

All things poetic!

Meter

Meter: Poetry meter refers to the structured pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of verse, which creates a rhythm.

- **Rising meter:** Rising meter starts with unstressed syllables and ends in stressed syllables.
- **Falling meter:** Falling meter describes metrical feet that begin with one or more stressed syllables and end with unstressed syllables.

Foot: In poetry, a foot is a unit of measurement related to a poem's meter. It is the basic building block to creating meter in a poem. One foot contains a combination of stressed and unstressed syllables.

There are many types of poetic feet. Here are some of the more common feet in English poetry, classified by the number of syllables in the foot:

("Short" means a short, unstressed syllable, and "long" means a long, stressed syllable.)

Disyllable feet (feet with two syllables):

- **Iamb (iambic):** short-long (example: beside, upon)

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

‘Ulysees’, Alfred Tennyson

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

‘Sonnet 18’, William Shakespeare

Lo, thus I triumph like a king,

Content with that my mind doth bring

‘My Mind to Me A Kingdom Is’, Edward Dyer

Twás brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.

‘Jabberwocky’, Lewis Carroll

I s'pose the flats is pretty green up there in Ironbark.

‘The Man from Ironbark’, A.B. Paterson

- **Trochee (trochaic):** long-short (example: coffee, tiger)

Should you ask me, whence these stories?

'The Song of Hiawatha', Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Double, double, toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

Macbeth, William Shakespeare

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;

And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

'The Raven', Edgar Allan Poe

Peter, Peter pumpkin-eater

Had a wife and couldn't keep her.

Nursery Rhyme, Anon

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright

In the forests of the night

'The Tyger', William Blake

- **Spondee:** long-long (example: hog-wild, heyday)

This is my son, mine own Telemachus

To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,

Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild

A rugged people, and through soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.

'Ulysses', Alfred Tennyson

Be near me when my light is low,

When the blood creeps and the nerves prick

And tingle; and the heart is sick,

And all the wheels of Being slow.

'In Memoriam', Alfred Tennyson

- **Pyrrhus (pyrrhic):** short-short (example: Andrew Marvell's "[The Garden](#)": "To a green thought in a green shade.")

Trisyllable feet (three syllables):

- **Dactyl (dactylic):** long-short-short (example: poetry, pineapple)

Just for a handful of silver he left us

Just for a riband to stick in his coat

'The Lost Leader', Robert Browning

Out of the cradle, endlessly rocking

Out of the mockingbird's throat, the musical shuttle

'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking', Walt Whitman

- **Anapest (anapestic):** short-short-long (example: engineer, understand)

Tetrasyllable feet (four syllables):

- **Choriamb:** long-short-short-long (example: under the bridge, what a relief)

Line length (in feet): The length of a line is sometimes referred to by the number of feet. These terms can also be used in combination with other terms when describing a poetic form, such as iambic pentameter (five iambs per line):

- **Monometer:** a line of one metrical foot

<https://internetpoem.com/best-poem/robert-herrick/upon-his-departure-hence-poem/>

- **Dimeter:** a line of two metrical feet

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-bridge-of-sighs/>

- **Trimeter:** a line of three metrical feet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45146/to-a-skylark>

- **Tetrameter:** a line of four metrical feet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43171/a-visit-from-st-nicholas>

- **Hexameter:** a line of six metrical feet

[Homer's *Iliad*](#) and [Odyssey](#), [Virgil's *Aeneid*](#), and [Ovid's *Metamorphoses*](#).

- **Heptameter:** a line of seven metrical feet

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885/annabel-lee>

Poetry Form Terms

Form: A poetic form is a set of rules that dictate the meter, rhyme scheme, length, and purpose or tone of a poem.

- **Open form:** An open form of poetry doesn't have strict rules to follow; free verse is an example.
- **Closed form:** A closed form of poetry has rules that regulate a poem's structure, meter, and/or rhyme scheme.

