

Anapest

Definition of Anapest

Anapest is a poetic device defined as a metrical foot in a line of a poem that contains three syllables wherein the first two syllables are short and unstressed, followed by a third syllable that is long and stressed. For example: “I must **finish my journey alone.**” Here, the anapestic foot is marked in bold.

Difference Between Anapest and Dactyl

Anapest is known as *antidactylus*, since it is a reverse pattern of [dactyl meter](#). The difference is that anapest consists of three syllables, where the first two are unstressed and the last one is stressed, in an unstressed/unstressed/stressed pattern. However, dactyl is the opposite of this pattern. It is a metrical foot that consists of three syllables wherein the first two syllables are stressed, and the last one is unstressed, such as stressed/stressed/unstressed pattern.

Examples of Anapest in Literature

Example #1: *The Destruction of Sennacherib* (By Lord Byron)

“The Assyrian came **down** like the **wolf** on the **fold**,
And his **cohorts** were **gleaming** in **purple** and **gold**;
And the **sheen** of their **spears** was like **stars** on the **sea**,
When the **blue** wave rolls **nightly** on **deep** Galilee.

Like the **leaves** of the **forest** when **Summer** is **green**,
That host **with** their **banners** at **sunset** were seen:
Like the **leaves** of the **forest** when **Autumn** hath **blown**...

For the **Angel** of **Death** spread his **wings** on the **blast**...
And their **hearts** but once **heaved**, and **forever** **grew** still!”

Byron has written this poem in anapestic tetrameter pattern, which consists of four anapests in each line. In this extract, anapests are marked in bold. The entire poem has the same pattern, where the first two syllables are unstressed, followed by a third stressed syllable.

Example #2: *Verses Supposed to Be Written by Alexander Selkirk* (By William Cowper)

“I am **monarch** of **all** I **survey**,
My right there is none to dispute;
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 **tameness** is **shocking** to me...”

This poem shows examples of anapests and iamb combinations. And at some places, iambs are substituted by anapests. The poem is written in anapestic [trimeter](#) in each line, which means there are three anapests in each line.

Example #3: *’Twas the Night before Christmas* (By Clement Clarke Moore)

” ‘Twas the **night** before **Christmas**, when **all** through the **house**
Not a **creature** was **stirring**, not **even** a **mouse**;
The stock**ings** were hung **by** the chimney with care...
While **visions** of sugar **plums** danced in **their** heads...

As dry **leaves** that **before** the wild **hurricane** **fly**,
when they **meet** with an **obstacle**, mount to the sky...
with the **sleigh** full of **toys**, and St. **Nicholas** too.”

This poem is a perfect example of anapest, which runs throughout the poem. Most of the lines are following anapestic tetrameter. Like in the first line, there are four anapests. However, three anapests are also used in other lines.

Example #4: *The Cloud* (By Percy Bysshe Shelley)

“May have **broken** the **woof** of my **tent**’s thin roof,
The stars **peep** behind **her** and peer;
And I **laugh** to see **them** whirl and **flee**,
Like a **swarm** of golden bees,
When I **widen** the **rent** in my **wind**-built tent...
Are each **paved** with the **moon** and these...
And the **Moon**’s with a **girdle** of pearl;
The volcanoes are **dim**, and the **stars** reel and **swim**,
When the **whirlwinds** my **banner** unfurl...
Sun**beam**-proof, I **hang** like a **roof**,
The **mountains** its **columns** be.
The **triumphal** arch **through** which I **march**...
When the **Powers** of the **air** are chained **to** my chair...
While the **moist** Earth was **laughing** below.”

This poem is also a very good example of anapest. Each long line has three anapests (anapestic trimeter) followed by shorter lines with two anapests (anapestic dimeter). It is lending [rhythm](#) and regular beats to the poem.

Function of Anapest

It helps create artistic lines with a regular meter in a poem. Since anapest ends in a stressed syllable, it makes strong rhyming lines that create music in a poem. It plays a very important role in poetry, and the most common role in [verse](#) is that of a comic meter, which is, the foot used in the [limerick](#) for comical effects.

