

Onomatopoeia / Alliteration / Assonance

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I. What is Onomatopoeia?

Boom! Pow! Whoosh! Wham! All of these words are onomatopoeias, or words that sound like what they describe. Onomatopoeia (pronounced on-uh-mat-uh-pee-uh) refers to words whose pronunciations imitate the actual sound that is being described. A dog's bark sounds like "woof," so "woof" is an example of onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeias can be used to describe the gears of machines working, the horn of a car honking, animals croaking or barking, or any number of other sounds.

II. Examples of Onomatopoeia

1. Some of the most common instances of onomatopoeias may be found in the words we assign to the sounds animals make:

Dogs bark, ruff, woof, arf, and howl. Cats meow, hiss, and purr. Frogs croak, chirp, and ribbit. Cows go moo. Horses neigh and whinny. Lions roar. The rooster goes cock-a-doodle-do!

The list of animal onomatopoeias goes on and on.

2. Another common example of onomatopoeia is the variety of sounds made by water. Consider the following:

Rain pitter-patters, drip-drops, and rat-a-tats on the tin roof. Creeks babble and churn. Lakes ripple. Rivers rush. Oceans crash, roar, and thunder against the shore.

3. For a third set of examples, think about the sounds people make while eating and drinking:

Cindy slurps up her soup. Ann sips her soda. Greg chews and chomps down his food. They all munch and crunch on chips.

4. Examples of onomatopoeia surround us. To find other examples, simply ask, "What sound does that make?" More often than not, the answer will be an example of onomatopoeia at play.

III. The importance of using Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeias are important in that they provide the reader with a full description of a sound, forming the actual sound in the reader's mind. This creates a vivid reading experience. For example, "The wind howled, hissed, and whooshed" is more expressive than "The wind blew." Onomatopoeias can provide a poem or prose passage with sound imagery and rhythm which reflect the mood of the composition. Furthermore, it is a powerful device that gives a passage a sense of reality in which readers can hear sounds, while reading words.

IV. Examples of Onomatopoeia in Literature

Onomatopoeias provide readers with exciting, realistic, and evocative descriptions of sound in both poetry and prose.

1. For an example of onomatopoeia in poetry, read this excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Bells":

*How they clang, and clash, and roar!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear it fully knows,
By the twanging
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling
And the wrangling,
How the danger sinks and swells,—
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells,
Of the bells*

Poe describes bells which clang, clash, roar, twang, jangle, wrangle, sink, and swell. Such strong descriptions of their ringing serve to evoke feelings of horror, danger, and anger in this dramatic and eerie passage.

2. For a more fun and cheerful example of onomatopoeias in literature, Read Shel Silverstein's poem "[Noise Day](#)":



Noise Day - a Poem by Shel Silverstein



Buck Hinman

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*Let's have one day for girls and boyses
When you can make the grandest noises.*

Screech, scream, holler, and yell—

Buzz a buzzer, clang a bell,

Sneeze—hiccup—whistle—shout,

Laugh until your lungs wear out,

Toot a whistle, kick, a can,

Bang a spoon against a pan,

Sing, yodel, bellow, hum,

Blow a horn, beat a drum,

Rattle a window, slam a door,

Scrape a rake across the floor,

Use a drill, drive a nail,

Turn the hose on the garbage pail,

Shout Yahoo—Hurrah—Hooray,

Turn up the music all the way,

Try and bounce your bowling ball,

Ride a skateboard up the wall,

Chomp your food with a smack and a slurp,

Chew—chomp—hiccup—burp.

One day a year do all of these,

The rest of the days—be quiet please.

This poem is essentially a collection of onomatopoeic words from screech and scream to hiccup and burp. Silverstein celebrates the numerous loud and bombastic sounds children make before asking them to be quiet every other day of the year.

V. Examples of Onomatopoeia in Pop Culture

Onomatopoeias can be used in pop culture to imitate sounds which create a mood or rhythm. One of the most popular uses of onomatopoeias in pop culture is in music.

1. For an example of onomatopoeias in pop culture, consider Ylvis's song "[The Fox \(What Does the Fox Say?\)](#)":



This comedic song uses onomatopoeia to draw attention to the fact that the fox, unlike many other animals, does not have a commonly known onomatopoeic sound:

*Dog goes woof, cat goes meow.
Bird goes tweet, and mouse goes squeak.
Cow goes moo. Frog goes croak, and the elephant goes toot.
Ducks say quack and fish go blub, and the seal goes ow ow ow.
But there's one sound that no one knows...
What does the fox say?*

Guesses for the fox's sound range from wa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pow to ring-ding-ding-ding to bay-buh-day-bum-bay-dum.

