

Rhythm and Meter in Poetry



FEELING THE BEAT

Can you hear the rhythm in these lines?

A gentleman dining at Crewe
Found quite a large mouse in his stew.
Said the waiter, "Don't shout,
And wave it about,
Or the rest will be wanting one too!"

Anonymous



What Is Rhythm?

- Rhythm is a musical quality in language produced by repetition.
 - Poets can create rhythm by
 - ✦ repeating patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables
 - ✦ repeating words, phrases, lines, or sentences
 - ✦ using rhymes or repetitions of sounds
 - ✦ using pauses
 - ✦ varying line lengths



What Is Meter?

- Meter is a generally regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry.
 - To indicate the metrical pattern of a poem, mark
 - stressed syllables with the symbol (/)
 - unstressed syllables with the symbol (˘)

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
The couple sat in silence, watching
˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
the lightning dance across the sky.



Units of Meter

- Meter is measured in units called feet.
- A **foot** usually consists of one stressed syllable and one or more unstressed syllables.
- The feet in a poem are divided by vertical lines.

 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
“The vil|lage smith|y stands;
 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
The smith,|a might|y man|is he,
 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
With large|and sin|ewy hands;”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Examples of Metrical Feet

- iamb—unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (da DAH)

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

- “His hair | is crisp, | and black, | and long, ”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- trochee—stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable (DAH ˘)

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

- “Week in, | week out, | from morn | till night, ”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Examples of Metrical Feet

- spondee—two stressed syllables (DAH DAH)

/ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /

- “Thanks, thanks | to thee, | my wor | thy friend,”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- anapest—two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable (da da DAH)

∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / / ∪ /

- “And the mus | cles of his | brawny | arms”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Examples of Metrical Feet

- dactyl—one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (DAH da da)

 / u u / u /
• “**Singing in** | **Para** | **dise**”

from “The Village Blacksmith” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Free Verse

- Not all poetry follows a methodical rhythm. Free verse is poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme.
 - Poems written in free verse may
 - ✦ sound like ordinary speech
 - ✦ have a loose kind of rhythm

“Let us write of olden, golden days and hunters of the Holy Grail and
men called ‘knights’

riding horses in the rain, in the cold frozen rain for ladies they loved.”

from “Horses and Men in Rain” by Carl Sandburg

What Have You Learned?

Match the terms with their definitions.

~~Free verse~~

~~Meter~~

~~Rhythm~~

Rhythm — musical quality in language produced by repetition

Free verse — poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme

Meter — generally regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables

The End

