

LINES IN POETRY

The length and rhythm of each line can reinforce the imagery of the poem. Usually, the words at the start and at the end of the line are most important. This naturally leads to features such as inversion.

☞ Lines may be of regular length.

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
The valleys, groves, hills and fields,
Woods or steepy mountain yields.

☞ Lines may be of irregular length.

They shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was a road through the woods

☞ They may be *end-stopped* ending with a complete thought or image.

Shows like a little restless midge.

☞ Lines may exhibit *enjambement*, where the lines run onto one another.

And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe

☞ Lines may contain *caesura*, where there is a 'pause' in the middle of the line.

Dear God! The very houses seem asleep

Notice that these features are not usually found in isolation:

A very monster void of love and prayer.
By day she stands a lie: by night she stands
In all the naked horror of the truth,

Think about why the poet has punctuated the poem like that. Why might two lines blend together with no pause (enjambement)? Might it suggest something grand, fluid or panoramic? Why might a poet wish to break the flow of a line (caesura)? Might it suggest an interruption of thought or a powerful exclamation?

RHYME

There was a young man from Darjeeling,
 Who travelled from London to Ealing.
 He read on the door,
 "Please don't spit on the floor."
 So he carefully spat on the ceiling.

At the ends of each line, label the rhyme scheme by giving each line a letter of the alphabet. Words that rhyme will have the same letters.

So the rhyme scheme for the above limerick is:
 aabba

☞ There are various rhyme configurations:
aabb rhyming couplets or adjacent rhyme
abba enclosed rhyme
abab alternate rhyme

☞ Some rhymes are *exact rhymes*. (standard)
 fat / cat

☞ Others are *approximate rhymes*. (truncated)
 boat / choke

☞ You can have *internal rhyme* where there is a rhyme within the line.
 And amidst all the fears and the shouts and the tears,

☞ Rhyme can also be *masculine* or *feminine*.
 Masculine rhyme is when the final rhyming syllables are stressed. (see notes on metre for clarification of this)
 time / crime
 Feminine rhyme is when the final rhyming syllables are unstressed.
 flower / shower

Remember, rhyme can have a purpose. It can add cohesion to lines. It can link ideas. It can link key images.

RHYTHM AND METRE

There is a specific way of describing poems' rhythms. First, you *scan* the poem: reread it and mark in each stressed and unstressed syllable.

Come live with me and be my love,
 Come [/]live with me [/]and be [/]my love,. (stressed)
[✓] [/] [✓] [/] [✓] [/] [✓] [/]
 Come live with me and be my love,. (both)

Then look for patterns. Here the pattern is clear. There are four lots of [✓] /
 The bit that is repeated is called a *foot*. Here there are four feet.

☞ The terms for the number of feet in a line come from Greek:

monometer	=	one foot
dimeter	=	two feet
trimeter	=	three feet
tetrameter	=	four feet
pentameter	=	five feet
hexameter	=	six feet

Thus the line above is *tetrameter*.

☞ Each pattern also has a special term.

[✓] /	=	iambic	[✓] / [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / I wandered lonely as a cloud
/ [✓]	=	trochaic	/ [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / There they are, my fifty men and women
/ [✓] [✓]	=	dactylic	/ [✓] [✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] [✓] / Eve with her basket was deep in the bells and grass
[✓] / [✓]	=	amphibrachic	[✓] / [✓] [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / [✓] / The days of our youth are the days of our glory
[✓] [✓] /	=	anapestic	[✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] / [✓] [✓] / The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold

Thus we can scan our line from Wordsworth, and find that it is *iambic tetrameter*.

☞ Not every poem will have regular metre.

//	=	spondee	[/] [/] Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art
[✓] [✓]	=	pyrrhic	[✓] [✓] My way is to begin with the beginning

☞ Sometimes there will be extra syllables (both stressed and unstressed) that seem just to dangle. This is OK. We can say that poems tend to have iambic pentameter with an extra unstressed syllable at the end of alternate lines.

- ☞ Sometimes poems will not conform to any meter at all but will have the same number of stressed syllables in each line. These are said to be examples of *tonic verse*.
- ☞ The mood of the poem can be reflected in its metre. Rising rhythm (unstressed to stressed: iambic, anapestic, amphibrachic) can suggest a happy mood. Falling rhythm (stressed to unstressed: trochaic, dactylic) can create a melancholic mood. Remember that breaks in the rhythm might serve a purpose such as breaking the mood.

For practice, try scanning the following poem. It is a lesson in poetry. Examine any rhyme scheme, as well as other sound patterns.

Lesson for a Boy

Trochee trips from long to short;
 From long to long in solemn sort
 Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able
 Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.
 Iambics march from short to long;
 With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng;
 One syllable long with one short at each side,
 Amphibrachys hastes with a stately stride;
 First and last being long, middle short, Amphimacer
 Strikes his thundering hooves like a proud high-bred Racer.
 If Derwent be innocent, steady and wise,
 And delight in the things of earth, water, and skies;
 Tender warmth at his heart, with these metres to show it,
 With sound sense in his brains, may make Derwent a poet,
 May crown him with fame, and must win him the love
 Of his father on earth and his Father above.
 My dear, dear child!
 Could you stand upon Skiddaw, you would not from its whole ridge
 See a man who so loves you as your fond S.T. Coleridge.