

Iambic Pentameter

Meter is the repetition of a regular rhythmic unit in a line of poetry. Each unit is known as a **foot**, with each foot having one accented and one or two unaccented syllables.

The **iamb** is the most common metric unit in English poetry. The iamb is composed of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. The meter is marked as follows:

Unaccented syllable = \cup

Accented syllable = $'$

Iamb = \cup'

A line of poetry that contains five iambs is called **iambic pentameter**. Study these lines from *Sonnet 18*:

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
1 2 3 4 5

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
1 2 3 4 5

Each of these lines consists of five iambic meters called iambic pentameter.

When lines of iambic pentameter do not rhyme, they are called **blank verse**. EX:

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
1 2 3 4 5

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
By any other name would smell as sweet.
1 2 3 4 5

When two lines of iambic pentameter **do** rhyme, they are called a **heroic couplet**. EX:

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,
1 2 3 4 5

$\cup / \cup / \cup / \cup / \cup /$
Chequ'ring the Eastern clouds with streaks of light.
1 2 3 4 5