

Slant Rhyme



DEFINITION

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

Traditionally, slant rhyme referred to a type of [rhyme](#) in which two words located at the end of a line of poetry themselves end in similar—but not identical—consonant sounds. For instance, the words "pact" and "slicked" could be slant rhymed. The term has expanded over time to include additional types of similar sounds. More precisely, slant rhyme today now includes words whose last syllables contain [assonance](#) ("unpack" and "detach") as well as words whose last syllables contain final consonants that have [consonance](#) ("country" and "contra").

Some additional key details about slant rhyme:

- Slant rhyme is often also called by the names "half rhyme" or "imperfect rhyme" because, unlike more conventional uses of rhyme, the sounds shared by the two words are not identical.
- You may also hear slant rhyme referred to as "sprung rhyme," "near rhyme," or "lazy rhyme."
- Slant rhyme is rarely as obvious to the ear as perfect rhyme, the type of rhyming used most often in poetry in which the rhyming sounds are identical.

Slant Rhyme: Narrow Definition and Broader Definition

If you look around the Internet for "slant rhyme," you'll likely find definitions of it that are different. That's because some definitions are based on the original, traditional definition of slant rhyme, while others are based on the definition of slant rhyme that has broadened in more modern times.

The Traditional Narrow Definition of Slant Rhyme

Originally, slant rhyme referred *only* to:

- Words that ended with the same consonants.

This definition would only include words like "hat" and "cut" or like "eden" and "dawn."

The Broader Definition of Slant Rhyme

Over time the definition of slant rhyme has broadened. The newer, broader definition *doesn't* focus solely on the last consonant of the word; it instead focuses on the entire last *syllable* of the word. It also allows for either similar consonant sounds ([consonance](#)) or similar vowel sounds ([assonance](#)) in that last syllable. The broader definition can be described in the following way:

- **Slant rhyme involving assonance:** Words that share [assonance](#) in their final syllables are slant rhymes, regardless of their consonant sounds. All of the following pairs of words are slant rhymes because their final syllable (or only syllable) share the same vowel sounds:
 - "Hat" and "bad"
 - "Crate" and "braid"
 - "Created" and rabid"
- **Slant rhyme involving consonance:** Words that have consonance in the final consonants of their last syllables are slant rhymes, regardless of their vowel sounds. Note that if a word has consonants at both the beginning and end of a syllable, it's only the consonance of the consonants at the *end* of the syllable that make the word a slant rhyme.
 - "Cut" and "mat" are slant rhymes because they have [consonance](#) in the last consonants of their final (and only) syllable.
 - "Poncho" and "crunchy" are slant rhymes because they have [consonance](#) in their final syllable ("cho" and "chy"). The fact that their ending vowel sounds ("o" and "y") are different doesn't matter.
 - However, the words "unfit" and "unfair" are *not* slant rhymes, despite the fact that they both have an "f" in their final syllable. That's because the "f" is not the final consonant to appear within that last syllable.

Slant Rhyme vs. Consonance and Assonance

While the broad definition of slant rhymes depends on assonance or consonance, it's important to note that slant rhyme is not the *same* as assonance or consonance. The reason for that difference is simple:

- Slant rhyming is the use of consonance or assonance *at the ends of words*.
- But assonance or consonance can exist *anywhere* in a word.

So while the words "pallate" and "polite" contain a bunch of consonance (on the p, l, and t), they are only slant rhymes because of the t in their final syllable.

Slant Rhyme vs. Perfect Rhyme

Perfect rhyme is the technical term for what most people think of simply as "rhyme." It's worth it to understand how perfect rhyme is different from slant rhyme. Perfect rhyme occurs when the sounds shared by two or more words:

1. Are identical beginning with the **stressed syllable** of each word, and

2. Remain identical for every syllable after that stressed syllable.

For instance, "cavern" and "tavern" make a perfect rhyme because the sounds of both the stressed syllables ("cav" and "tav"), as well as the unstressed syllables that follow it, are all identical.

The rules for what makes a slant rhyme are *much* less strict: the sound shared by both words does *not* have to include a stressed syllable, and the sounds don't have to be identical—they can share just the same consonant or vowel sounds in their final syllable. So, "cavern" and "other" are slant rhymes, but they are absolutely *not* perfect rhymes.



EXAMPLES

Slant Rhyme in Yeat's "Easter 1916"

William Butler Yeats was one of the first poets to use slant rhyme in his work extensively enough to popularize it for other modern poets. In this poem, you can identify the uses of slant rhyme because the poem's [rhyme scheme](#) shows you where to look for them. The poem generally follows a rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD (etc), so it follows that in the second and fourth lines we might expect to find words that rhyme—but instead those lines end with the words "faces" and "houses," which are in fact slant rhymes and not perfect rhymes (because the sounds they share are only their final unstressed syllables). Similarly, "gibe" and "club" lines 10 and 12 are slant rhymes because they share only the consonant b's at their end.

