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Shakespeare Scenes Sonnets and Soliloquies: Coaching Students

Resource Materials  
For Exploring Shakespeare's Text  
for Performance

# POETRY WORKSHEET

## **Poetry or Verse**

*That category of literature characterized by highly imaginative language selected and arranged to elicit a specific emotional response. Poets use meaning, sound, and rhythm to incorporate a concentrated depiction of experience. Usually, poetry appears on the page with a jagged right margin, and was conceived by the author in line form.*

## **What is blank verse?**

Blank verse: verse which satisfies BOTH condition (i) and condition (ii):

Condition (i): It does not rhyme. If it rhymes, it's not blank verse.

Condition (ii): All the lines have the same number of feet.

## **Is blank verse iambic pentameter?**

Blank verse may be in the form of iambic pentameter, and usually is. However, blank verse does not have to be iambic pentameter. Other metrical patterns are possible.

## **Does Shakespeare use blank verse?**

In the plays, often, but not always. Remember that if the verse rhymes then it is not blank verse. Shakespeare's sonnets have rhyme schemes so they are not blank verse.

## **What is iambic pentameter?**

A line of iambic pentameter is a line of poetry which follows this pattern of weak and strong stresses:-

weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG weak STRONG

It breaks into five feet, like this:

weak STRONG / weak STRONG / weak STRONG / weak STRONG / weak STRONG

## **What is an iamb?**

An iamb is one of the "weak STRONG" units used to build a line of iambic pentameter. "Penta" means five (as in "the Pentagon," a building which happens to have five sides) and iambic pentameter is a line of verse which has 5 x iambs.

## **What is a foot?**

A foot is one of the repeating segments that is used to build a line of poetry. In the case of iambic pentameter, one iamb = one foot.

One line of iambic pentameter has five feet. Each of these five feet is an iamb.

## What is meter?

Meter is the pattern of a line of verse (for example, iambic pentameter). If the rhythm of each line of a piece of verse is iambic pentameter then we can say that the metrical pattern of that piece of verse is iambic pentameter.

### LIKE THE BEAT OF A HEART: Da DUM

**Blank Verse** – poetry that does not rhyme; easily used to emulate the natural rhythms of English speech within *iambic pentameter*

**Foot** – Unit of meter – each foot contains 2 syllables

**An iambic foot** is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.  
We could write the rhythm like this:

Da DUM

(*iambic* – meaning push, persistency or determination).

### Iambic Pentameter:

**Five forward-moving feet (10 syllables of ‘Dee DUM’)**

A line of iambic pentameter is five iambic feet in a row:

Da DUM      da DUM      da DUM      da DUM      da DUM

Example of a pure iambic line:

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
(II.ii.2)

Scanned and marked:

- /    - /    - /    - /    - /  
But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
(II.ii.2)

Although strictly speaking, iambic pentameter refers to five iambs in a row (as above), in practice, poets vary their iambic pentameter a great deal, while maintaining the iamb as the most common foot. The first foot, on the other hand, is the most likely to change by the use of *inversion*, which reverses the order of unstressed and stressed in the foot. For example the first line of Richard III begins with an inversion:

/ - - / - / - / - /  
Now is the winter of our discontent

As Shakespeare often does, he uses a trochaic inversion to begin the speech; otherwise, the line

scans normally.

Another common departure from standard iambic pentameter is the addition of a final unstressed syllable, which creates a *weak* or *feminine ending*. One of Shakespeare's most famous lines of iambic pentameter has a weak ending:

- / - / - / - / - / -

To be or not to be that is the question

### Scansion

The analysis of poetry or verse to show its metrical pattern. Scansion is the process of analyzing poetry's rhythm by looking at **meter** and **feet**. A foot is a two- or three-syllable division of stresses. Meter is the predominant rhythm of a poem based on the type and number of feet per line.

Syllables are marked either as stressed (/) or unstressed (-) depending upon the pronunciation of a given word within the line. For instance, the word "example" would scan as:

- / -  
ex am ple

### Common Metrical Feet in English

Foot	Syllables	Stress Pattern
iamb	2	- /
trochee	2	/ -
spondee	2	/ /
pyrric	2	- -
anapest	3	- - /
dactyl	3	/ - -

### Meter

As stated before, meter is defined by the predominant type of foot and the number of feet within the lines of a poem. For instance, much of English dramatic verse was written in *iambic pentameter*, or lines of five iambs, because the rhythm most closely approximated natural speech patterns. In fact, unrhymed iambic pentameter was so popular, it had a term of its own: *blank verse*.

Although these speeches are all written in blank verse, there are other meters as well:

- **monometer**—lines consisting of 1 foot                    *"My Lord!"*
- **dimeter**—lines consisting of 2 feet                        *"What is't o'clock?"*
- **trimeter**—lines consisting of 3 feet                        *"I warrant you my lord"*

- **tetrameter**—lines consisting of 4 feet

*"You spotted snakes with double tongue,  
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;"*  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream: II, ii*

- **pentameter**—lines consisting of 5 feet (blank verse)

*"The sweetest sleep and fairest brooding dreams"*  
*King Richard III: V, iii*

*"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?"*  
*Juliet, Romeo and Juliet*

- **hexameter**—lines consisting of 6 feet (alexandrine) Often a topic sentence or carrier of an important intention of the speaker. It has a strong tendency to divide into two equal segments.

*"Brutus and Caesar, what should be in that Caesar?"*  
*Cassius, Julius Caesar.*

*"Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar."*  
*Julius Caesar: I, ii*

*"To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean."*  
*Measure for Measure: II, iv*

***Lines of more than six feet are rare in English poetry.***

### **Other Helpful Poetry Terms**

- **Assonance**—repetition or a pattern of similar sounds, especially vowel sounds. A partial rhyme in which the vowel sounds are the same, but the consonant sounds are different.

