

# End-Stopped Line

## Definition of End-Stopped Line

An end-stopped line is a poetic device in which a pause comes at the end of a syntactic unit (sentence, clause, or phrase). This pause can be expressed in writing as a punctuation mark, such as a colon, semi-colon, period, or full stop.

According to A. C. Bradley, a line would be an end-stopped line, when the [meter](#) and sense both make a natural pause at its end such as in this line:

“Yet to be known shortens my made intent ...”

(*King Lear*, by William Shakespeare)

## Opposite of Enjambment

[Enjambment](#) is the opposite of end-stopped line. Thus, examples of end-stopped line should never be confused with enjambment examples. When a break or pause comes at the end of a line or sentence, it is called an end-stopped line. However, when a break comes in the middle of a phrase or line and the idea moves on to the next line, it is called “enjambment.” Like in these lines:

“... I am not prone to weeping, as our sex  
Commonly are, the want of which vain dew...”

(*A Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare)

## Examples of End-Stopped Line in Literature

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Example #1: *Bright Star* (By John Keats)

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“Bright Star, would I were as stedfast as thou art —  
Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night,  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite ...”

These lines are very good example of end-stopped line. Each line ends with a punctuation mark, followed by a pause, which gives a sense of a separate unit. These pauses give [rhythm](#) and tempo to the poem.

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#### **Example #2: *An Essay on Criticism* (By Alexander Pope)**

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“A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.  
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.”

These lines all end with grammatical breaks. Also, these end-stopped lines contain complete phrases and make sense. Here, each sentence corresponds to the length of a line, and that pause slows down the pace of poem.

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#### **Example #3: *Sonnet 18* (By William Shakespeare)**

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“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date ...”

This excerpt is a perfect example of end-stopped line. All of these lines carry a pause at the end. There is a pause in both meter and sense; therefore, this device gives a complete poetic effect.

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#### **Example #4: *Alley Cat Love Song* (By Dana Gioia)**

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“Come into the garden, Fred,  
For the neighborhood tabby is gone.  
Come into the garden, Fred.  
I have nothing by my flea collar on,  
And the scent of catnip has gone to my head.  
I’ll wait by the screen door till dawn.  
The fireflies court in the sweetgum tree.  
The nightjar calls from the pine,  
And she seems to say in her rhapsody,  
“Oh, mustard-brown Fred, be mine!”  
The full moon lights my whiskers afire,  
And the fur goes erect on my spine ...”

End-stopped line is used in this entire poem where each line ends with a pause marked by a punctuation sign. This gives rhythmic and poetic effect. Apart from that, it provides greater flexibility to the poet.

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#### **Example #5: *The Burning Babe* (By Robert Southwell)**

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“As I in hoary winter’s night stood shivering in the snow,  
Surprised I was with sudden heat, which made my heart to glow;  
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,  
A pretty babe all burning bright did in the air appear ...”

In the above lines, the ends of the lines correspond to the ending of the clause. Also, there are strong breaks at the closing of each line, which helps making the meaning explicit.

#### **Function of End-Stopped Line**

The purpose of using end-stopped lines is to give poetic and rhythmic effect to the literary text. They tend to slow down the speed and give a clear idea of each line by creating a break at the end. Besides, it provides regularity to the meter of a poetic text. End-stopped lines make poetry more coherent and accessible, and helps the readers ponder on the sentences. Hence, the reader is able to explore deeper meanings and sense in lines where end-stop is given.

