

SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF POETRY

METER: Meter is the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables established in a line of poetry. The stressed (/) syllable is also called the accented syllable. The unstressed (u) syllable is also called the unaccented syllable. In determining the meter, the importance of the word, the position in the metrical pattern, and other linguistic factors should be considered. In identifying the meter of a line or verse, the type and the number of feet are considered.

FOOT: A foot is a unit of meter. A metrical foot can have two or three syllables. A foot consists generally of one stressed and one or more unstressed syllables. A line may have one foot, two feet, etc. Poetic lines are classified according to the number of feet in a line.

TYPES OF METRICAL FEET: The basic types of metrical feet determined by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables are:

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|--------------|-------------|
| A. iambic | D. dactylic |
| B. trochaic | E. spondaic |
| C. anapestic | F. pyrrhic |

- A. **IAMB:** The iambic foot is a two-syllable foot with the stress on the second syllable. The iambic foot is the most common foot in English.

A book | of ver | ses un | der neath | the bough.

A jug | of wine, | a loaf | of bread | --and thou.

- B. **TROCHEE:** The trochaic foot consists of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.

Dou ble, | dou ble, | toil and | trouble,

Fire | burn and | cauldron | bubble

- C. **ANAPEST:** The anapestic foot consists of three syllables with the stress on the last syllable.

With the shee

With the shee

With the shee

- D. **SPONDEE:** The spondaic foot consists of two stressed syllables. Compound words are examples of spondees. They are used for variation.

Heartbreak, childhood, football

- E. **DACYTL:** The dactylic foot contains three syllables with the stress on the first syllable.

Love again, | song again | nest again, | young again.

- F. **PYRRHIC:** The pyrrhic foot consists of two unstressed syllables. This type of foot is rare and is found interspersed with other feet.

KINDS OF METRICAL LINES: The basic kinds of metrical lines are:

- A. monometer—one-foot line
- B. dimeter—two-foot line
- C. trimeter—three-foot line
- D. tetrameter—four-foot line
- E. pentameter—five-foot line
- F. hexameter—six-foot line
- G. heptameter—seven-foot line
- H. octometer—eight-foot line

A. **MONOMETER:** Following is an example of iambic monometer from a poem by Robert Herrick.

UPON HIS DEPARTURE

Thus I
Pass by
And die,
As one,
Unknown
And gone.

B. **DIMETER:** Below is an example of a poem in trochaic dimeter by Richard Armour.

MONEY

Workers earn it,
Spendthrifts burn it
Bankers lend it,
Women spend it,
Forgers fake it,
* * *
I could use it.

C. **TRIMETER:** Following is an example of iambic trimeter from a poem by Robert Bridges.

THE IDLE LIFE I LEAD

The idle life I lead
Is like a pleasant sleep,
Wherein I rest and head
The dreams that by me sweep.

D. **TETRAMETER:** Below is an example of iambic tetrameter by Henry Leigh.

NOT QUITE FAIR

The hills, the meadows, and the lakes,
Enchant not for their own sweet sakes.
They cannot know, they cannot care
To know that they are thought so fair.

- E. PENTAMETER: Some quotations from Alexander Pope illustrate iambic pentameter.

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd,
The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head.

- F. HEXAMETER: (sometimes called an alexandrine)

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good.

- G. HEPTAMETER: The iambic heptameter example is from a poem by Ernest Thayer.

CASEY AT THE BAT

It looked extremely rocky for the Mudville nine that day,
The score stood four to six with but an inning left to play:

- H. OCTOMETER: Below is an example from a poem by E. A. Poe to illustrate trochaic octometer.

THE RAVEN

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

VERSE FORMS: The kinds of verse forms based on meter and rhyme are (A) rhymed verse, (B) blank verse, and (C) free verse.

- A. RHYMED VERSE: Rhymed verse consists of verse with end rhyme and usually with a regular meter
- B. BLANK VERSE: Blank verse consists of lines of iambic pentameter without end rhyme.
- C. FREE VERSE: Free verse consists of lines that do not have a regular meter and do not contain rhyme.