*"Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more."*  
*Hamlet*

- **Alliteration** - The repetition of consonant sounds in a series of words. The feel of the consonant will therefore color the moment:

"To post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets."  
*Hamlet*

"For by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams,  
I trust to take of truest Thisby sight."  
*Bottom as Pyramus, Midsummer Night's Dream*

"Wherat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade.  
He bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast."  
*Quince as Prologue, Midsummer*

"But manhood is melted into curtsies, valour into compliment, and  
men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too..."  
*Beatrice: Much Ado About Nothing*

"The hum of either army stilly sounds,  
That the fix's sentinels almost receive  
The secret whispers of each other's watch."  
*Chorus, Henry V*

"The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll..."  
*Chorus, Henry V*

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
*Admit impediments.*" *Sonnet 116*

- **Antithesis** - A rhetorical device in which sharply contrasted ideas are linked in parallel words or phrases. 'Setting the word against the word.'

Gert: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.  
Ham: Mother, you have my father much offended.  
Gert: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.  
Ham: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

- **Caesura**—a natural pause or break in a line of verse, usually occurring near the middle of the line.

"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?"  
*Romeo, Romeo and Juliet*

- **Consonance**—repetition of similar consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words

Haste, haste me to know't,  
That I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of Love,  
May sweep to my Revenge.

*Ghost, Hamlet*

- **Couplet**— Couplet - Two rhyming lines of verse. Shakespeare's sonnets always end with a couplet; his earlier plays are full of them. In the later plays, they are used mostly for special effects, comic effects, and final flourishes.

"As you from crimes would pardon'd be.  
Let your indulgence set me free."

*Prospero, The Tempest*

"Shine out fair sun, till I have bought a glass,  
That I may see my shadow as I pass."

*Richard Richard III*

- **Elision** - The omission of a part of a word (usually one syllable) to make pronunciation easier or to achieve a rhythmic effect.

Ever = e'er Even = e'en Heaven = heav'n  
Pi/teous Beau/teous Vir/tous  
In/fluence U/sual

- **End-Stopped Line** - A line of poetry in which the idea is complete and which ends with a punctuation mark reveals a strong correlation of thought and feeling.

"In sooth, I know not why I am so sad."

*Antonio; Merchant of Venice*

O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!

*Ghost, Hamlet*

- **Enjambed Line** or **Run-On Line** A line of poetry in which the sense of the sentence or clause is not completed (as in an end-stopped line) but which continues into a succeeding line – allowing thoughts to continue from line to line, rather than finishing a thought per line.

"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them."

*Hamlet*

- **Feminine ending**— An extra, unstressed syllable at the end of a line (which would ordinarily end with a stressed syllable). Many feminine endings in a row often reveal tentativeness, a contrast between thought and feeling.

“To be or not to be that is the question.”

*Hamlet*

- **Lists** (series of actions or descriptive words that build to a climax)

Get you gone you dwarf, you *minimus* of hindering knot-grass made,  
you bead, you acorn.

*Lysander, Midsummer Night's Dream*

- **Masculine ending**—an extra stressed syllable at the end of a line

“The heavens have blessed you with a goodly son”

- **Oxymoron** - A poetic device in which two words of opposite meaning are brought together in an emphatic way.

"joyful trouble" "bright darkness" "wise fool"

- **Parenthetical Phrase** - A phrase which is secondary to the main thought, and dependent on it, so that it must be uttered with less emphasis in order for the main thought to be clear. Mark parentheses around it in your script.

"Sure He that made us with such large discourse,  
(Looking before and after), gave us not  
That capability and godlike Reason  
To fust in us unus'd."

*Hamlet*

- **Prose** - Generally, any written or spoken expression that is not in poetic, rhythmic patterns. Usually, prose appears on the page with an even right margin. Shakespeare uses it in informal situations.

- **Pun** - A pun plays with a works that has two or more meanings in order to twist the sense. Puns are not always funny. The following line is spoken after Mercutio is stabbed:

Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man."

*Mercutio, Romeo and Juliet*

- **Quatrain** - A stanza or poem with four lines, with many possible rhyme schemes.



- **Repeated Word** – Any time a word is repeated there is a reason, usually implies extended emotionality or a playful comparing and or contrasting of the word to add meaning.

Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take  
All this away and me most wretched make.

*Sonnet 91*

- **Rhetoric** - The art of discourse and persuasion; skill in the use of language.

- **Sonnet** - A poem, usually reflective, of 14 iambic pentameter lines with a rigidly prescribed rhyme scheme. A Shakespearean sonnet contains three quatrains and a couplet. The rhyme scheme is

ABAB  
CDCD  
EFEF  
GG.

No. 91

A Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,  
B Some in their wealth, some in their body's force,  
A Some in their garments, though new fangled ill,  
B Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;  
C And every humor hath his adjunct pleasure  
D Wherein it finds a joy above the rest.  
C But these particulars are not my measure:  
D All these I better in one general best.  
E They love is better than high birth to me,  
F Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,  
E Of more delight than hawks or horses be;  
F And having thee of all men's pride I boast:  
G Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take  
G All this away and me most wretched make.

- **versification**—the system of rhyme and meter in a poem

## On Quoting Shakespeare

*Bernard Levin Wrote:* If you cannot understand my argument, and declare "It's Greek to me", you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger; if your wish is farther to the thought; if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise -why, be that as it may, the more fool you , for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then - to give the devil his due - if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a door-nail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then - by Jove! O Lord! Tut tut! For goodness' sake! What the dickens! But me no buts! - it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.