

Spondee

Definition of Spondee

A metrical foot, spondee is a beat in a poetic line that consists of two accented syllables (stressed/stressed) or DUM-DUM stress pattern.

Spondee is a poetic device that is not as common as other metrical feet, like iamb and trochee. We rarely find poems written in spondee alone; however, poets use spondee by combining other metrical feet. For instance, the word “faithful” contains spondee. If you say this word loudly, you would notice that you are putting an equal amount of stress on both syllables “faith” and “ful.”

Features of Spondee

It is one of the most commonly used five metrical feet, including iambic [meter](#), trochaic meter, dactylic meter, and anapestic meter. It rarely occurs in poetic forms. Also, usually poets do not use spondaic meter in the entire poem, as it does not add a basis to the metrical line. Therefore, they combine it with other metrical patterns – a combination which changes the pace of the poem. Since it is an irregular foot, it does not add high structure or [rhythm](#) to a [verse](#).

Opposite to Pyrrhic Foot

Spondee contains two long or accented syllables (stressed/stressed), while pyrrhic meter contains two short or unaccented syllables (unstressed/unstressed) in a quantitative meter, which is opposite to spondee. For example, see the pyrrhic syllables in bold in this line: “**To a** green thought **in a** green shade.” We generally find pyrrhic meter in classical Greek poetry, whereas we find spondee in the modern prosodic system.

Examples of Spondee in Literature

Example #1: *The Song of Hiawatha* (By Henry Wordsworth Longfellow)

“By the shore of Gitche Gumee,
By the shining Big–Sea–Water,
At the doorway of his wigwam,...
All the air was full of freshness,
All the earth was bright and joyous,
And before him, through the sunshine,
Westward toward the neighboring forest...
Burning, singing in the sunshine.”

Longfellow has written this poem in tetrameter, which means the lines of this poem contains four beats, in which three beats are of spondee and one of trochee. Here, the spondaic feet are underlined.

Example #2: *Break, Break, Break* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

“Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.”

This is the most popular example of spondaic meter. Look at the first two lines of this [stanza](#). Three consecutive spondaic meters are underlined. Read out these lines aloud, and you will notice both syllables are using equal stress pattern.

Example #3: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

“If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings ...”

This is a very good example of spondaic meter, where we can see double spondee in the first line “If I ” and “do prove ” and in the second line

“heart-strings.”

Example #4: *Pied Beauty* (By Gerard Manley Hopkins)

“Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim ...
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change ...”

Hopkins uses heavy spondaic meter in this poem. The second line in this excerpt contains two consecutive accented syllables, “all” and “trades.” Then, the third line also uses spondee “fathers-forth.”

Example #5: *Troilus and Cressida* (By William Shakespeare)

“Cry, cry! Troy burns, or else let Helen go.”

Shakespeare begins these lines with double spondees. See there is a stress on both syllables of the word “cry,” and then there is stress again on the two syllables “Troy burns.”

Example #6: *Lepanto* (By G. K. Chesterton)

“White founts falling in the courts of the sun
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run ... “

In this example, the first line contains spondee in the first two syllables. However, we do not see the use of this meter in the entire poem.

Function of Spondee

The purpose of using spondaic meter is to emphasize particular words, and to create heightened feeling, or provide an emotional experience to the readers by converting a normal expression into dramatic form. It also makes sense more compact and compressed. Though spondee does not add much rhythm, it adds feelings of expectancy in a verse. In addition, it

poetic line structured in modern poetry. On the other hand, spondee has become more experimental.