

## Poetry- form and structure, a.k.a scansion:

**Feet**- a foot, when we're talking about poetry, refers to a unit of two or sometimes three syllables, but the feet that are made from just two are really the most common. Usually the more common feet have two kinds of syllables- stressed and unstressed. Example: the word poem, when you say it out loud, comes out with the first syllable of the word, *po*-, stressed more than the last (*poem*). This foot, visually, is represented like this: u – the stressed syllable, DUM, is represented by the u, and the unstressed syllable is represented by a short straight line (-). When we are working on a poem, we divide the feet first, by using a diagonal line (/). Sometimes the line cuts a word in half, into more than one foot, and sometimes a foot consists of two small, one-syllable words. Here's a list of feet:

- |                       |                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| *1. iamb- da DUM      | 6. dactyl- DUM da da             |
| 2. trochee- DUM da    | 7. amphibrach- da DUM da         |
| 3. pyrrhic- da da     | 8. amphimacer- DUM da DUM        |
| 4. spondee- DUM DUM   | 9. <b>tribach- da da da</b>      |
| 5. anapest- da da DUM | 10. <b>molussus- DUM DUM DUM</b> |

Each of these feet would be used in a larger unit, a line of poetry. The length of a poem's lines are measured by the number of feet per line, and this measurement is the *meter* of the poem- pretty simple really:

monometer- one-foot line  
dimeter- two-foot line  
trimeter- three-foot line  
tetrameter- four “ “  
+pentameter- five “ “  
hexameter- six “ “  
septameter- seven “ “  
octameter- eight “ “

### Rhyme schemes and fixed forms

We've looked at the smaller units that make up poetry, the syllables and the feet they are organized into, and you have a guide for scansion. This is a quick reference for rhyme schemes, fixed forms, and types of verse.

First, the *stanza*- this is Italian for room, space, or place to end. A stanza is a group of lines, separated from another stanza by space on a page. Stanzas of different sizes (different numbers of lines) have their own names:

**couplet**- a two- line stanza (usually rhymed at the end- *aa*)

**tercet**- a three- line stanza (*aaa, bbb, ccc*)

**quatrain**- four lines (*abab, cdcd, efef*)

**cinquain**- five lines

A six line stanza is called a **sestet**, and an eight line stanza is an **octave**.

\*\* The italicized letter you see after some of the above indicate a rhyme scheme- each letter (*aa, bb, cc, etc.*) stands for the last word of syllable in a line that rhymes- “hickory dickory dock,” line one (*a*), rhymes with “the mouse ran up the clock,” line two (*a*), and so on. Many specialized forms require that you shift rhymed words in a pattern, either alternating within a stanza, or with every new stanza. There is no reason you can't come up with your own rhyme scheme if you enjoy working rhyme in your poetry, but there are some *fixed forms* from “classic” poems that have remained popular for a very long time.

1. **Terza Rima**- tercets that use the middle line of each tercet as the first and third of the next- *aba, bcb, cdc*, etc.
2. **Heroic Stanza**- quatrains of iambic pentameter that rhyme *abab*- see Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."
3. **The Burns Stanza**- rhymes *aaabab*, with the *a*- lines tetrameter, and the *b*- lines dimeter. Named for Robert Burns (see "To a Mouse").
4. **Rhyme Royale**- seven- line stanzas rhyming *ababbcc*. See Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence."
5. **Ottava Rima**- Italian for "eight- line rhymes"- eight line stanzas rhyming *abababcc*- see Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium."
6. **Spenserian Stanza**- the only named nine- line stanza- *ababbcbcc*- see *The Faerie Queen*.
7. **English Sonnet**- 3 quatrains and a couplet at the end for a total of fourteen lines. Rhymes *abab, cdc d, efef, gg*. See Shakespeare.
8. **Italian or Petrarchan Sonnet**- Dante and Petrarch used this form- eight- line stanza followed by a six- line stanza. This one is a bit tricky: there is a rhyme scheme for both at the end of the line and the beginning in the sestet. This is represented by a double letter code for each line: stanza one (octave) *abbabba*, stanza two (sestet) *cc dd ec cd dc ed*.
9. **Spenserian Sonnet**- rhyme linked quatrains- *ababbcbccdcdee*. See "Amoretti."
10. **Sestine**- six line stanzas- same six words end each line, but switch position each stanza in a rotation. Each word is numbered here: stanza one- 1,2,3,4,5,6 stanza two- 6,1,2,3,4,5 stanza three- 5,6,1,2,3,4 etc. See Sidney's "Ye goatherd Gods"- this is a popular form with modern poets.
11. **Villanelle**- a nineteen- line poem that consists of a rhyme scheme and repeating lines (entire line repeats word for word- represented by capitol letters). The repeated lines still fall into the rhyme scheme.