

METRE is the basic rhythm structure in poetry. Many types of poetry follow specific rhythmic patterns or an order of rhythm within different types of poems. It works like this:

Every word can be divided into syllables:

SYLLABLE
SYL LAB LE

When each syllable is spoken it is either spoken **STRESSED** or **UNSTRESSED**. Symbols can be placed above each syllable to show the stress or unstress. A u (unstressed) and a / (stressed) can show the pattern visually. This is called **SCANSION**. A group of stressed and unstressed syllables is called a **FOOT**.

When a **foot** is repeated a certain number of times we get the different types of metre:

- 1. **IAMBIC PENTAMETRE:** Five IAMBIC (unstress/stress) feet per line

So	long	as	men	can	breathe,	or	eyes	can	see,	
So	long	lives	this,	and	this		gives	life	to	thee.

- 2. **IAMBIC TETRAMETRE:** Four IAMBIC (unstress/stress) feet per line

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

- 3. **IAMBIC TRIMETRE:** Three IAMBIC (unstress/stress) feet per line **(SEE EXAMPLE ABOVE)**
- 4. A Four-Line stanza with the pattern of two lines of iambic tetrameter and two lines of iambic trimetre is a common form of BALLAD WRITING.
- 5. **CAESURA:** An intentional break in the rhythm of a poem. It is caused by the end syllable of a word not following the regular pattern
- 6. **INVERSION:** Taking a foot of poetry and making it the opposite (i.e. an IAMBIC to TROCHEE)
- 7. **TROCHEE:** A foot with two syllables, the first stressed and the second unstressed
Example: HERO, CANDLE
- 8. **SPONDEE:** A foot with two stressed syllables

OTHER TYPES OF FEET:

Foot Name	Scansion*	Examples
Iamb	˘/	create, extreme
Trochee	/˘	hero, candle
Anapest	˘˘/	overdue, interfere
Dactyl	/˘˘	catalyst, poetry

BASE METRES (NUMBER OF FEET PER LINE)

Monometer (1 foot per line)
Dimeter (2 foot per line)
Trimeter (3 foot per line)
Tetrameter (4 foot per line)
Pentameter (5 foot per line)
Hexameter (6 foot per line)
Heptameter (7 foot per line)
Octameter (8 foot per line)

These words are combined with the adjectival form of the name of the primary feet in the line, creating phrases such as “iambic pentameter,” “trochaic octameter,” “anapestic tetrameter,” and so on (the other adjectival forms are “dactylic,” “spondaic,” and “pyrrhic”).

EXAMPLES

/ stressed syllable
˘ unstressed syllable
| division between feet

˘ / | ˘ / | ˘ / | ˘ / | ˘ / - iambic pentameter
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
- William Shakespeare, “Sonnet 116”

/ ˘ | / ˘ | / ˘ | / ˘ - trochaic tetrameter
Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater
- Nursery rhyme

/ ˘ ˘ | / ˘ ˘ | / ˘ ˘ | / ˘ ˘ - dactylic tetrameter
Picture yourself in a boat on a river with
- The Beatles, “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”

˘ ˘ / | ˘ ˘ / | ˘ ˘ / | ˘ ˘ / - anapestic tetrameter
Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot
- Dr. Seuss, “The Lorax”*

THIS LINK OFFERS SOME USEFUL TIPS AND INFORMATION:

[Mapping Meter in Poetry:](http://www.writing.com/main/view_item/item_id/1303679-Mapping-Meter-a-poetry-lesson)

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