This extract from Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism*, like the whole poem, is written in rhyming **couplets** (lines rhyming in pairs). They confer a formal, regular quality to the verse. The punctuation helps to control the way in which we read: notice that there is a pause at the end of each line, either a comma, a semi-colon, or a full stop. This use of the end-stopped line is characteristic of eighteenth-century **heroic couplets** (iambic pentameter lines rhyming in pairs), where the aim was to reproduce classical qualities of balance, harmony, and proportion.

**Get into the habit of looking at rhyme words. Are any of Pope’s rhymes particularly interesting here?** One thing I noticed was what is known as **poetic inversion**. The rhyme ‘shore’/’roar’ is clearly important to the sound sense of the verse, but the more natural word order (were this ordinary speech) would be ‘The hoarse rough verse should roar like the torrent’. Had he written this, Pope would have lost the sound qualities of the rhyme ‘shore’/’roar’. He would have had to find a word such as ‘abhorrent’ to rhyme with ‘torrent’ and the couplet would have had a very different meaning. He would also have lost the rhythm of the line, in spite of the fact that the words are exactly the same. ■

Before we leave *An Essay on Criticism*, did you notice that Pope’s subject in this poem is really poetry itself? Like Wordsworth, Pound, and William Carlos Williams, all of whom I’ve quoted earlier, Pope too was concerned with poetry as a craft.

**Alliteration**

Alliteration is the term used to describe successive words beginning with the same sound – usually, then, with the same letter.

**Read the following stanza from Arthur Hugh Clough’s poem, ‘Natura naturans’**.

There is not enough space to quote the whole poem, but to give you some idea of the context of this stanza so that you can more fully appreciate what Clough is doing, it is worth explaining that ‘Natura naturans’ describes the sexual tension between a young man and woman who sit next to each other in a railway carriage. They have not been introduced, and they neither speak nor exchange so much as a glance. The subject matter and its treatment is unusual and also extraordinarily frank for the time of writing (about 1849), but you need to know what is being described in order to appreciate the physicality of the lines I quote.

**What is the single most striking technique used, and what are the effects?**

Flashed flickering forth fantastic flies,  
Big bees their burly bodies swung,  
Rooks roused with civic dim the elms,  
And lark its wild reveillez rung;  
In Libyan dell the light gazelle,  
The leopard lithe in Indian glade,  
And dolphin, brightening tropic seas,  
In us were living, leapt and played:

(Clough, 1890, p.262)

Visually the use of alliteration is striking, particularly in the first line and almost equally so in the second. If you took the advice above about paying attention to the physical business of articulating the words too, you should be in a good position to discriminate between the rapidity of the flies and the heavier movement of the bees, and to notice how tactile the language is. The effect is actually to create sensuality in the stanza. ■

**How would you describe the imagery, and what does it contribute to the overall effect?** Notice that though we begin with flies, bees and rooks, all of which are fairly common flying creatures, we move to the more romantic lark with its ‘wild’ song, and then to the positively exotic gazelle, leopard, and dolphin. From the rather homely English air (flies, bees, birds), we move to foreign locations ‘Libyan dell’ and ‘Indian glade’, and from there to ‘tropic seas’. (Cod in the North Sea would have very different