DEVICES OF SOUND

- A. RHYME: is the similarity of likeness of sound existing between two words. A true rhyme should consist of identical sounding syllables that are stressed and the letters preceding the vowels sounds should be different. Thus fun and run are TRUE or perfect rhymes because the vowel sounds are identical preceded by different consonants.

Near, off, or slant rhyme: A rhyme based on an imperfect or incomplete correspondence of end syllable sounds. Common in the work of Emily Dickinson, for instance:

It was not death, for I stood up,
And all the dead lie down.
It was not night, for all the bells
Put out their tongues for noon.

B. POSITION OF RHYME: Rhyme may be end rhyme or internal rhyme.

1. END RHYME: consists of the similarity occurring at the end of two or more lines of verse:

I wish that my room had a FLOOR
I don't so much care for a DOOR
 But this walking AROUND
 Without touching the GROUND
Is getting to be quite a BORE!

2. INTERNAL RHYME: consists of the similarity occurring between two or more words in the same line of verse.

Once upon a midnight DREARY, while I pondered, weak and WEARY,

C. KINDS OF RHYME: The kinds of rhyme based on the number of syllables presenting a similarity of sound are:

1. MASCULINE RHYME—occurs when one syllable of a word rhymes with another word:

bend and send; bright and light

2. FEMININE RHYME—occurs when the last two syllables of a word rhyme with another word:

lawful and awful; lighting and fighting

3. TRIPLE RHYME—occurs when the last three syllables of a word or line rhyme:

victorious and glorious; ascendency and descendency; quivering and shivering; battering and shattering

D. RHYME SCHEME—is the pattern or sequence in which the rhyme occurs. The first sound is represented or designated as a, the second is designated as b, and so on. When the first sound is repeated, it is designated as a also.

Whose woods these are I think I know. a
His house is in the village though. a
He will not see me stopping here b
To watch his woods fill up with snow. a

My little horse must think it queer b
To stop without a farmhouse near b
Beside the woods and frozen lake c
The coldest evening of the year. b

He gives his harness bells a shake c
To ask if there is some mistake c
The only other sound's the sweep d
Of easy wind and down flake. c

The woods are lovely, dark and deep d
But I have promises to keep, d
And miles to go before I sleep d
And miles to go before I sleep. d

E. ALLITERATION—is the repetition of the initial letter or sound in two or more words in a line of verse.

A Tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to teach two young tooters to toot;
Said the two to the tutor
"Is it harder to toot, or
To tutor two tooters to toot?" Carolyn Wells

F. ONOMATOPOEIA—is the use of a word to represent or imitate natural sounds (*buzz, crunch, tingle, gurgle, sizzle, hiss*)

G. ASSONANCE—is the similarity or repetition of a vowel sound in two or more words. *Lake* and *stake* are rhymes; *lake* and *fate* are assonance. *Base* and *face* are rhymes; *base* and *fate* are assonance.

H. CONSONANCE—is the repetition of consonant sounds within a line of verse. Consonance is similar to alliteration except that consonance doesn't limit the repeated sound to the initial letter or a word.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep.

I. REFRAIN—is the repetition of one or more phrases or lines at intervals in a poem, usually at the end of a stanza. The refrain often takes the form of a chorus.

Tobacco is a dirty weed:
I like it.
It satisfies no normal need:
I like it.

It makes you thin, it makes you lean.
It takes the hair right off your bean.
It's the worst darn stuff I've ever seen;
I like it.

G. L. Hemminger

I. REPETITION—is the reiterating of a word or phrase within a poem.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

A FIGURE OF SPEECH—is an expression in which the words are used in a nonliteral sense to present a figure, picture, or image. The basic figures are:

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|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. simile | 7. allegory | 11. apostrophe |
| 2. metaphor | 8. overstatement
(hyperbole) | 12. dramatic irony |
| 3. personification | 9. understatement
(litotes) | 13. irony of situation |
| 4. synecdoche | 10. antithesis | 14. verbal irony |
| 5. metonymy | | 15. paradox |
| 6. symbol | | 16. oxymoron |

1. SIMILE—is a direct or explicit comparison between two usually unrelated things indicating a likeness or similarity between some attribute found in both things. A simile uses like or as to introduce the comparison. In the expression "John swims like a fish," the grace and naturalism with which John swims is compared with the grace and naturalness with which a fish swims. Literally, it would be impossible for John to swim like a fish because of his human nature. However, we can imagine the figure or image of a very skilled and graceful swimmer beneath the surface.