Abecedarian: In this ancient poetic form, the first letter of each line or stanza follows alphabetical order until all letters of the alphabet have been expressed. Once used for writing sacred texts, this form is now more commonly used as a mnemonic device. Poets can also write a double abecedarian, in which the first word and last word of a line begin with the correct letter of the alphabet. Examples include "[An ABC \(The Prayer of Our Lady\)](#)" by Geoffrey Chaucer, and Jessica Greenbaum's, "[A Poem for S.](#)"

Acrostic: An acrostic poem spells out a word, name, or phrase in a vertical line within the poem. Commonly the first letter of each line spells a word, but the word may also be found in the middle or end of a line. An example is "[An Acrostic](#)" by Edgar Allan Poe.

Ballad: A ballad poem is written like a narrative, including plot, characters, and a dramatic conclusion. The typical form uses quatrains (four-line rhyming stanzas) that follow the *abab* or *abcb* rhyming pattern. Each line follows a rhythm, alternating three- and four-stresses per line. This form can easily be set to music. Examples include "[Barbara Allen](#)," and "[The Rime of the Ancient Mariner](#)," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Ballade: The ballade is comprised of four stanzas: three eight-line stanzas with the same rhyme scheme of *ababbcbc*, and a final shortened four-line stanza (called an envoy) with a *bcbc* rhyme scheme. The last line of each stanza is the same (a refrain). An example is "[Ballade of the Ladies of Times Past](#)," by François Villon.

Blank verse (or heroic verse): Poems written in unrhymed iambic pentameter are called blank verse. Iambic pentameter consists of ten syllables per line in the pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (such as the word "upon"). Shakespeare commonly used blank verse and often added an extra, unstressed syllable, or "feminine ending." Examples of blank verse include Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and John Milton's [Paradise Lost](#).

Canzone: The canzone, which means "song" in Italian, led to the later development of the sonnet. A canzone can range from seven to twenty lines long, with ten or eleven syllables per line, and a variety of rhyme schemes. Examples include "[Canzone](#)" by Daryl Hine.

Cento (collage poem): A cento poem is a patchwork poem made up of lines from other poets' published poems. The form may pay homage to a great poet, or create a clever juxtaposition of images and ideas. Examples include "[The Dong with the Luminous Nose](#)," by John Ashbery.

Cinquain (quintain or quintet): A cinquain is a poem with five lines and a rhyme scheme of *ababb*, *abaab*, or *abccb*. A cinquain may also refer to a stanza within a poem. Some cinquains also follow a pattern of two, four, six, eight, and two syllables per line. Examples include "[To Helen](#)" by Edgar Allan Poe and "[November Night](#)" by Adelaide Crapsey.

Conceit: When metaphor is used in an unexpected, clever way for the length of the poem, then it is a conceit poem. A metaphysical conceit uses unconventional, obscure metaphor. The Petrarchan conceit uses a more conventional metaphor on the topic of love. An example of conceit poetry is "[The Flea](#)," by John Donne.

Couplet: A couplet is two rhyming lines of poetry, usually of the same length and meter. Entire poems may be written in couplets. An example of a couplet poem is "[Nothing Gold Can Stay](#)," by Robert Frost.

Double Dactyl (or higgledy-piggledy): A dactyl is one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, for example, the words "poetry," and "classical." The double dactyl poem is light-verse, meant to be nonsensical or humorous. The form has strict rules. It's made up of two four-line stanzas, and each line is two dactyls, except for the last line of each stanza, which is a rhymed choriamb (four syllables, long-short-short-long). The first line must be a nonsense jingle or phrase, the second line a name, and somewhere in the poem (preferably the second stanza) must be a single, six-syllable word that has never been used before in a double dactyl. A self-referential example is "[Double-Dactyl](#)" by Roger L. Robison.

Dramatic Monologue (or persona poem): This form is much like a theatrical monologue, written through the voice of a character or persona who is addressing a silent audience. An example is T.S. Eliot's "[The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock](#)."

