

Poetic Meter and Verse  
AP Literature  
Ms. Wilson

The basics

Poetic Feet – a foot is a group of syllables in poetry. There are five common types of feet in English verse.

1. Iamb – a group of two syllables (unstressed, stressed) (examples: behold, amuse, inspire)(See Blank verse for examples)
2. Trochee – a group of two syllables (stressed, unstressed)(examples: clever, dinner, happy)
  - Example: “The Tyger” by William Blake  
“Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night . . .”
3. Spondee – a group of two syllables (stressed, stressed)(examples: heartbreak, earthquake, childhood)
  - Example: from “In Memoriam” by Alfred Lord Tennyson  
“When the **blood creeps** and the **nerves prick**”
4. Anapest – a group of three syllables (unstressed, unstressed, stressed)(examples: understand, comprehend, contradict)
  - Example: from "The Destruction of Sennacherib" by Lord Byron  
“And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea ...”
5. Dactyl – a group of three syllables (stressed, unstressed, unstressed)(examples: carefully, merrily, notable)
  - Example: “The Charge of the Light Brigade” by Alfred Lord Tennyson  
“Half a league, half a league . . .”

Trimeter – three feet per line

Tetrameter – four feet per line

Pentameter – five feet per line

Hexameter – six feet per line

(Side note: a line written in iambic hexameter could also be referred as an alexandrine.)

Stanza types

1. Couplet – 2 lines
2. Tercet – 3 lines
3. Quatrain – 4 lines
4. Cinquain, Quintet, Quintain – 5 lines
5. Sestet – 6 lines
6. Septet – 7 lines
7. Octet – 8 lines
8. Spenserian stanza – 9 lines - the first eight in iambic pentameter, the closing line is an alexandrine (a line in iambic hexameter)

## Specialized Forms and Terms

**Blank Verse** – unrhymed iambic pentameter

Example:

From *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

“Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,  
And won thy love, doing thee injuries.  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph, and with reveling.”

**Common meter** - four-line stanzas, the second and fourth lines of which are iambic trimeter and rhyme with each other; the first and third lines written in iambic tetrameter rhyme as well.

**Ballad meter** is a slight variation on this form in which the first and third lines may not rhyme with each other.

Examples:

“Amazing Grace” by John Newton

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me....  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now, I see.

T'was Grace that taught... my heart to fear.  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear...  
the hour I first believed.

Etc.

“She Dwelt Among Untrodden Ways” by William Wordsworth

She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A Maid whom there were none to praise  
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye!  
Fair as a star, when only one  
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,

The difference to me!

**Free verse** – poetry with no set rhyme or meter

Example: “Fog” by Carl Sandberg

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

**Lyric** – a short poem expressing the feelings of a first-person speaker.

Example: “These Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

**Ode** – A form of poetry used to meditate on or address a single object or condition.

Example: “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodies, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,  
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?  
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

**Sonnet** – A poetic form composed of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter that adheres to a particular rhyme scheme. The two most common types are:

**Petrarchan** – also known as the Italian sonnet, its fourteen lines are divided an octave and a sestet. The octave rhymes abba, abba; the sestet that follows can have a variety of different rhyme schemes: *cdcdcd*, *cdecde*, *cddcdd*” (Jago 1504).

Example: “The World Is Too Much with Us” by William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not. --Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

**Shakespearean** – Also know as the English sonnet, its fourteen lines are composed of three quatrains and a couplet, and its rhyme scheme is *abab*, *cdcd*, *efef*, *gg* (Jago 1504).

Example: “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” by William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

**Terza Rima** – Ten or eleven syllable lines arranged in tercets.

Example:

“Acquainted with the Night” by Robert Frost

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

**Heroic couplet** – rhyming couplets written in iambic pentameter

Example:

End of Sonnet XVIII by William Shakespeare  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Rhyme Royal** – stanzas of seven lines in iambic pentameter

Example: “They Flee from Me that Sometime Seek” by Thomas Wyatt

They flee from me that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.  
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,  
That now are wild and do not remember  
That sometime they put themselves in danger  
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking with a continual change.

