

# Poetic Meter

When words are arranged so that 'stressed' (emphasised) and 'unstressed' (non-emphasised) syllables form a pattern, it's called the METER. A poem's meter gives it a beat – a regular, rhythmic sound when read aloud.

## Meter vs Syllables

Meter should not be confused with the number of syllables in each line. Even if two lines have the same number of syllables, they won't have the same 'beat' if the emphasis is different. Compare:

I am a pirate with a wooden leg (10 syllables)      **Meter matches**  
I never want to eat a scrambled egg (10 syllables)

I am a pirate with a wooden leg (10 syllables)      **Meter doesn't match**  
I'd prefer eating a lightly poached egg (10 syllables)

## Feet

A 'foot' in poetry refers to a short combo of up to 3 stressed & unstressed syllables. There are names for each combo:

**Trochee** (DAH-da) e.g. TRO-phy, FACT-ion, OUT-ward  
**iamb** (da-DAH) e.g. in-DEED, a-BOVE, dis-TRESS  
**Dactyl** (DAH-da-da) e.g. CER-tain-ly, UN-i-verse, BASK-et-ball  
**Anapest** (da-da-DAH) e.g. in-ter-RUPT, com-pre-HEND, un-der-STAND  
**Spondee** (DAH-DAH) e.g. TV (these are rare and not used often)

When describing the meter, add "-ic" to the end, e.g. **Trochaic, iambic, dactylic,**

To name the meter, figure out what type of 'feet' are in each line, and count how many.

one foot = monometer	five feet = pentameter
two feet = dimeter	six feet = hexameter
three feet = trimeter	seven feet = heptameter
four feet = tetrameter	eight feet = octameter

So if a poem has the meter 'iambic pentameter' it means there are five 'iamb' feet in each line.

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?

Iamb #1      Iamb #2      Iamb #3      Iamb #4      Iamb #5

If a poem has the meter "anapestic tetrameter" it means there are four "anapest" feet in each line.

In the heat      of the day      in the cool      of the pool

Anapest 1      Anapest 2      Anapest 3      Anapest 4