

Trimeter

Definition of Trimeter

Trimeter is a poetic device that is defined as a [meter](#) or a line that consists of three iambic feet. It is one of the five main types of iamb. An iamb is a foot that contains an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable.

Let us take these lines to understand:

“Is **like** a pleasant **sleep**,/ Where**in** I **rest** and **heed**/ The **dreams**
that **by** me **sweep**.”

(*The Idle Life I Lead*, by Robert Bridges)

Apart from poetry, one can also find examples of trimeter in the dialogues of comedic and tragic plays.

Types of Iamb Meter

Trimeter is one of the five types of iamb meter, which are:

Iambic dimeter (contains two iambs in each line)

“The **way** a **crow**
Shook **down** on **me**...”

(*Dust of Snow*, by Robert Frost)

Iambic trimeter (contains three iambs in each line)

“I **love** the **jocund dance**,
The **softly breathing song**...”

(*I Love the Jocund Dance*, by William Blake)

Iambic tetrameter (contains four iambs in each line)

“Two **roads** **diverged** in a **yellow** wood,
And **sorry** I could **not** travel both...”

(*The Road Not Taken*, by Robert Frost)

Iambic pentameter (contains five iambs in each line)

“Her **vestal** **livery** is **but** sick **and** green
And **none** but **fools** do **wear** it; **cast** it **off**.”

(*Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare)

Iambic hexameter (contains six iambs in each line)

“He **had** adorned **and** hid **the** **coming** bulk **of** death...”

(*Adonais*, by Percy Bysshe Shelly)

Examples of Trimeter in Literature

Example #1: *The Only News I Know* (By Emily Dickinson)

“The **only** **news** I **know**
Is **bulletins** all **day**
From **Immortality**.
The **only** **shows** I **see**,
To**mor**row **and** To**day**,
Per**chance** E**ternity**.”

This excerpt is a good example of iambic trimeter, in which the lines have three iambs or three metrical feet. Normally, the extract contains six syllables in each line, with the pattern of iambic trimeter. Here, the trimeter pattern is in bold.

Example #2: *When I Was One and Twenty* (By E. E. Cummings)

“When I was **one-and-twenty**
I **heard** a **wise** man **say**,
‘Give **crowns** and **pounds** and **guineas**
But **not** your **heart** away;
Give **pearls** away and **rubies**
But **keep** your **fancy** **free**.”
But I was **one-and-twenty**,
No **use** to **talk** to **me**.”

Among the poems that can be considered as good trimeter examples is E. Housman’s *When I Was One-and-Twenty*. Houseman follows a perfect pattern of trimeter in this poem. The pattern lends regular beats and [rhythm](#) to the poem.

Example #3: *My Papa’s Waltz* (By Theodore Roethke)

“We **romped** until the **pans**
Slid **from** the **kitchen** **shelf**;
My **mother’s** **countenance**
Could **not** unfrown itself.”

This whole excerpt is following the pattern of trimeter. The lines are very short. With iamb trimeter, it has a regular pattern and rhythmical sense.

Example #4: *Verses Supposed to be Written* (By Alexander Selkirkby William Cowper)

“From the **centre** all **round** to the **sea**,
I am **lord** of the **fowl** and the **brute**.
Oh, **solitude**! where are the **charms**...
Better **dwell** in the **midst** of **alarms**...
I am **out** of humanity’s **reach**,
I must **finish** my **journey** **alone**,
Never **hear** the sweet **music** of **speech**...
They are so **unacquainted** with man,
Their **tame**ness is **shocking** to me.”

This poem is a fine example of a combination of iambic trimeter and anapestic meter. At different places trimeter is replaced by anapestic trimeter.

Example #5: *The Divine Image* (By William Blake)

“To **Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,**
All **pray** in **their** distress:
And **to** these **virtues of** delight
Return their **thankfulness.**”

This poem follows an alternating trimeter and iambic tetrameter pattern. The first and third lines represent iambic tetrameter, whereas the second and fourth lines are written in trimeter pattern.

Function of Trimeter

The main function of trimeter is to create regular beats and rhythm in a literary text. However, it is also useful to achieve heightened formality in dramas when used as normal speech. Since trimeter creates a regular rhythm, it lends formality and high [drama](#) to a text. Hence, the basic purpose of using this pattern is to create a beautiful poetic work, and produce a greatly emotional experience. In addition, it helps to make a piece of art more artistic by producing a regular rhythm. Poetry, comedies, and Greek tragedies often use this device.