Meter

The meter of a poem is its rhythmical pattern. This pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line. How do we determine meter? Follow the steps below.

1. Count the number of syllables in each line. You can do this by clapping on each syllable like you did in elementary school. Number each syllable in the line below.

T h e o u t l o o k w a s n ’t b r i l l i a n t f o r t h e M u d v i l l e N i n e t h a t d a y

2. Find the first two-syllable word in the line and figure out which syllable has the stress on it. In the above line, the word “outlook” has the stress on the word OUT, so you would mark that syllable with the over it. The syllable LOOK is unstressed, which is indicated by the

symbol. Based on this, you should be able to notice a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables throughout the line.

3. Divide the stressed and unstressed syllables into groups using a parenthesis between each set of syllables. Each of these groups is called a **foot**.

4. Figure out what type of feet the line contains. Below are the most common types of feet in English poetry:

**iamb**: a foot with one unstressed and one stressed syllable, as in the word ( )

“be/fore” This foot is **IAMBIC**

**trochee**: a foot with a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, as in

the word ( )

“glo/ry” This foot is **TROCHAIC**

anapest: a foot with two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable,

as in the phrase ( )

“a/ra/besque” This foot is ANAPESTIC

dactyl: a foot with on stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables,

as in the word ( )

“won/der/ful” This foot is DACTYLIC

( )

spondee: a foot with two strong stresses, as in the word “space/walk”

This foot is SPONDAIC

Depending on the type of foot that is most common in the poem, the lines of poetry are described as iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, or spondaic. However, for our purposes, the only types of meter you need to identify are **IAMBIC or TROCHAIC.**

Lines are also described in terms of the number of feet in each line, such as:

1: **Monometer**: a line with one foot

Example: All things/ Must pass/ Away

2: **Dimeter**: a line with two feet

Example: When up aloft/ I fly and fly

3: **Trimeter**: three foot lines

Example: I know not whom I meet/ I know not where I go

4: **Tetrameter**: four foot lines

Example: Had we but World enough, and Time,/This coyness Lady were no crime.

5: **Pentameter**: five foot lines

Example: But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

6: **Hexameter**: six foot lines

Example: To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails

7: **Heptameter**: seven foot lines

Example: O could I feel as I have felt, or be what I have been,

8: **Octometer:** eight foot lines

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

9: **Nonometer**: nine foot lines

10: **Decameter**: ten foot lines

A complete description of the meter of the line includes both how many feet there are and what type of feet are most common in that line. Thus, Romeo’s monologue to Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* would be described as being in **iambic pentameter**.

Scansion Homework

Scan each line below to determine the meter. Remember, first you count the syllables, then you figure out which syllables are stressed (check the two syllable words first), then divide into feet. Determine which type of foot the poem contains, and then count the feet to determine the name of the meter. *You only have to scan the first line of each*, as both lines will have the same meter*.* All meters below are either **iambic** or **trochaic**.

1. He thrusts his fists against the post

2. Workers earn it.

3. Double, double, toil and trouble

4. There they are, my fifty men and women

5. When I consider how my life was spent

6. Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

7. Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good.

8. Dark behind it rose the forest,

9. The dinosaurs are not all dead

10. All the saints adore thee