

## The Structure of a Poem

### FORM

Form, in poetry, is the physical structure of the poem: the length of the lines, their rhyming schemes and repetition where these features have been shaped into a pattern – especially classical and ancient poems.

Contemporary poets in many cases don't slavishly follow these classic patterns especially when using Free or Blank verse. but they are not ignored either.

### PROSODY

POETS even in Free Verse should be aware of patterns and rhythms of speech – Prosody is the patterns, rhythms and syllabic stresses and intonation in speech. While a lot of contemporary poetry does not have rhyming sequences like classical poems, they have structure and use prosody in creating patterns... even if the new poet is unaware of it. However, it makes life easier if the poet is aware of such things.

Prosody, incidentally, comes from Ancient Greeks who specified that a **foot** must have both an **arsis** and a **thesis**, raising ("arsis") and lowering ("thesis") like beating time in marching or dancing. In music think of a Bar or Beat.

**The poet determines the rhythm of the poem and measure the lines in what are known as metric feet. The FOOT is the basic unit repeating rhythm of a line of verse.**

**Trimeter [3 feet]; Tetrameter [4 feet]; Pentameter [5 feet]; Hexameter [6 feet]**

A foot is made up of syllables and the length of the foot is usually two or three, sometimes four syllables. This is where **Scansion** comes in. An accented or stressed syllable (Ictus) is shown by /; an unaccented or unstressed syllable (nonictus) is shown by x. The most common **Foot** are:

**IAMB:** short syllable followed by a long one / an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable

x /    x /    x /    x /    x /

Pentameter    To **strive**, to **seek**, to **find**, and **not** to **yield**. (Alfred Tennyson, "Ulysses")

x /    x /    x /    x /    x /

Pentameter    Shall **I** compare thee **to** a **summer's day**? (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18)

**TROCHEE:** a stressed or heavy syllable followed by an unstressed or light one. As an adjective the word is Trochaic. *Trochee* itself is a trochaic word.

Trochaic lines:

/ x    / x    / x    / x

**Double, double Toil and Trouble**

/x    / x    / x    / x

**Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble**

## WEEK TWO

## STAGE Creative Writing Workshops

**DACTYL:** a long syllable followed by two short syllables; a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. firsts two lines of **Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking** by Walt Whitman

[ dactyl ] [trochee] [ dactyl ] [trochee]  
/ x x / x / x x / x  
**Out of the cradle, endlessly rocking**

[ dactyl ] [ dactyl ] [trochee] [dactyl] [trochee]  
/ x x / x x / x / x x / x  
**Out of the mockingbird's throat, the musical shuttle**

**ANAPEST:** two short syllables followed by a long one / two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable. It is the reverse of a dactyl.

### *Tetrameter*

An example of anapestic tetrameter is "A Visit from St. Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore (1823):

x x / x x / x x / x x /  
*Twas the **night** before **Christmas** and **all** through the **house***

The following is from Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib":

x x / x x / x x / x x /	<i>Scheme</i>
<i>The <b>Assyrian</b> came <b>down</b> like a <b>wolf</b> on the <b>fold</b></i>	[A]
<i>And his <b>cohorts</b> were <b>gleaming</b> in <b>purple</b> and <b>gold</b></i>	[A]
<i>And the <b>sheen</b> of their <b>spears</b> was like <b>stars</b> on the <b>sea</b></i>	[B]
<i>When the <b>blue</b> wave rolls <b>nightly</b> on <b>deep</b> Ga-li-lee.</i>	[B]

“there are four common ways to view meter.

- **Syllabic:** A general counting of syllables per line.
- **Accentual:** A counting of accents only per line. Syllables may vary between accents.
- **Accentual-syllabic:** A counting of syllables and accents.
- **Quantitative:** Measures the duration of words.”

**RHYME** is “the repetition of syllables, typically at the end of a verse line.” there are several different types of rhymes:

- Visual rhyme, words that look similar but are not pronounced similarly, like flood and wood.
- “End rhyme, the most common type, is the rhyming of the final syllables of a line, like in the previous example of Nile and crocodile.
- Feminine or **slant** rhyme with one or more unstressed syllables, such as “dicing” and “enticing.”
- Masculine rhyme describes those rhymes ending in a stressed syllable, such as “hells” and “bells.” It is the most common type of rhyme in English poetry.
- Internal rhyme is when a word from the middle of a line is rhymed with a word at the end of the line.