Elegy: An elegy is a serious poem that expresses deep sorrow typically to mourn someone who has died. In a traditional elegy, there are three stages of loss represented in the poem, including lament, praise of the deceased, and finally solace. An example of an elegy is "[You Were You Are Elegy](#)," by Mary Jo Bang.

Epic: Epic poems often fill the length of a book and tell of heroic adventures and journeys, often involving extraordinary abilities, muses and gods, and high drama. Classic examples include Homer's [Odyssey](#) and Virgil's [Aeneid](#).

Epigram: An epigram is a concise yet forceful and often witty and satirical poem. Epigrams are usually written in verse. An example is "[What Is an Epigram?](#)" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Epitaph: An epitaph poem is written to honour and remember someone who has died. The poem is intended for inscription on a tombstone. Examples include "[Upon Ben Jonson](#)," by Robert Herrick.

Free Verse: In free verse, there are no regular rhyme schemes or patterns of meter. However, the poem does have intentional line breaks and may rhyme. Examples include "[After the Sea-Ship](#)" by Walt Whitman and "[This Is Just To Say](#)" by William Carlos Williams.

Haiku: Originally, the haiku was the opening of a Japanese renga, a longer poetic form. Over time the haiku became its own form, typically capturing a single image or moment in time. Haikus are short—just seventeen syllables in all. They are usually unrhymed and are arranged in three lines of verse: the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the final line has five. While modern haikus may not adhere to the strict 5-7-5 pattern, the heart of the haiku remains unchanged. Examples include "[The Snow is Melting](#)," by Kobayashi Issa, and "[The Bottoms of My Shoes](#)," by Jack Kerouac.

Limerick: A form of light verse, a limerick is often funny, nonsensical, or even lewd. A limerick is five lines and follows a rhyme scheme and rhythm. The rhyme scheme is *aabba*, and the meter is generally anapestic, with lines one, two, and five consisting of one iamb (one unstressed followed by one stressed) and two anapests (two unstressed followed by one stressed syllables), the third and fourth lines are made of one iamb and one anapest. Examples include many of the Mother Goose nursery rhymes, and "[There Was an Old Man with a Beard](#)," by Edward Lear.

Sapphic: A sapphic poem is comprised of four-line stanzas. There's no specific number of stanzas; however, there are rules regarding meter. The first three lines are made up of two trochees (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable), one dactyl (one stressed syllable and two unstressed), and two more trochees. The fourth line of the stanza is shortened to only one dactyl and one trochee (this five-syllable pattern is called an adonic). An example is "[Ode to Solitude](#)" by Alexander Pope.

Sonnet: Sonnets are fourteen-line poems traditionally written in iambic pentameter with a rhyme scheme and meter that varies based on the type. There are several types of sonnet, including Shakespearean, Petrarchan, Miltonic, and Spenserian. The Petrarchan sonnet is made up of two stanzas: the octet (the first eight lines), which presents an argument or question, followed by the answering sestet (the last six lines). The rhyme scheme is *abbaabba* for the octet, and *cdecde* or *cdcdcd* for the sestet (or further variation, including *cddece*, *cdcccd* or *cdeede*). An example of the Petrarchan sonnet is "[Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent](#)," by John Milton. The Shakespearean sonnet uses a different rhyme scheme of *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*. The final couplet holds great power in this sonnet, forming the conclusion or a surprising negation of the previous lines in the poem. An example of the Shakespearean sonnet is "[Sonnet 130: My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun](#)" by William Shakespeare.

Villanelle: The villanelle is comprised of five tercets (three-line stanzas) and one quatrain (four-line stanza). While there are many lines to the poem, there are only two variations in the rhymes, plus there are two refrains, creating a repetitive rhythm to the form. [Poets.org](https://poets.org/poetry/villanelle) describes the form: "Using capitals for the refrains and lowercase letters for the rhymes, the form could be expressed as: A1 b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 / a b A2 / a b A1 A2." The form can best be seen by looking at an example, such as "[Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night](#)," by Dylan Thomas.

