden of Eloquence*, "Diacope is a figure which repeateth a word putting but one word betweene, or at least very few." There's no definite limit to the number of intervening words that can be used in diacope, but it's worth noting that compared to Peacham's more traditional definition, in this example the separation between words is on the longer side.

### Diacope in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*

This line spoken by the character Bella Wilfer in Dicken's *Our Mutual Friend* is a case of elaborative diacope that keeps on elaborating and elaborating. This use of diacope makes Bella's distaste for her poverty vivid. It's also an example of [epistrophe](#).

I hate to be **poor**, and we are degradingly **poor**, offensively **poor**, miserably **poor**, beastly **poor**.

### Diacope in "A Child is Born" by Stephen Vincent Benét

From a Christmas play written largely in rhyming verse, this excerpt has three difference cases of diacope, all of which work to convey the tragedy of youthful vitality slipping gradually away. The final example of diacope in this passage is elaborative.

Life is not lost by dying! Life is lost  
Minute by minute, **day** by dragging **day**,  
In all the thousand, small, uncaring ways.

### Diacope in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is brimming with diacope, the device appears side-by-side in some passages. Here, the words "theory" and "know" are repeated. Note that the second two "theories" are an example of elaborative diacope.

Clarissa had a **theory** in those days—they had heaps of **theories**, always **theories**, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not **knowing** people; not being **known**.



## EXAMPLES

### Diacope Examples in Literature

Diacope abounds in poetry and prose. It's so common that examples can be found easily in almost any book.

## Diacope Examples in Speeches

As a tool of persuasion, diacope is commonly and often subtly used in speeches.

### Diacope in Tony Blair's Remarks on Princess Diana

These remarks after the death of Princess Diana in 1997 highlight that diacope often suits discussing matters of gravity, such as loss. Blair uses the device to emphasize the magnitude of the tragedy.

"The people **everywhere**—not just here in Britain, **everywhere**—they kept faith with Princess Diana."

### Diacope in Donald Trump's Announcement of his 2016 Presidential Campaign

Donald Trump often hits on the same words when he speaks, so it's easy to identify diacope in almost any of his quotes. In these sentences from the speech Trump gave announcing his presidential campaign in 2016, he repeated three words that would go on to be central to his platform: "build," "great," and "wall."

I will **build** a **great** **wall**—and nobody **builds** **walls** better than me, believe me—and I'll **build** them very inexpensively. I will **build** a **great**, **great** **wall** on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that **wall**. Mark my words.

## Diacope Examples in Songs

Song lyrics, which tend to rely on repetition, frequently contain diacope. Diacope is often the reason song lyrics are catchy and memorable rather than flat and forgettable.

### Diacope in "Freedom" by Beyoncé

This Beyoncé song, which references African American bondage in slavery and the fight for human rights, uses extended diacope to call both *to* freedom and *for* freedom. The fervent invocation of freedom through diacope is key to the song's emotional weight.

**Freedom!** **Freedom!** I can't move  
**Freedom**, cut me loose!  
**Freedom!** **Freedom!** Where are you?  
 Cause I need **freedom**, too!

### Diacope in Trampp's "Disco Inferno"

One of the more famous disco songs of all time makes a memorable use of vocative diacope:

**Burn** baby **burn**  
 Disco Inferno  
**Burn** baby **burn**  
 Burn that mother down

## Diacope in "Let Her Go" by Passenger

Part of this poignant song's punch is the repeated "you let her go," the culmination of a narrative about losing a lover.

Only know you've been high when you're feeling low  
 Only hate the road when you're missing home  
 Only know you love her when **you let her go**  
 And **you let her go**

## Diacope Examples in Movies

Diacope is a prime device for highly charged, soppy, tragic, or generally dramatic moments in movie scripts. For instance, in the *Rambo* movie *First Blood*, Rambo and his army colonel use diacope in a climactic argument over the personal war Rambo is waging in a small town, as he copes with his return from Vietnam. Colonel Trautman addresses Rambo with vocative diacope, and Rambo mirrors Trautman's diacope in an attempt to defeat his argument.

Trautman: If you won't end this now, they will kill you. Is that what you want? **It's over**, Johnny. **It's over!**

Rambo: **Nothing** is over! **Nothing!** You don't just turn it off! It wasn't my war!

## Diacope Examples in Advertising

Repetition in advertising is key to brand-building and establishing credibility with customers. On a smaller scale, the repetition in diacope makes slogans more memorable and more persuasive. Here are some examples:

- You're not **fully clean** until you're Zest **fully clean!** –Zest Soap slogan
- I am** what **I am**. –Reebok slogan
- What happens **here**, stays **here**. –Las Vegas tourism slogan



## WHY WRITERS USE IT

As one of the more versatile repetition schemes, diacope can be used for a wide variety of purposes: to heighten the emotional register of speech; to add a sense of rhythm to the text; to make words more persuasive; and to make form and content echo each other.

- Diacope works to convey heightened emotion:** The structure of diacope—words repeated in close succession, with a few words in between—makes it ideal for passages with mounting emotion. Consider elaborative diacope, in which an idea is introduced and then built upon, often dialing-up the idea's potency (It was a **crime**, a terrible and heartless **crime**). Similarly, extended diacope might be used to insist or plead (as in "**Love me, love me**, say that you **love me**"), implying a certain strength of emotion.
- Diacope can strengthen the sense of rhythm and musicality in a text**—two important factors that can help make literature more

aesthetically pleasing. This line from Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* owes much of its eloquence to diacope: "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning." Here, the diacope is also a case of [parallelism](#) (the first case) and [anaphora](#) (the second case).

- **Diacope can make writing more persuasive and affecting:** Diacope can help to make an idea more persuasive by inviting the reader to dwell on a concept, or by striking an emotional chord through repetition (much the way some musical chords can be poignant when repeated). This applies not only to political speeches, but to any context in which the author aims to emotionally affect his or her audience. Take this line from Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness*: "In your life there are a few places, or maybe only the one place, where something happened, and then there are all the other places."
- **Diacope can help match form to content:** Some writers focus heavily on making sure that the style and form of their work is complementary to the content. That is, if a poem describes a helicopter crashing, the [stanzas](#) might be fragmented and choppy, with harsh, cacophonous [diction](#) to help the form of the text "perform" the scene's violence. Diacope is an ideal tool for performing the content of scenes with repetitive action. For instance, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the use of diacope imitates the character Septimus' obsessive suicidal thoughts: "The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it..."



## OTHER RESOURCES

- [ThoughtCo.com Page on Diacope](#): Excellent stock of examples, plus some helpful quotes on the term.
- [Manner of Speaking Page on Diacope](#): Brief but smart notes on diacope, with a few examples.
- [Wikipedia Page on Diacope](#): A limited smattering of good examples.
- [Mark Forsyth's \*The Elements of Eloquence\* Chapter on Diacope](#): A rhetorician's witty, studied take on diacope and its uses.
- [Excerpt from Henry Peacham's \*The Garden of Eloquence\*](#): If you're curious what a 16th century author has to advise and caution about diacope, here it is.

## HOW TO CITE

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### Chicago Manual

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