

# Enjambment

## Definition of Enjambment

Enjambment, derived from the French word *enjambment*, means to step over, or put legs across. In poetry it means moving over from one line to another without a terminating punctuation mark. It can be defined as a thought or sense, phrase or clause, in a line of poetry that does not come to an end at the [line break](#), but moves over to the next line. In simple words, it is the running on of a sense from one [couplet](#) or line to the next without a major pause or syntactical break.

## Features of an Enjambment

Enjambment lines usually do not have a punctuation mark at the end. It is a running on of a thought from one line to another without final punctuation.

It is used in poetry to trick a reader. Poets lead their readers to think of an idea, then move on the next line, giving an idea that conflicts with it.

Poets can achieve a fast pace or [rhythm](#) by using enjambment.

Multiple ideas can be expressed without using semi-colons, periods, or commas.

It helps reinforce the main idea that might seem to be confusing with pauses.

It can be seen in different songs and poems.

It helps readers to continue thinking about the idea, which is expressed in one line, and which continues through to the next.

## Short Examples of Enjambment

I think I had never seen  
A [verse](#) as beautiful as a flower.  
Autumn showing off colors slowly  
Letting the splendid colors  
Flow softly to earth below.

The poet labors all his days  
To build the beauty in his [rhyme](#).  
When rain drops are  
Exposed to sunlight, even  
Colorless become vibrant.  
Longer days have come,  
Cuckoos are here with joyous  
Shades of dark green arise!  
Amongst the bushes and thorns  
Beautiful red rose blooms.  
Breezy blue sky so clear,  
So bright and relaxing  
That escapes daily toil.  
The sunlight brightens the horizon  
Like the sky lightens a small island.  
Cold morning time  
Ice crystals reflect the rays  
Of blazing sunrise.  
Before the sunrise  
A chain of red clouds  
And all else is in the darkness.  
Lovely nature has something to offer  
you; so inhale the fresh air  
And, beautifully, learn by deciding where to go.  
Still in their cabins lay the murdered,  
But the air is filled with pain  
And tearful rain and gusty sighs.  
The rooms feel mirror reflection  
For that glowing face,  
The windows were covered  
With frost. Outside  
Is a world of ice.  
The moon moved above  
The clouds, suspended between  
Night and dawn.  
How beautiful are sunflowers  
That yield without difficulty,  
Blooming so fully now  
In the light of the sun.

## Examples of Enjambment from Literature

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Example #1: *It is a Beauteous Evening* (By William Wordsworth)

“It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free;  
The holy time is quiet as a Nun  
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun  
Is sinking down in its tranquility;  
The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea;  
Listen! The mighty Being is awake,  
And doth with his eternal motion make  
A sound like thunder—everlastingly. ...

“Thou liest in Abraham’s bosom all the year;  
And worshipp’st at the Temple’s inner shrine,  
God being with thee when we know it not.”

This poem is a perfect example of enjambment. In this poem, every line is running over to the next, while the sense is not finished at the end of lines, without pause or break. None of the lines make sense – or stand on their own – without the next line.

### **Example #2: *Endymion* (By John Keats)**

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and asleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”

*Endymion* is a famous example of enjambment. The first and last lines in the given poem have end marks, while the middle lines are enjambed. There is a flow of thought from one line to the next.

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### **Example #3: *The Winter’s Tale* (By William Shakespeare)**

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“I am not prone to weeping, as our sex  
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew  
Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have  
That honorable grief lodged here which burns

Shakespeare frequently used enjambment in his plays. This extract is filled with the heavy use of enjambment. In each line, the linguistic unit finishes mid-line with a [caesura](#). The meaning flows from one line to next, and readers are forced to read the subsequent lines.

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**Example #4: *The Waste Land* (By T. S. Eliot)**

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“April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.”

In this extract, only two lines (4 and 7) are end-stopped. The rest of the lines are enjambed. Each line is expanded unexpectedly by enjambment. The thought and sense flow into the next lines.

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**Example #5: *Don't You Wonder, Sometimes?* (By Tracy K. Smith)**

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“After dark, stars glisten like ice, and the distance they span  
Hides something elemental. Not God, exactly. More like  
Some thin-hipped glittering Bowie-being—a Starman  
Or cosmic ace hovering, swaying, aching to make us see.”

In the above example, Smith has used enjambment at the end of each line, which continues until the last line, where an end-stop is used.

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**Example #6: *Harlem* (By Langston Hughes)**

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“What happens to a dream deferred?  
  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore —  
And then run? ...

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load?

*Or does it explode?*<sup>9</sup>

This is a good example of enjambment. The poet uses a [simile](#) to compare a missed dream to a raisin getting dried in the sunlight, starting in the second line and ending in the third line. Then enjambment occurs in the ninth and the last lines. The fourth and seventh lines also use because the meaning continues to move on to the next lines.

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#### **Example #7: *Endymion* (By John Keats)**

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“The very music of the name has gone  
Into my being, and each pleasant scene  
Is growing fresh before me as the green  
Of our own valleys: so I will begin  
Now while I cannot hear the city’s din ...”

Here the first four lines are enjambed, the meaning and thought not ending. It rather moves on to the next lines, which maintain rhythm and pull the readers along from line to line.

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#### **Example #8: *The Red Wheelbarrow* (By William Carlos Williams)**

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“So much depends  
upon  
  
a red wheel  
barrow  
  
glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.”

Williams has used enjambment in the entire poem. There are four couplets, all of which have meaning continuing into the next lines, giving a flow to the poem.

### **Functions of Enjambment**

Enjambment can be used to surprise readers by delaying the meaning of a line until the following line is read. Some writers use this technique to bring humorous effects to their work. It is good to use in verse in order to create a sense of natural motion.

In poetry, the role of enjambment is normally to let an idea carry on beyond the restrictions of a single line. Another purpose of enjambment is to continue a rhythm that is stronger than a permanent end-stop, wherein complicated ideas are expressed in multiple lines.