As can be heard in this song, onomatopoeias provide the song with an upbeat rhythm and fun lyrics.

- For a slightly subtler version of onomatopoeias used in song, listen to Charli XCX's song "[Boom Clap.](#)"



The song "Boom Clap" is catchy, fun, and lighthearted. One reason why, is its use of onomatopoeias in the chorus:

Boom! Clap!
The sound of my heart
The beat goes on and on and on and on and
Boom! Clap!
You make me feel good
Come on to me, come on to me now

Describing the heartbeat as boom and clap implies that the heart is full and energetic, like a pop song or happy party. Such a description further emphasizes the happiness of the speaker who has fallen in love.

VI. Related Terms: Onomatopoeia vs. Similar Devices

Assonance

Like onomatopoeia, assonance uses sound to create rhythm and mood. Unlike onomatopoeia, assonance is not a specific word, but the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. Here is an example of assonance versus onomatopoeia in the description of a river:

- Sentence with Assonance:**
The river wove hither and thither, glistening and misting over slivers of rocks.

The repetition of the 'i' sound in river, hither, thither, glistening, misting, and slivers provides this sentence with rhythm and imitates the hissing sound of rushing water to create sound imagery.

- **Sentence with Onomatopoeias:**

The river slushed and rushed, bubbling and gurgling along the rocks.

Onomatopoeic words slushed, rushed, bubbling, and gurgling provide this sentence with similar but different rhythm and sound imagery.

Alliteration

Like onomatopoeia, alliteration uses specific words and their sounds to create a rhythm and mood. Unlike onomatopoeia, alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Here is an example of alliteration versus onomatopoeia in the description of a girl on a slide:

- **Sentence with Alliteration:**

Sally slipped on the slide and slid off sloppily.

The repetition of the 's' sound at the beginning of Sally, slipped, slide, slide, and sloppily provides this sentence with rhythm and imitates the slippery imagery.

- **Sentence with Onomatopoeias:**

Sally slipped with a whoop and bumped down onto the slide, swooshing to the bottom.

The use of words like whoop, bumped, and swooshed provides the reader with sound imagery, invoking a vivid image of Sally sliding down the slide.

VII. In Closing

Onomatopoeias serve as proof that words can be fun and realistic representations of the sounds which they serve to define. If a sound exists in the world, chances are there is an onomatopoeic word which clatters or clacks, swooshes or slaps, or bings or bangs in line with it.

Source: <http://literaryterms.net/onomatopoeia/>

The list below contains over a hundred examples of onomatopoeias. Many of them are not really appropriate to use in a college application essay – but many could be. Go through the list and highlight 20 you think may be useful to describe the scenes in your essays.

The BIG Onomatopoeia List

A	B-cont	B-cont
aaugh abracadabra achoo ah ah uh ah uh ah-choo / atchoo / achoo Ah-ooh-ga aha ahahah ahem ahh ha ha ahhhh ahoy Arf argh argh aroo atishoo aw awk	bawled bawling bay beep belch bellbird bellow Biff bing blab blab / blabber blabbed blabbing blah blam blang blare blared blaring blast bleat bleep bling bling bling blip bllggh blllgggh bllllgggghh bloop blub blubber blurp blurt blurted blurting bob-white bobolink boff boing boink bomb bomp / bop	bong bong / dong bonk bonked bonking boo boo-hoo boom boooOOOOOOooo Boosh bop / bomp borborygmus bow-wow brat / bratatat bray breet/preet brekekekex, koax, koax bringg / brinng brouhaha brring Brrr brum-brum-brum-brum- brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr brush bubble bubbled buck buffet buffoon bumble bumblebee bump burble burp burr buzz buzzed buzzing bwahaha! Bzzz
B		
baa babble babbler badaboom badum tish bah bam bamf bang baraag barf bark baroom bash bashed bashing batabatabata bawl		

C	C-cont	C-cont / D
ca-chunk	clank	croon
cackle	clanked	croup
carambah	clanking	crow
caterwaul	clap	crumple
caw	clapped	crunch
cha-cha(-cha)	clapping	crunch, crunch, crunch
cha-ching	claque	crunching
chachalaca	clash	crunchy
chakk-chackk-chak-chak,	clatter	cry
chak-a-chak-akk-chk-chk-chk	clattered	cuckoo
cham / champ	clattering	cuckoo
chant	cliche	curlew
chat	click	currawong
chatter	clickety-clack	
chatterer	clickety-clack / click-ety-cla	D
chattering	clicking	
cheep	clink	d'oh / doh
chickadee	clinker	dab
chiffchaff	clinking	dada
chiming	clip clop	dakka
chink	clippity-clop / clippety-clop	dash
chirp	clitter	deed-a-reedle
chirr	cllobber	dibble dibble dopp dopp
chirrup	clop	dickcissel
chit	clout	didgeridoo
chit-chat	cltkty cluck	dikdik ding
chitchat	clucking	ding-dong
chitter	clunk	dirnt
chomp	cock-a-doodle-doo	doink
choo	coo	dong
choo-choo	cough	dong / bong
chortle	crack	doo-wop
chough	crackle	dook
Chrrrick chrrrick chrrrick	crackling	dook
chrrrick	crash	dot a dot dot drip
chunchy	crashed	drizzle
chuck-will's-widow	creak	drone
chuckle chug	creaked	drop
chukar	creaking	drum
chump	Creek	
chunk	Cricket	
clack	crinkle	
clacked	crinkled	
clackety-clack	crisp	
clang	croak	
clanged	croaked	
clanging	croaker	

E-cont / F	G	G-cont / H
echo eee-aaaah eeeeeee eeeooooeeeo eeeyouch Eek eek eek eew eeyore eh	gabing gada, gada, gada gag gaggle gak gak gallop gargle gargled gasp gecko gibber gibber(ish) giggle klok / klok gloop glop glub glug glup gnash gnaw gobble gobbled gong gray-winged trumpeter great kiskadee grind groan groaned growl growling growls grr grumble grumbling grump grumph grunt grunted guffaw gulla, gulla, glugluglugluglug gulp gulped gunko, gunko gurgle gurgled gurgling	gurrhr gush gushed gwuf, gwuf, gwuf gyuh gyuh,gyuh
F		H
fa-thud fanfare fash Ffffffffffffff fillip finch fisst fizz fizz / fizzle fizzed fizzle fizzled flac-flac-flac flap flapped flash flatulence flibbertigibbet flick flick a flack fleck flicker Fling flip flip-flop(s) flog floovb, floovb, vwomp, vwomp flop flump flumppf flush flutter fluttered Fnarr! Fnarr! freh, freh, freh frou-frou		ha ha / ha ha! / haha / haha! ha-ha-ha-HA-ha HA-ha! ha! ha. hack hackigi-gi-gi-gi hacking hah! haha har har! harumph haw he-he hee haw hee! / heeheehee! heh, heh! hehehe! hem /ahem hey hhhrrrrrrnnnnngggg hiccup hiccup / hiccough hiccups hip hiss hissed hissssssssss ssss ss hm(m) hmpf / humph / humpf hmph ho ho ho ho! ho hum hock hohn hohn hohn hohn hohoho holler honk

H - J	K - L	M-N-O
<p>hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo hoopoe hooray / hurrah hoot hooted hottentot</p> <p>houyhnhnm howl howled howler monkey hrrooonnh hubbub huff huh huh huh huh hum humbug hummed humming hummingbird humph humph / humpf / hmpf hurrah hurrah / hooray hush huuuooohar huuuuuuuuuugh hyuk hyuk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">J</p> <p>jabber jangle jar jee je je jeee jingle</p>	<p>ka-ching Kaaahhkkk kaaapooooom kaboom kapow kapow kashl kata-kata katydid kea kekekeke ker-ching kerplunk kerrang killdeer kirik kish-kish kite kittiwake klam klok, klok klopp klopp klopp klunk knack knell knock knock-knock knocking knot koink</p> <p style="text-align: center;">L</p> <p>la lap lash laugh laughing lilt lisp low</p>	<p>meow meowing mew miaow mmm moan moaned moaning moo moob mooed mrow mum mumble mumbled munch murmer murmur murmured mutter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p>na na, na NA na naa natter NEE-eu NEE-eu neener, neener neigh neow nibble nnneeaoowww nyah, nyah / nya, nya</p> <p style="text-align: center;">O</p> <p>oink oinked ooh ook oompah oops ooze ouch ow owooooah</p>

