

# UNSPEAKABLE SUGGESTIONS

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A. A. Milne of Winnie-the-Pooh fame contended that light verse is the hardest and most severely technical work known to authorship. If his appraisal be accepted, then unspeakable rhymes, long known as sight rhymes, go beyond the superlatives of difficulty. Where a light verse begins with an idea which will be expressed in words, an unspeakable rhyme has to start with a pair of incongruous words for which a logical (or even better, an illogical) connecting idea has to be found:

Cab Strike	The world may turn on its axis; New York can't turn on its taxis!
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As with other simple-appearing and easily-readable writing, much careful effort goes into the production of a good unspeakable rhyme. Lest it be thought a frivolous pursuit and in case some readers may want to try their hands at it, a baker's dozen of suggestions, hints, guidelines, rules, or constraints affecting composition of these anti-phonic homographs are offered here. Most of the following good and not-so-good examples are taken from my book, which was described in the February 1977 issue of Word Ways.

1. Take any pair of words which rhyme to the eye but not off the tongue: kinder-cinder; aviary-diary; rough-dough; simply-imply. As in these examples, take only words ending in identical sets of letters. Give no concern at this stage as to how or whether you may find a way of tying the pair together.

2. Plural and past tense forms are often useful in finding word pairs -- taxisis-axis; buttereded-butte red; etc.

3. Take only word pairs having very distinctive sounds. Please-lease may be too much alike, while wind-wind and tear-tear are far enough apart. The last stressed syllable is the one that counts, as in lover-clover. Avoid words having more than one pronunciation in context, such as slough.

4. If your intended audience is wider than the elite world of logologists, seek words both of which are in common usage -- whose correct pronunciations are generally known. A pocket dictionary is to be preferred over the esoterica of Webster's Second or Third.

5. List other words which agree in both spelling and sound with one of your word pair. You may find that an alternate works better for you in making an unspeakable rhyme, or probably you can use a number of them to increase the final dissonance:

Hot Weather Tip

That's neat! Some feat!  
To beat the heat,  
Repeat! Repeat!  
Repeat! No sweat!

6. Having found some word pairs, set them on your back burner to simmer. It isn't necessary to press for connecting ideas; let your subconscious do the work. You will find that, totally unrelated as a pair may at first appear, a likely linkage will occur to you out of the blue: east-breast ... east-breast ... ?

Chinese New Year      Comes now that centipedal dragon of the East,  
Made up of fifty persons prancing one abreast!

7. Most important! A useable idea has to be able to stand on its own as though a bit of light verse in rhyming rhyme. It must convey a thought, sentiment, twist, or double entendre, more or less independent of its unspeakability. Lacking such redeeming features, these non-rhymes would boil down to the same stale joke repeatedly told -- not any better than a listing of the word pairs alone. Here is a punning favorite which I would like even if it did rhyme:

Too Petite

Our little deer park so exquisite,  
Proves too small -- a 20 x 20 hindsite!

8. It is wise not to indulge in too serious thoughts with this form of offbeat humor. For example, this unpublished macabre whimsy might have left readers in confusing limbo:

Antivivisection

As animal used to cu/re me dies,  
I pray for more humane remedies.

9. In couplets with interchangeable lines, it is preferable to heighten the contrast by saving the more unusual-sounding word for last:

And Not Striped

When at times I'm sorely griped,  
I take solace I was born a biped!

Quite the opposite holds in respelt verses (homophonic homographs), where I prefer to use the most outlandish spelling of a given sound on the first line, since there it governs the following spellings:

Quiet, Please!

I dearly love our mother tongue,  
I have heard it since very yongue,  
All my life in my ears it's rounge,  
I like it when I hear it songue --  
Don't speak it now! I'm overhongue!

10. The final unspeakable sound should not appear more than once in the "rhyme" because that would indeed produce a rhyme:

Literally	On that first grand Fourth of July, Our forebears proved truly unruly!
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11. To further share this idiosyncrasy, abbreviations may be included in the repertoire:

Our Butcher	We call our meatman the "Wizard of Oz", He cuts a 5-lb. roast within an oz.
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Queue Clue	He looks a rich Chinese cook, i.e., One who's made his fortune cookie!
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12. Rhyming words may sometimes also be included, provided that they are saved by a final non-rhyme. I have long been amused by the "naked eye" pun:

Objective Case	"It's visible to the naked I", Is what I'm sure she said! That's risible! "To the naked <u>me</u> ", I urge that shameless maid.
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13. Necessary casualties of some unspeakable rhymes are accent and meter since pronouncing the final word correctly may change its syllabication:

Hot Dog!	Skin so tender -- sand so caked, I've a burn that isn't faked, Lobster red and overbaked, Too much sun and too long naked!
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Finally, you can expect that any clever subtleties or hidden nuances within the raucous context of your unspeakable rhymes will be lost on your audience. Witness this nostalgic item:

Country Store	There you'd find traps for bears or mice, Hen fruit, crackers, calico, rice, Coal oil, cure for colic, or ice, Specs, crocks, and penny licorice.
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Readers may fail to notice that the same confection appears at the end of each of the last three lines.