

The Snappy Guide to Scanning a Poem

Adapted by Dr. K from materials at

<http://www.english.bham.ac.uk/staff/tom/teaching/firstyear06/howtoscan.htm> and

<http://www.amittal.com/prose/meter.php>

Note: This Guide is heavily based on, and deeply indebted to, Stephen Fry's excellent book, *The Ode Less Travelled*, which anyone interested in poetry should read. It also draws from John Hollander's *Rhyme's Reason*, an equally informative and entertaining book.

If you've grown up on a steady diet of free verse, it probably comes as a nasty surprise to you that not all poetry in English is written that way. Robert Frost told the students at Milton Academy in 1935 that "Writing free verse is like playing tennis with the net down," and many poets before and since have chosen to meet the challenge of meter and rhyme when creating their works. Part of being an English major (and taking the GRE subject exam, etc., etc.) is learning how to "scan" a poem—that is, to determine its meter and its rhyme scheme. In doing so, you'll gain insight not only into what the poet wanted to emphasize in the poem but also be able to connect it to other works (by the poet and others) in the same metrical and prosodic forms, helping you to place a poem in its historical period and circumstances. So learning to play poetic "tennis" by mastering meter and rhyme is a big part of your development as critical readers of literature. Let's look at the two main areas separately, starting with **meter**.

Name that foot

The basic meter of English poetry is iambic: two syllables to a foot. That's part of our Indo-European language heritage, since Indo-European featured short syllables as building blocks for words. Note that the names follow a consistent pattern: an adjective describing the shape of the **foot** or basic stress pattern, and a noun telling you how many feet are in a line. Thus, **iambic pentameter** tells you that you have five iambs in your line. Pretty simple, once you know what the feet are. And since there only a handful of stress patterns, once you get them down, you just have to count the syllables in the line and you're in business.

OK, so what do these funny words mean?

The basic six sound patterns in English have names of Greek etymology and look like this:

iamb (˘ /)

The / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
 falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love

trochee (/ ˘)

 / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘
Double, double toil and trouble

anapest (˘ ˘ /)

˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
I am monarch of all I survey

dactyl (/ ˘ ˘)

 / ˘ ˘ / ˘ ˘
Take her up tenderly

The Snappy Guide To Scanning A Poem Winthrop University

Annie Finch



The Snappy Guide To Scanning A Poem Winthrop University:

How to Scan a Poem: A Poetry Witch Workbook Annie Finch, 2023-05 Poet Annie Finch shares her lifelong passion for meter and scansion with poetry lovers and poets in this uniquely useful book From the basic tools and fundamental 3 steps of scansion to the most complex metrical delights *How to Scan a Poem* covers it all accentual poems anapests trochees iambs dactyls and more with sample poems you can scan right in the book and explorations of the all important connections between meter and meaning The art of Deep Scansion you will learn here invites you to enter the poet's own voice mind and inner ear in the most intimate of ways Scansion is widely considered to be a way of thinking and yet it is a way of hearing a way of feeling a way of listening a way of dancing Truly scansion is a way of living Annie Finch [How to Read Poetry Like a Professor](#) Thomas C. Foster, 2018-03-27 From the bestselling author of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* comes this essential primer to reading poetry like a professor that unlocks the keys to enjoying works from Lord Byron to the Beatles No literary form is as admired and feared as poetry Admired for its lengthy pedigree a line of poets extending back to a time before recorded history and a ubiquitous presence in virtually all cultures poetry is also revered for its great beauty and the powerful emotions it evokes But the form has also instilled trepidation in its many admirers mainly because of a lack of familiarity and knowledge Poetry demands more from readers intellectually emotionally and spiritually than other literary forms Most of us started out loving poetry because it filled our beloved children's books from Dr Seuss to Robert Louis Stevenson Eventually our reading shifted to prose and later when we encountered poetry again we had no recent experience to make it feel familiar But reading poetry doesn't need to be so overwhelming In an entertaining and engaging voice Thomas C Foster shows readers how to overcome their fear of poetry and learn to enjoy it once more From classic poets such as Shakespeare Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Edna St Vincent Millay to later poets such as E E Cummings Billy Collins and Seamus Heaney *How to Read Poetry Like a Professor* examines a wide array of poems and teaches readers How to read a poem to understand its primary meaning The different technical elements of poetry such as meter diction rhyme line structures length order regularity and how to learn to see these elements as allies rather than adversaries How to listen for a poem's secondary meaning by paying attention to the echoes that the language of poetry summons up How to hear the music in poems and the poetry in songs With *How to Read Poetry Like a Professor* readers can rediscover poetry and reap its many rewards

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