

Shakespeare used 3 levels of language in his plays:

**PROSE** = everyday language

In Shakespeare: Used by people of lower social status or when other characters have short lines of greeting or exclamation.

**BLANK VERSE** = **unrhymed iambic pentameter**

In Shakespeare: Used frequently by characters of higher social status or importance.

**RHYMED VERSE** = **rhymed iambic pentameter**

In Shakespeare: Used frequently by characters of higher social status or importance. Often rhymed lines offer some especially important meaning, especially if sonnet form is used.

HOW TO IDENTIFY:

1. **Does the passage rhyme?** What is the rhyme scheme (aabb or abab, etc.)?
2. **If it doesn't rhyme, count the syllables per line.** Are there 10? Check for iambic pentameter.
3. **If it doesn't rhyme and doesn't have 10 syllables per line, it's prose.**

Self-Check: **RHYMED VERSE, BLANK VERSE, OR PROSE?**

1.

**ROMEO**

[To JULIET] If I profane with my unworthiest hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

2.

**LORD CAPULET**

*Go, sirrah, trudge about  
Through fair Verona. Find those persons out  
Whose names are written there, and to them say  
My house and welcome on their pleasure stay.*

**SERVINGMAN**

*Find them out whose names are written here? It is written, that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets. But I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ, and can never find what names the writing person hath here writ. I must to the learned in good time!*

3.

**MERCUTIO**

O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
On the fore-finger of an alderman,  
Drawn with a team of little atomies  
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;

*See answer key below.*

**Answer key:**

1. Rhymed verse
2. Lord Capulet: Rhymed verse; Servingman: prose

### 3. Blank verse