I have met them at close of day
 Coming with vivid faces
 From counter or desk among grey
 Eighteenth-century houses.
 I have passed with a nod of the head
 Or polite meaningless words,
 Or have lingered awhile and said
 Polite meaningless words,
 And thought before I had done
 Of a mocking tale or a gibe
 To please a companion
 Around the fire at the club,
 Being certain that they and I
 But lived where motley is worn:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.

Note that although "I" and "utterly" don't end with the exact same vowel sound, they are *also* an example of a slant rhyme. Yeats here is taking some creative license, treating the "i" and "ee" sounds as close-enough approximations of the same sound to be treated *as if* they were the same, which is a fairly common thing for poets to do with all sorts of [rhymes](#), including slant rhymes.

Slant Rhyme in Dickinson's "Not any higher stands the Grave"

Emily Dickinson is well-known for her prolific use of slant rhyme. Here, the slant rhyme in the second stanza is preceded by the first stanza's perfect rhyme: "men" and "ten." This conditions the reader to anticipate a similar rhyme scheme in the second stanza, but instead Dickinson produces a slant rhyme: "queen" and "afternoon."

Not any higher stands the Grave
 For Heroes than for Men —
 Not any nearer for the Child
 Than numb Three Score and Ten —

This latest Leisure equal lulls
 The Beggar and his Queen
 Propitiate this Democrat
 A Summer's Afternoon —

Slant Rhyme in Larkin's "Toads"

Save for the *almost* perfect rhyme of "work" and "pitchfork," all of the other lines in Philip Larkin's poem "Toads" are parts of slant rhymes made up of words that share either a final unstressed syllable, or share the final consonant sounds of a stressed syllable without sharing vowel sounds. The following excerpt shows the first four stanzas of the poem.

Why should I let the toad work
 Squat on my life?
 Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
 and drive the brute off?
 Six days of the week it soils
 With its sickening poison-
 Just for paying a few bills!
 That's out of proportion.
 Lots of folk live on their wits:
 Lecturers, lispers,
 Losels, loblolly-men, louts-
 They don't end as paupers;
 Lots of folk live up lanes
 With fires in a bucket,
 Eat windfalls and tinned sardines-
 They seem to like it.

Slant Rhyme in Creeley's "The Conspiracy"

The second and third couplets in this poem by Robert Creeley make use of slant rhyme.

Things tend to awaken
 even through random communication.

Let us suddenly
proclaim spring. And jeer

Big Daddy Kane's "Wrath of Kane"

It's common for songwriters to use slant rhymes in addition to perfect rhymes—especially in rap. This 1989 track by Big Daddy Kane gives an expert example of slant rhyme. Note how in this excerpt from the song, Kane creates his slant rhymes not through simple pairs of words, but by sometimes matching sets of words ("top of me") with single words that make up the same number of syllables ("monopoly").

The heat is on so feel the fire
Come off the empire, on a more higher
Level than def, one step beyond dope
The suckers all scope and hope to cope but nope
Cause I can never let 'em on top of me
I play 'em out like a game of Monopoly
Let 'em speed around the board like an Astro
Then send 'em to jail for trying to pass Go
Shaking 'em up, breaking 'em up, taking no stuff
But it still ain't loud enough



WHY WRITERS USE IT

Much like the [perfect rhymes](#) that are more common in poetry, slant rhymes give a sense of unity and cohesion to poetry by repeating sounds according to a pattern or [rhyme scheme](#). Unlike perfect rhymes, however, slant rhymes may not always be obvious to the ear, so some poets use slant rhymes to give their poetry a more subtle musical quality. Still other poets may choose to use slant rhyme because it gives them a wider range of word choices than traditional

rhyming does—enabling them to express themselves more freely (and therefore more precisely) than they might be able to if they needed to use words that rhymed perfectly. Slant rhymes can also have a way of surprising readers by *omitting* traditional rhymes where they might be expected to occur, satisfying the reader's ear in a way that they may not have expected.



OTHER RESOURCES

- [The Wikipedia Page on Slant Rhyme](#): A somewhat technical explanation, with more details about other types of perfect and imperfect rhyme.
- [The dictionary definition of Slant Rhyme](#): A basic definition, with citations of several different dictionaries for support.
- A [seven minute video](#) explaining some uses of slant rhyme (broadly defined) in rap music.
- Just for reference, a link to [a more conservative definition](#) of slant rhyme than the definition we've covered in this entry.

HOW TO CITE

MLA

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