

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 = \sim

Accented syllable = $'$

Iamb = \sim'

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

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

$\sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad /$
 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:

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

$\sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad / \quad \sim \quad /$
 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:

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

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