

# Iamb

## Definition of Iamb

An iamb is a literary device that can be defined as a foot containing unaccented and short syllables, followed by a long and accented syllable in a single line of a poem (unstressed/stressed syllables). Two of Robert Frost's poems, *Dust of Snow*, and *The Road not Taken* are considered two of the most popular examples of iamb.

## Types of Iambic Meter

Iamb examples may be classified according to the following five types:

**Iambic dimeter** (two iambs per line)

**Iambic trimeter** (three iambs per line)

**Iambic tetrameter** (four iambs per line)

**Iambic [pentameter](#)** (five iambs per line)

**Iambic hexameter** (alexandrine; six iambs per line)

## Examples of Iamb in Literature

Poets have written a number of poems in regular meters, and iambic [meter](#) is widely used in several of them.

---

### Example #1: *Dust of Snow* (By Robert Frost)

---

"The **way** a **crow**  
Shook **down** on **me**  
The **dust** of **snow**  
From a **hemlock tree**

Has **given** my **heart**  
A **change** of **mood**

And **saved** some **part**  
Of a **day** I had **rued**.”

This is an example of iambic dimeter, which has two metrical feet, shown in bold, in each line. The [rhyme](#) scheme of each [stanza](#) is called interlocking rhyme. Also, there are some anapestic feet, but most feet are in iambic dimeter.

---

### Example #2: *The Only News I Know* (By Emily Dickinson)

---

“The **only news** I **know**  
Is **bulletins** all **day**  
From **Immortality**.  
The **only shows** I **see**,  
Tom**orrow** **and** Today,  
Per**chance** Eternity.”

This excerpt is an example of iambic [trimeter](#), where lines have three metrical feet or three iambs. Generally, there are six syllables in the lines with three iambs.

---

### Example #3: *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* (By William Wordsworth)

---

“I **wandered**, **lonely as** a **cloud**  
That **floats** on **high** o’er **dales** and **hills**  
When, **all** at **once**, I **saw** a **crowd**  
A **host** of **golden daffodils**.  
**Beside** the **lake**, **beneath** the **trees** ...  
For **oft**, when **on** my **couch** I **lie**  
In **vacant** **or** in **pensive mood**,  
They **flash** **upon** that **inward eye** ...  
And **dances with** the **daffodils**.”

This is an example of iambic tetrameter, which consists of four iambic feet, or iambic beats, in each line. These metrical feet give a regular [rhythm](#) to

---

#### Example #4: *The Road not Taken* (By Robert Frost)

---

“Two **roads** diverged in a **yellow wood**,  
And **sorry** I **could** not **travel both**  
And **be** one **traveler**, long I stood  
And **looked** down **one** as **far** as I could.  
Then **took** the **other**, as **just** as **fair**,  
And **having** **perhaps** the **better** [claim](#)  
Because it was **grassy** and **wanted** **wear**,  
Though **as** for **that** the **passing** **there**.  
Two **roads** diverged in a **wood**, and I,  
I **took** the **one** less **traveled by**.”

This poem is also a very good example of iambic tetrameter. Each line contains four iambic beats. Since iamb refers to an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, iambic tetrameter comprises of four such feet in a line.

---

#### Example #5: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

---

“But, **soft!** what **light** through **yonder window breaks?**  
It **is** the **east**, and **Juliet is** the **sun**.  
**Arise**, fair **sun**, and **kill** the **envious moon**,  
Who **is** already **sick** and **pale** with **grief ...**”

This excerpt is an example of [iambic pentameter](#), which is the most commonly used meter in poetry and [verse](#). It consists of five iambic feet in a line, as shown in bold here. Shakespeare is very famous for using this type of meter in his plays and poems.

---

#### Example #6: *Macbeth* (By William Shakespeare)

---

“Hence**forth** be **earls**, the **first** that **ever** **Scotland**  
In **such** an **honour** **named**. What’s **more** to **do ...**

Of **this** dead **butcher** **and** his **fiend**-like **queen**,  
Who, **as** 'tis **thought**, by **self** and **violent** **hands** ...  
That **calls** up **on** us, **by** the **grace** of **Grace** ...  
So, **thanks** to **all** at **once** and **to** each **one**,  
Whom **we** in **vite** to **see** us **crown'd** at **Scone**."

Here, we have another perfect example of iambic pentameter. There are five iambic feet in each line. It is giving the poem a sense of rhythm, and it also has a perfect [rhyme scheme](#) due to its regular beats.

### **Function of Iamb**

The basic function of iambic meter is to create a speech that should have a regular pattern. It functions to make a normal speech fit into heightened formality and dramatic form. Since it gives a rhythmic sense, it lends the text high [drama](#) and formality. Hence, the main purpose of iambic meter is to give highly emotional experience, and makes a piece of work beautifully poetic.