Stanza: A stanza is a group of lines in a poem. Stanzas are separated by a line break. They are similar to paragraphs in a book, uniting and dividing thoughts. Lines within a stanza may share a rhyme scheme and meter.

Lines per stanza: There are terms for stanzas depending on the number of lines they contain. For example:

- **Couplet:** A stanza of two lines, usually rhyming.

- **Tercet:** A stanza of three lines.
- **Quatrain:** A stanza of four lines.
- **Quintain:** A stanza of five lines.
- **Sestet:** A stanza of six lines.
- **Septet:** A stanza of seven lines.
- **Octet:** A stanza of eight lines.

Envoi/Envoy: An envoi is a concluding or explanatory stanza that appears at the very end of a poem (for example, a [ballade](#)). It is shorter than the previous stanzas throughout the poem.

Refrain: A refrain is a line or phrase that is repeated throughout a poem. For example, there are two refrains in "[Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night](#)," by Dylan Thomas.

Poetic Devices and Terms

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of sounds used at the beginning of words next to, or near each other. For example, alliteration is demonstrated in the use of the *n* sound in this line from "[The Raven](#)," by Edgar Allan Poe: "While I **n**odded, **n**early **n**apping, suddenly there came a tapping."

Apostrophe: An apostrophe is when the poem directly addresses someone or something that isn't present, such as a person (living or deceased), place, or thing (for example, the earth, love, or death).

Assonance: Assonance is a repetition of similar vowel sounds in words near each other. William Wordsworth uses assonance in his poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," for example: "A **h**ost, of golden daffodils; / Beside the lake, **e**neath the **t**rees."

Caesura: A caesura, or pause, is a break in the rhythm of a poem for a beat, usually indicated by punctuation, a line break, or an extra space.

Connotation: Connotation is the implied meaning, feeling, and weight of a word. It's the word's emotional and cultural baggage.

Denotation: Denotation is the literal meaning of a word, or the dictionary definition.

Enjambment: Enjambment is when a sentence wraps between two or more lines in a poem. The incomplete sentence at the end of the line creates tension because the reader is both drawn to pause at the end of the line and is urged to continue to the next line to read the completion of the sentence.

Hyperbole: An extreme exaggeration to create emphasis.

Imagery: When poets write using imagery, they write in a way that creates mental pictures in the minds of readers. Writing with imagery appeals to the five senses, showing the reader instead of telling.

Irony: Irony is a literary device that requires the reader to read between the lines. What is literally written is not what is meant; in fact, it may be the exact opposite. There is an implied meaning behind

the words. Additionally, poets may use situational or dramatic irony. In this type of irony, the actions, intentions, or ideals contrast with the reality of the situation.

Metaphor: A metaphor is a literary device that draws a comparison between two seemingly unrelated things. The metaphor may be direct or implied. A metaphor does not use the words "like" or "as" to make the comparison.

Prose: Prose, as opposed to poetry, refers to text written without rhyme or meter. Literary devices, such as metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, may be present in prose.

Onomatopoeia: This term describes using words that imitate a sound, such as "snap" and "meow."

Simile: A simile is a comparison between two things using the words "like" or "as."

Slant rhyme: A slant rhyme (also called an off, imperfect, near, or half rhyme) is a type of rhyme that does not have a perfectly matched end sound between the two words, but they share similar sounds (such as the vowels are the same but the consonants are different). For example: home and none, mug and mutt, ridge and grudge.

Symbol: Poets use symbols as a literary device when an object or action signifies or represents something else, which is usually a more abstract idea that holds deep significance. Unlike metaphor, a symbol's meaning is not directly explained through a comparison between the two things, but instead it is created through the context of its use.

Verse: The term verse generally refers to poetry, or text written in meter or rhyme (as opposed to prose, which is not).

A video link to the wonderful Stephen Fry discussing aspects of poetry. Well worth watching!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ap59pZiFZt0>

"Among the
pleasures of poetry
is the sheer
physical, sensual,
textural, tactile
pleasure of feeling
the words on your
lips, tongue, teeth
and vocal chords."

— STEPHEN FRY