**RHYMING SCHEME** There are a number of rhyme schemes used in poetry; some of the most popular of which include:

**RHYME**

Couplets

Rhyming sequences (A-A:B-A) (A-B:A-B) (A:B-B:A)

Perfect rhyme Deer/Fear/ May/Day

Stress end rhymes (masculine)

Imperfect rhyme unstressed end rhymes (feminine or slant rhyme)

So many others

**Ballade:** It contains three stanzas of 8 lines with the rhyme scheme of ABABBCBC followed by a four line stanza known as an evoi usually schemed BCBC.

*Joyce Kilmer's* poem is made of *rhyming couplets* (two lines with the same end rhyme)

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree....

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast....

**Robert Frost**, in his poem *On Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, uses the scheme: AABA then BBCB then CCDC and ends on DDDD (linking stanzas through rhyme like this is **chain rhyme**). He ends on two exact same lines with different meanings: one immediate; one much later. The poem is *iambic tetrameter* (4 feet of x / ) and is in **quatrain** (4 line Stanzas). I include the whole poem here as it is a personal favourite—Mr Frost was reputedly not a very nice person, but he was a very fine poet.

**On Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

Whose woods these are I think I know.	A
His house is in the village though;	A
He will not see me stopping here	B
To watch his woods fill up with snow.	A

My little horse must think it queer	B
To stop without a farmhouse near	B
Between the woods and frozen lake	C
The darkest evening of the year.	B

He gives his harness bells a shake	C
To ask if there is some mistake.	C
The only other sound's the sweep	D
Of easy wind and downy flake.	C

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.	D
But I have promises to keep,	D
And miles to go before I sleep,	D
And miles to go before I sleep.	D

—Robert Frost

**Sonnet 18**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

...

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

*Rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter  
 are known as Heroic couplets*

**STANZA**

We have spoken before about STANZAS. Stanzas are sometimes used in poems in the same way that a paragraph is used in prose, especially in free verse poetry. In rhyming verse, as seen above, they can be an important part of the structure of the poem. A Stanza is usually a series of 4 or more lines of fixed length and meter and have a rhyming scheme. This is not strictly the same in free verse.

Not all poems have or even need Stanza's, many poems, even some long ones have few or no breaks in them.

Some poets like to write in long lines some like to write in short lines. ***Pablo Neruda wrote many poems in short lines because when asked to contribute on a regular basis to a newspaper he demanded that they appear in the news section and not the arts pages. Broadsheet News pages have narrow columns so he would measure his lines to fit columns so they would not get broken.***

**ALLITERATION: assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia**

**Assonance:** a repetition of stressed vowel sounds – these can be similar but not necessarily the same – cold / soul / beam / green etc.

**Consonance:** a repetition of similar consonant sounds: bird / sword / paired / cured

**Alliteration:****Snake** by D. H. Lawrence

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In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree  
 I came down the steps with my pitcher  
 And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough  
 before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
 And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over  
 the edge of the stone trough  
 And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,

And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a **small clearness**,  
 He **sipped** with **his** straight mouth,  
**Softly** drank through his **straight gums**, into **his** slack long body,  
**Silently**. This suggests a hissing sound to the poem making the snake more real in the reader's mind.

**Onomatopoeia**: a word that is created to describe a sound or action. Wheeeee! Zing, Boing, Pow, Bam, Wham are obvious ones. Onomatopoeia are not always used as fun sounds.

*From Tennyson's, The Bells*

Yet the ear it fully knows,  
 By the **twanging**,  
 And the **clanging**...

Or, Wilfred Owen's WWI poem: *Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori* (How sweet and honourable it is to die for one's country). The poem is essentially two sonnets butted together:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
**Knock**\*-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,  
 And towards our distant rest began to **trudge**\*.  
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,  
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the **hoots**\*  
 Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling  
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,  
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
 And **flound'ring**\* like a man in fire or lime.—  
 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,  
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight  
 He **plunges**\* at me, **guttering**\*, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,  
 If you could hear, at every **jolt**\*, the blood  
 Come **gargling**\* from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high **zest**\*  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est  
 Pro patria mori.*

## **WEEK TWO**

## STAGE Creative Writing Workshops

Owen dedicated this poem to the English poet and WWI propagandist, Jessie Pope, who used her poetry and essay writing to encourage young men to go to war. Owen was killed a week before the end of the war.