



Poetic Meter

When you say poetic lines aloud, you stress certain syllables.

The “stress” determines “meter.”

Meter controls the rhythm and can make poetry musical.

Meter affects meaning.



Counting Stressed Syllables

Stressed syllables tell us the **dominant** meter of the poem in poetic feet—two or three syllables.

Sometimes the meter changes, breaking the rhythm to emphasize a word, to highlight the shift, or to signal a new speaker.

Metric Patterns

Along with the iamb, there are other possible patterns:

Pattern	Noun	Adjective
~ /	iamb	iambic
~ ~ /	anapest	anapestic
/ ~	trochee	trochaic
/ ~ ~	dactyl	dactylic
//	spondee	spondaic

We describe a poetic meter, then, by its **type and number of poetic feet.**

Types of beat structures (feet)

Simple (2 syllable)

iamb = - /

- a. be-HOLD
- b. am-USE
- c. in-SPIRE

• **Trochee** = / -

- a. HA-ppy
- b. PLA-net
- c. DIN-ner


Complex (3 syllable)

• **Anapest** = - - /

- a. un-der-STAND
- b. in-terr-UPT
- c. se-ven-TEEN

• **Dactyl** = / - -

- a. STRAW-ber-ry
- b. CARE-ful-ly
- c. SCOR-pi-on

- 
- Two (feet) =
 - dimeter
 - Three =
 - trimeter
 - Four =
 - tetrameter
 - Five =
 - pentameter
 - Six =
 - hexameter
 - Seven =
 - heptameter
 - Eight =
 - octameter

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Stanzas

- 2 line stanzas: couplets
- 3 line stanzas: tercets
- 4 line stanzas: quatrains
- 5 line stanzas: quintets
- 6 line stanzas: sestets
- 7 line stanzas: septets
- 8 line stanzas: octaves

Kinds of Rhyme

- **Exact:**
 - **eye/sky/pie; sing/ding/ring**
- **Near or Half or Slant:**
 - **sing/dung/rang**
- **Internal:**

"Ah, distinctly I **remember**, it was in the bleak **December**"

u / u / u / u / u /

Rhyme

Feet

Quatrain

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

A

5

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

B

5

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

A

And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

B

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

C

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

D

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

C

By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

D

But thy eternal summer shall not fade

E

Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;

F

Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

E

When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

F

Heroic

Couplet

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

G

So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

G



What is the difference in mood between trochaic octometer and iambic pentameter?

/ u / u / u / u / u / u / u / u

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Common rhythms

- The iamb is very common in the English language: we often speak in iambic pentameter without realizing it:

~ / ~ / ~ / ~ / ~ /

- **I' d like to have you meet a friend of mine.**

~ / ~ / ~ / ~ / ~ /

- **Did you take out the garbage yesterday?**

Rhythm and Meaning

- The trochee / ~ gives a feeling of pressing forward, of more urgency or insistence:

/ ~ / ~ / ~ / ~

Charging down the Kings path steady
On to meet our death charge ready

- The anapest is used for a galloping kind of rhythm ~~/ ~~/ or for a light, almost comic feeling:

~ / ~ ~ / ~ ~ /

There once was a fellow at Drew
Who spotted a mouse in his stew,
Told the waiter about it, who said “Well don’ t shout it”
Or the rest will be wanting one too!”

Hymns often use iambic (common)

u / u / u / u /
A • ma • zing Grace • how • sweet • the • sound 5

u / u / u /
That • saved • a wretch • like • me! 4

u / u / u / u /
I • once • was • lost, • but • now • am • found, 5

u / u / u /
Was • blind, • but • now • I • see. — 4

Rhythmic Variation forces a purposeful change as in this famous line.

u / u / u / / u u / u

To be, or not to be: that is the question.

Compare to

To be, or not to be; once I had this thought.

Which one is the...

1. Iamb 2. Trochee 3. Anapest 4. Dactyl

a. TAKE her up TENderly...

b. There was MAny and MAny a YEAR ago...

c. DOUble, DOUble, TOIL and TROUble...

d. Shall I comPARE thee TO a SUMmer's DAY.

Answers

1. Iamb 2. Trochee 3. Anapest 4. Dactyl

a. #4 TAKE her up TENderly...

b. #3 There was MAny and MAny a YEAR ago...

c. #2 DOUble, DOUble, TOIL and TROUble...

d. #1 Shall I comPARE thee TO a SUMmer's DAY.



Summation of meter's meaning

- Iambic—conversational
- Trochaic—urgent
- Anapestic—comical or light-hearted
- Dactylic—romantic or “dash and drive” (poetry)