

# Meter & Rhythm

**Rhythm:** the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line.

**Meter:** the number of feet in a line.

**Scansion:** Describing the rhythms of poetry by dividing the lines into feet, marking the locations of stressed and unstressed syllables, and counting the syllables.

Thus, when we describe the rhythm of a poem, we “scan” the poem and mark the stresses (/) absences of stress (-) and count the number of feet.

In English, the major feet are:

**iamb** (- /)

- / - / - / - / - /  
The falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love

**trochee** (/ -)

/ - / - / - / -  
Double, double toil and trouble

**anapest** (- - /)

- - / - / - - /  
I am monarch of all I survey

**dactyl** (/ - -)

/ - - / - -  
Take her up tenderly

**spondee** (/ /)

**pyrrhic** (- -)

The commonly used names for line lengths are:

|                   |            |                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| <b>monometer</b>  | one foot   | <b>pentameter</b> | five feet  |
| <b>dimeter</b>    | two feet   | <b>hexameter</b>  | six feet   |
| <b>trimeter</b>   | three feet | <b>heptameter</b> | seven feet |
| <b>tetrameter</b> | four feet  | <b>octameter</b>  | eight feet |

Name

Meter Practice: Describe the rhythms of these poems by dividing the lines into feet, marking the locations of stressed and unstressed syllables, and counting the syllables.

The morns are meeker than they were,

The nuts are getting brown;

The berry's cheek is plumper,

The rose is out of town.

--Emily Dickinson

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Bats have webby wings that fold up;

Bats from ceilings hang down rolled up;

Bats when flying undismayed are;

Bats are careful; bats use radar;

--Frank Jacobs, "The Bat"

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You know that it would be untrue,

You know that I would be a liar,

If I was to say to you

Girl, we couldn't get much higher.

Come on, baby, light my fire.

Try to set the night on fire.

--Jim Morrison, "Light My Fire"

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Now therefore, while the youthful hue

Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may;  
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour,  
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.  
Let us roll all our strength, and all  
Our sweetness, up into one ball;  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life.  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

(Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress")

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There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:  
I love not man the less, but Nature more,  
From these our interviews, in which I steal  
From all I may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

-Lord Byron, "There is pleasure in the Pathless Woods"