2. METAPHOR—is an implied comparison between two usually unrelated things indicating a likeness or analogy between attributes found in both things. A metaphor, unlike a simile, does not use like or as to indicate the comparison.
3. PERSONIFICATION—the giving of human characteristics to inanimate objects, ideas, or animals. “The wind whistled.” “Her heart cried out.”
4. SYNECDOCHE—is the technique of mentioning a part of something to represent the whole. “All hands on deck!”
5. METONYMY—is the substitution of a word naming an object for another word closely associated with it. “Pay tribute to the crown.” “The White House has decided.”
6. SYMOL—is a word or image that signifies something other than what it literally represents. The cross is a symbol of Christianity. The donkey and the elephant are symbols of the two American political organizations.
7. ALLEGORY—a narrative or description having a second meaning beneath the surface one.
8. OVERSTATEMENT—is an exaggeration for the sake of emphasis and is not to be taken literally. “rivers of blood” “sweat to death”
9. UNDERSTATEMENT—consists of saying less than one means, or of saying what one means with less force than the occasion warrants.
10. ANTITHESIS—is a balancing or contrasting of one term against another. “Man proposes, God disposes.” — Pope
11. APOSTROPHE—is the addressing of someone or something usually not present, as though present. “Captain, My Captain! A fearful trip is done.” —Walt Whitman
12. DRAMATIC IRONY—a device by which the author implies a different meaning from that intended by the speaker (or by a speaker) in a literary work. An incongruity or discrepancy between what a character says or thinks and what the reader knows to be true (or between what a character perceives and what the author intends the reader to perceive.)
13. IRONY OF SITUATION—a situation in which there is an incongruity between actual circumstances and those that would seem appropriate or between what is anticipated and what actually comes to pass.
14. VERBAL IRONY—a figure of speech in which what is meant is the opposite of what is said.
15. PARADOX—a statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements.
16. OXYMORON—a compact paradox—a figure of speech that combines two contradictory words, placed side by side: *bitter sweet, wise fool, living death.*

STANZA FORMS

A STANZA—a division of a poem based on thought or form. Stanzas based on form are marked by their rhyme scheme.

Stanzas are known by the number of lines they contain. The basic stanza forms are:

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|-------------|-------------------|
| a. couplet | two-line stanza |
| b. triplet | three-line stanza |
| c. quatrain | four-line stanza |
| d. sestet | six-line stanza |
| e. septet | seven-line stanza |
| f. octave | eight-line stanza |

HEROIC COUPLET—(sometimes called a closed couplet) consists of two successive rhyming verses that contain a complete thought within the two lines. It usually consists of iambic pentameter lines.

TERZA RIMA—is a three-line stanza form with an interlaced or interwoven rhyme scheme: a-b-a, b-c-b, c-d-c, d-e-d, etc. Usually iambic pentameter.

LIMERICK—is a five-line nonsense poem with an anapestic meter. The rhyme scheme is usually a-a-b-b-a. The first, second, and fifth lines have three stresses; and the third and fourth have two stresses.

BALLAD STANZA—consists of four lines with a rhyme scheme of a-b-c-b. The first and third lines are tetrameter and the second and fourth are trimeter.

RIME ROYAL—is a stanza consisting of seven lines in iambic pentameter rhyming a-b-a-b-b-c-c. It called so because King James I used it.

OTTAVA RIMA—consists of eight iambic pentameter lines with a rhyme scheme of a-b-a-b-a-b-c-c. It is a form that was borrowed from the Italians.

