

## SCANSION AND PROSODY

Meter: the recurrence of regular beats in a poetic line

Foot: a combination of two or three stressed and/or unstressed syllables.

(1) **IAMBIC** (the noun is "iamb"): an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, a pattern which comes closest to approximating the natural rhythm of speech. Note line 23 from Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection, Near Naples":

And walked | with in | ward glory crowned

- To remember the structure of an iamb: paRADE, baLOON.

(2) **TROCHAIC** (the noun is "trochee"): a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable, as in the first line of Blake's "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*:

Piping | down the | valleys | wild

- To remember the structure of a trochee: CHILDisH, PEACock, SOda

(3) **ANAPESTIC** (the noun is "anapest"): two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable, as in the opening to Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib":

The Assy | rian came down | like the wolf | on the fold

- To remember the structure of an anapest: interVENE, contraDICT.

(4) **DACTYLIC** (the noun is "dactyl"): a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, as in Thomas Hardy's "The Voice":

Woman much | missed, how you | call to me | call to me

- To remember the structure of an anapest: CELebrate, ENtropy, MANiac

(5) **SPONDAIC** (the noun is "spondee"): two stressed syllables, used to avoid monotony in poetry, as in Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break":

Break, break, break, O cold, gray stone

- To remember the structure of a spondee: MAN-MADE.

**Meter** also refers to the number of feet in a line: monometer-1; dimeter-2; trimeter-3; tetrameter-4; pentameter-5; hexameter-6; heptameter-7; octameter-8

**Scansion** is the determination of the metrical feet and the number of metrical feet per line of poetry.

To **scan** a line is to determine its metrical pattern. Perhaps the best way to begin scanning a line is to mark the natural stresses on the polysyllabic words. Take Shelley's line:

And walked with inward glory crowned

Then mark the monosyllabic nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that are normally stressed:

And walked with inward glory crowned

Then fill in the rest:

And walked with inward glory crowned

Then divide the line into feet:

And walked | with in | ward glo | ry crowned

Then note the sequence:

iamb | iamb | iamb | iamb

The line consists of four iambs; therefore, we identify the line as **iambic tetrameter**.

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## Stanza Classification

Number of lines	Type of Stanza
1	verse
2	couplet
3	tercet
4	quatrain
5	cinquain
6	sestet
7	septet
8	octet (octave)
9	x-lined stanza

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## Special Stanzas

Heroic Line: Iambic pentameter

Alexandrine: Iambic hexameter

Ballad Line: line with four feet followed by a line with three feet

## Practice identifying the meter of the following examples:

1. Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth
2. Tell me not in mournful numbers
3. For the moon, never beams, without bringing me dreams
4. This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks.
  
5. I dare  
Not scream  
Although  
I fear  
This dream.
6. Dreaming of  
Monsters that  
Frighten me.
  
7. I hear the sound  
of birds aflight.  
The world still sleeps  
though it grows light.
8. Something tells me  
not to seek her  
though the darkness  
has not fallen.
  
9. Halloween is nearing.
10. And the sound of a voice that is still.
11. Follow me, though you are slumbering.
12. And bats went round in fragrant skies.
13. Tell me not in mournful numbers.
14. In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes.
15. I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.
16. Faint was the air with the odorous breath of magnolia blossoms...

17. For I have known them all already, known them all.

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

19. Nursed the little Hiawatha.

20. The evil that men do lives after them.

21. Hippity hop to the barber shop.

22. 'Twas the night before Christmas, when all thro' the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

23. Tyger, Tyger burning bright

In the forests of the night

24. This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,

Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,

Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,

Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.

25.

26. Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me;

I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see.

27. Great streets of silence led away

To neighborhoods of pause;

Here was no notice — no dissent —

No universe — no laws.

**27. What are the different kinds of metrical feet used in lines 1, 2, and 5 of this limerick by Edward Lear:**

There was a young lady of Wilts,

Who walked up to Scotland on stilts;

When they said it is shocking

To show so much stocking,

She answered, "Then what about kilts?"