

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

# Poetic Structure / Scansion

## Steps in the process for completing a scansion

1. Identify each **syllable** as **stressed** or **unstressed**. (Tip—the smallest words are often unstressed)

- / - / - / - / - /

I am a pirate with a wooden leg.

- - / - - / - - / - - /

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house

2. Look for the dominant pattern, which is called **meter**. Use a vertical line to separate each section: this is identifying the **feet**, which are the basic metrical units.

- / | - / | - / | - / | - /

I am a pirate with a wooden leg.

- - / | - - / | - - / | - - /

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house

3. Describe the **meter** by identifying the feet.

- /     iamb (iambic foot)
- / -     trochee (trochaic foot)
- - /   anapest (anapestic foot)
- / - -   dactyl (dactylic foot)
- //     spondee (spondaic foot)

4. Describe the **rhythm** by counting the feet.

- 1 foot = monometer
- 2 feet = dimeter
- 3 feet = trimeter
- 4 feet = tetrameter
- 5 feet = pentameter
- 6 feet = hexameter

I am a pirate with a wooden leg.  
=   
iambic pentameter

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house  
=   
anapestic tetrameter

## Completing a scansion on your own

Now that you understand the steps of the process for poetic structure analysis you have the needed skills to complete scansions on your own. Complete the following:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,  
But I have promises to keep

meter & rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

When here the spring we see,  
Fresh green upon the tree

meter & rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;

meter & rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater  
Had a wife and couldn't keep her.

meter & rhythm: \_\_\_\_\_

*Continued on back*

### Additional poetry terms to know

- Blank verse:** Uses the structured rhythm and meter without end rhyme
- Free Verse:** Uses no structured rhythm, meter, or end rhyme
- Heroic Couplet:** Two consecutive lines of iambic pentameter with end rhyme—often for emphasis to close a scene/sonnet
- Shakespearean Sonnet:** Fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, with a rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG (three quatrains followed by an heroic couplet)

### A Note about *Hamlet*

The vast majority of *Hamlet* is blank verse iambic pentameter. Take note of where (1) the text switches to prose, (2) end rhymes are incorporated, and (3) the meter is broken. These are often indicates that Shakespeare is drawing focus to the form to match/reveal specific content.

### Complete a scansion for the prologue of *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*

1. Mark the stressed and unstressed **syllables**, **feet**, and **rhyme** scheme

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;  
The which if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.



2. Identify the **meter** and **rhythm**: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Find three examples where the meter is broken and explain why:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_