SPENSERIAN STANZA—is a nine-line stanza consisting of eight iambic pentameter lines followed by an alexandrine, a line of iambic hexameter. The rhyme scheme is a-b-a-b-b-c-b-c-c. The form derives its name from Edmund Spenser, who initiated the form for his *Faerie Queene*.

SONNET—is a fourteen-line stanza form consisting of iambic pentameter lines. The two major sonnet forms are the Italian (Petrarchan) and the English (Shakespearean) sonnet.

Petrarchan or Italian Sonnet—is divided usually between eight lines called the octave, using two rimes arranged a-b-b-a-a-b-b-a, and six lines called the sestet, using any arrangement of either two or three rimes: c-d-c-d-c-d and c-d-e- c-d-e are common patterns. The division between octave and sestet in the Italian sonnet (indicated by the rhyme scheme and sometimes marked off in printing by a space) usually corresponds to a division of thought. The octave may, for instance, present a situation and the sestet a comment, or the octave an idea and the sestet an example, or the octave a question and the sestet an answer. Thus the structure reflects the meaning.

English or Shakespearean Sonnet—is composed of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, riming a-b-a-b c-d-c-d e-f-e-f g-g. Again the units marked off by the rimes and the development of the thought often correspond. The three quatrains, for instance, may present three examples and the couplet a conclusion or the quatrains three metaphorical statements of one idea and the couplet an application.

VILLANELLE—consists of five tercets and a quatrain in which the first and third lines of the opening tercet recur alternately at the end of the other tercets and together as the last two lines of the quatrain.

ELEGY—usually a poem that mourns the death of an individual, the absence of something deeply loved, or the transience of mankind.

LYRIC—is the most widely used type of poem, so diverse in its format that a rigid definition is impossible. However, several factors run common in all lyrics:

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| a. limited length | d. expression of thoughts and feelings of one speaker |
| b. intensely subjective | e. highly imaginative |
| c. personal expression of personal emotion | f. regular rhyme scheme |

ODE—an exalted, complex rapturous lyric poem written about a dignified, lofty subject

OTHER LITERARY TERMS

ALLUSION—a reference in literature or in art to previous literature, history, mythology, current events, or the Bible.

ANACHRONISM—an element in a story that is out of its time frame; sometimes used to create a humorous or jarring effect, but sometimes the result of poor research on the author's part.

ANECDOTE—a short and often personal story used to emphasize a point, to develop a character or a theme, or to inject humor.

ANTECEDENT—the word or phrase to which a pronoun refers. (sometimes after the pronoun in poetry)

APHORISM—a terse statement that expresses a general truth or moral principle; sometimes considered a folk proverb.

ARCHETYPE—a character, situation, or symbol that is familiar to people from all cultures because it occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore.

CONCEIT—a far-fetched comparison between two seemingly unlike things; an extended metaphor that gains appeal from its unusual or extraordinary comparison.

CONNOTATION—associations a word calls to mind—what a word suggests beyond its basic definition
(DENOTATION).

ENJAMBMENT—in poetry, the running over of a sentence from one verse or stanza into the next without stopping at the end of the first. When the sentence or meaning does stop at the end of the line it is called—END STOPPED LINE.

IMAGERY—anything that affects or appeals to the reader's senses: sight (visual), sound (auditory), touch (tactile), taste (gustatory), or smell (olfactory).

NARRATIVE POEM—a poem that tells a story

PARABLE—a short story illustrating a moral or religious lesson.

PARODY—a comical imitation of a serious piece with the intent of ridiculing the author or his work.

PASTORAL—a poem, play or story that celebrates and idealizes the simple life of shepherds and shepherdesses. The term has also come to refer to an artistic work that portrays rural life in an idyllic or idealistic way.

PATHOS—the quality of a literary work or passage which appeals to the reader's or viewer's emotions—especially pity, compassion, and sympathy. Pathos is different from the pity one feels for a tragic hero in that the pathetic figure seems to suffer through no fault of his or her own.

PUN—humorous play on words that have several meanings or words that sound the same but have different meanings.

SATIRE—the use of humor to ridicule and expose the shortcomings and failings of society, individuals, and institutions, often in the hope that change and reform are possible.