**Sprung Rhyme** - A meter developed by Gerard Manly Hopkins in which he was attempting to mimic natural speech. Each line has the same number of stressed syllables; the number of unstressed syllables varies, however.

Example – “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manly Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

**Villanelle** – “A form of poetry in which five tercets (rhyme scheme aba) are followed by a quatrain (rhyme scheme abaa). At the end of tercets two and four, the first line of tercet one is repeated. These two repeated lines, called refrain lines, are again repeated to conclude the quatrain” (Jago 1584).

Example: “Do not gentle into that good night” by Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

### Poetic Literary Devices and Terms

**Anaphora** – repetition of an initial word or words for emphasis (Jago 1480).

Example: “The Quiet Life” by Alexander Pope

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,  
Whose flocks supply him with attire:  
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,  
In winter, fire.

**Apostrophe** – A direct address to an abstraction (Time), a thing (the Wind), an animal, or an imaginary or absent person.

Example: “Ode to the West Wind” by Percy Bysshe Shelley

“O WILD West Wind, though breath of autumn’s being . . .”

**Ars Poetica** – poetry written about the art of poetry

**Assonance** – The repetition of vowel sounds in a sequence of words (Jago 1481).

Example: “Shiloh: A Requiem” by Herman Melville

That church so lone, log-built one,  
That echoed to many a parting groan  
And natural prayer  
Of dying foeman mingled there.

**Caesura** – A pause within a line of poetry, sometimes punctuated, sometimes not, often mirroring natural speech (Jago 1482).

Example: “On My First Son” by Ben Jonson

O could I lose all father! For why  
Will man lament the stare he should envy.

**Consonance** – an instance in which identical final consonant sounds in nearby words follow different vowel sounds (Jago 1485).

Example: “Arms and the Boy” by Wilfred Owen

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is,, and keen with hunger of blood; d  
Blue with all malice, like a madman’s flash; sh  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh. sh.



**Ekphrastic poetry** - poetry which is about other works in a different genres of art such as music, painting, sculpture, etc.

**Elegy** – A contemplative poem on death and mortality, often written for someone who has died (Jago 1487).

**End-stopped line** – A line of poetry that concludes with punctuation that marks a pause. The line is completely meaningful in itself.

Example: “The Second Coming” by William Butler Yeats

Surely a revelation is at hand;  
Surely at second coming is at hand.

**Enjambment (Run-on line)** – A poetic technique in which one line ends without a pause; one must continue on to the next line to complete its meaning (Jago 1487).

Example: from “A Prayer for My Daughter” by William Butler Yeats

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid  
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill  
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,  
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

**Metaphysical Conceit** – A literary device that sets up a striking analogy between two or more entities that would not usually invite comparison, often drawing connections between the physical and the spiritual (Jago 1493).

Example: “The Flea” by John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;  
Thou know’st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;  
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,  
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.

Though use make you apt to kill me,  
Let not to that, self-murder added be,  
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;  
'Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:  
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

**Metonymy** – a figure of speech in which one thing is represented by another thing that is related to it. Examples: Crown standing for monarch; altar standing for religion.

**Onomatopoeia** – The use of a word that refers to a sound and whose pronunciation mimics that sound. Examples: thwack, boom, etc.

**Rhyme** – Different types of rhyme include

**End Rhyme** – occurring at the end of a line

**Internal Rhyme** – occurring within a line

**Near Rhyme (Slant Rhyme)** – sounds are similar but do not quite rhyme (example: soft and wrought)

**Sight Rhyme (Eye Rhyme)** – words look similar, but do not rhyme when pronounced (example: maid and said)

**Synecdoche** – A figure of speech in which part of something is used to represent the whole. Example: hands representing sailors, etc.

**Zeugma** – A technique in which one verb is used with multiple and often congruous objects, so that the definition of the verb is changed, complicated, or made both literal and figurative (Jago 1509).

Example from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* “You are free to execute your laws, and your citizens, as you see fit.”