P	P-cont / Q-R	R-cont / S
p-taff	Puff	roar
pad	puh-puh-puh	roared
pah-pa-rah	puhVRooPuhHoo	roaring
pant	puhVROOpuhHOO	roaaaarr
parp	puke	rowr
pat	pump	rrrinngg
patter	pump-a-rum	rrrruuurrrr
pattered	punt	rub-a-dub
pee-oo-wee	purr	ruff
peep	purr/prr	rumble
peeper	purred	rumbled
pew pew		rump-rump
pewee / peewee	Q	rush
pewit / peewit		rustle
pew	quack	rustled
phooey	quacked	rustling
pht / ft	quacking	
paaaaak	quiver	
pickle-pee		S
pied	R	
ping		scat
ping-pong		schhwaff
pip	rabble	Schklikt, klikt
pitter-patter	racket	schlikt
plain chachalaca	rail	schlip
plink	rap	schreech
Plip – plip – ploop – plip –	raspberry	schwump schwump schwump
plip – plip – plip – ploop	raspy	schwump
plonk	rataplan	scratch
plop	ratatatat / rat-a-tat / bratat	screech
plopped	ratchet	screeched
plopping	rattle	screeching
pluck	rattled	scritch
plump	rattlesnake	scrunch
plunk	rawr	shashing
Poke	red knot	shatter
poof	regurgitate	shazam
poomb	revved	sheesh
poop pop	ribbit	Shh
popped	ribbit	shiiiiing
popping	ring	shiiin
potato-potato-potato	ringing	shines
pow	rinky-dink	shiver
prattle	rip	shock
prrr/purr	ripped	shoo
psst	rizz	shoop
ptooy		

S-cont	S-cont	S-cont / T
shoosh	shush	Sssshblamm
shriek	shuush, shuush	static
shrieked	shwap	stomp
shudder	sigh	strident
shuffle	sings	strum
shuffle, shuffle, shuffle	sis	stup
shuh, shuh, shuh	sizzle	suru suru
skreek skrrreek	sizzled	susurratation
slam	sizzling	swah / shwah
slap	skirl	swash
slash	skraaa	swat
slashed	skraww	sweep
slip	spank	swish
slither	spark	switch
slobber	Sparkle	swoop
slop	spit	swoosh
slosh	splash	swooshed
slump	splashed	
slurp	splat	T
slurped	splatt	
slurping	splatter	t'chi
smack	splattered	ta-da / ta-dah
smacked	spish	tack, tack, tack / tap, tap, tap
smash	splosh	takka takka
smashed	splosh / sploosh	tap
smooch	splut	tapped
smooth	splutter	tattle
snap	spoing	tch, tch, tch
snapped	spoot	teehee!
snarl	spray	terwit terwoo
sneeze	sprayed	thisshig rrrrrk
snick	sprinkle	thith-thith-thith
snicker	sputter	throb
sniff	squabble	throbbing
sniffed	squall	thrum
sniffle / snuffle	squashed	thubalup
snikt	squawk	thud
snip	squeak	thump
snore	squeal	thumped
snort	squealed	thunder
snorted	squealing	thung
snuffle	squelch	thunk
sob	squirt	thunk
sock	squish	thwack
sora	squished	thwip
spack a speck speck	ssinda, sssssinda	thwogg

W-cont	Y	Z
wizz wlu-wlu-wlu-wlu-wlu-wlu- wlu woah, oh, oh, oh! woh woh woh woh woo-hoo! woo-woo-woo woof woofed woohoo woops woosh wow wub wub	yackety-yak yadda yadda yadda / yada yada yahoo yakyakyakyak yammer yank yap yap yap yapping yar yawn yawp yay YEEeeEEeeEEeeEEeeEEee! yeeha, yeehaw, yee-haw yell yelp yelped yeow yikes Yikes! yip yippee yodel yoink yoo-hoo yoooo yow yowl yowt yucchh yuck Yuk yuk yuk yummy	zap zapped zchunk zigzag zing zip Zip! zipped zipper zlopp zonk zoom zoomba-zoom zoomed zzzz

Source: <http://www.onomatopoeialist.com/>