

# WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

## ONOMATOPOEIA IN LANGUAGE

Onomatopoeia differs by language: it conforms to some extent to the broader linguistic system. Coach John looks at onomatopoeia in English.



Onomatopoeia is when a word imitates the sound it makes.

Onomatopoeia is also a **literary device** that is used to create vivid imagery in writing. An onomatopoeic word sounds like the sound it is describing, so we instantly know what it means.

In other words - when said out loud, onomatopoeic words phonetically imitate the sound that they describe. They're often used to add emotion and make writing more fun, expressive and relatable.

Onomatopoeia examples include words like '**boom**', '**bang**' and '**crash**'. You'll probably recognise plenty of onomatopoeia examples from comic books.

Writers also use figurative language to add more context and provide a 'show, don't tell' approach. Onomatopoeia falls into this category, but the unique thing about onomatopoeia is that these

words tell the reader what they should hear. They affect our senses - whether or not we're actually aware of it while we're reading. So, onomatopoeia makes writing more alive and realistic, because it provides a **soundtrack** of sorts, immersing us in the action.

Onomatopoeia appears in many languages, not just English. We use these types of words to describe a variety of things, including actions and animal noises.

The word onomatopoeia comes from the two Greek words *onoma*, meaning 'name' and *poiein* meaning 'to make'. So, in a literal sense, onomatopoeia means 'to make a name (or sound)'.

Onomatopoeias are popular in poetry because they are very descriptive words. Onomatopoeias help readers understand by forming images in their minds.

A great example of onomatopoeia in literature is this poem by Australian poet Lee Emmett:

“water plops into pond  
 splish-splash downhill  
 warbling magpies in tree  
 trilling, melodic thrill  
 whoosh, passing breeze  
 flags flutter and flap  
 frog croaks, bird whistles  
 babbling bubbles from tap”.



**Adapted from the internet by  
 ECP coach John**

## Word list

**literary device: (n)** specific techniques that allow a writer to convey a deeper meaning that goes beyond what's on the page.

**boom: (n)** a deep, long, echoing sound

**bang: (n)** a sudden loud, explosive noise, as the firing of a gun

**crash: (n)** a breaking or falling to pieces with loud noise

**soundtrack: (n)** the sound recorded on a film, esp. music or voices

### Music groups or terms

Bebop: (n) a style of jazz

Oom-pah: (n) brass instruments, also Humppa

Ska: (n) a style of music characterised by a walking bass line

Rattle and Hum: (n) sixth album by the Irish band U2.

## Let's chat about that!

1. Summarise the texts (*To answer the questions you will need to read both texts on pages 1 and 2*)
2. In your own words; define onomatopoeia.
3. How is onomatopoeia used in literature?
4. Think of some animals. What do they sound like in your language? Ask your coach how they sound in English? Are they the same or different? Explain the differences.
5. Listen to your coach reading the poem. What images come into your mind?
6. What are your favourite onomatopoeic words in English/Spanish/Basque?

## EXAMPLES OF ONOMATOPOEIC WORDS

**Words related to water or other liquids often start with sp- or dr-. For example:**

*splash;*  
*spray;*  
*drip.*

**For small quantities of water, the words also commonly end in -le. For example:**

*drizzle;*  
*sprinkle.*

**For collisions of two objects together, there are a number of common letter combinations.**

**For example, words that start with cl- suggest that there's been a collision between glass or metal, like:**

*clink;*  
*clatter.*

**Other collision sounds end in -ng, which suggests that the sound resonates or echoes for a while after the collision. For example:**

*clang;*  
*ding;*  
*bang.*

### More Examples

*babble* (water moving along in a river);  
*beep* (a high-pitched signal);  
*blare* (a loud and unpleasant noise);  
*boom* (an explosion);  
*chime* (a high ringing sound, such as bells);  
*clack* (short, loud sound as two objects hit against each other);  
*clang* (a loud metallic sound);  
*clank* (a short, loud sound);

*clatter* (a series of short, sharp noises - something falling over);  
*click* (the same sound as when you press a switch);  
*creak* (a door opening);  
*ding-dong* (a doorbell ringing);  
*fizz* (such as bubbles in fizzy drinks);  
*groan* (a long, low sound);  
*growl* (a low, unpleasant noise, usually an animal);  
*grunt* (a short, low sound made in your throat and nose at the same time);  
*gurgle* (the sound water makes going down a drain);  
*honk* (a loud horn, usually in a car);  
*hoot* (a short, loud sound as a warning);  
*tick-tock* (the hands of a clock)