

### A Brief Introduction to Poetic Meter

Verse is writing arranged with metrical rhythm; prose is written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical rhythm. The most common metrical system of verse in English is **accentual-syllabic**, meaning that the meter is determined by looking at the pattern of accents and syllables in a line of verse.

First, there are five basic rhythms (or patterns) of stressed and unstressed syllables. They are:

Iamb	x /	
Trochee	/ x	(e.g. soda)
Spondee	/ /	(e.g. never)
Anapest	x x /	(e.g. interrupt)
Dactyl	/ x x	(e.g. carefully)

Second, each line of poem contains a certain number of **feet** of iambs, trochees, spondees, dactyls, or anapests:

Monometer  
Dimeter  
Trimeter  
Tetrameter  
Pentameter  
Hexameter  
Heptameter  
Octameter

So, for example, one of if not *the* most common meters in English poetry is iambic pentameter. (Shakespeare's sonnets are in iambic pentameter.) This means that each line of the poem is made up of five feet, each foot being an iamb (two syllables). Thus, each line of poetry in iambic pentameter will have ten syllables [5 feet x 2 syllables (iamb) = 10 syllables].

For example, from Shakespeare's sonnet 18:

**Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**

How many syllables would the following meters have?

trochaic tetrameter

dactylic hexameter

spondaic dimeter

I am resolv'd; Faustus shall ne'er repent.

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit