**PROSODY**[[1]](#footnote-1)

**PROSODY** (= sound patterning) – the patterns of **rhythm** and **sound** in literature, mainly poetry.

**METRE** and **RHYTHM**

**A. METRE**

from (**Gk. ‘measure’**) arrangement of **stressed** and **unstressed** syllables in verse that appears with **some regularity** in a poem or its section.

(N.B.: in English poetry the stress more about **accent** than **quantity** – as opposed to classical Greek poetry)

**APPLICATION**

* Metre and rhythm **help set the tone** of a poem or its part.

**SCANSION**

**SCANSION** = a **visual representation of stress and non-stress;** a mechanism employed to determine and record the metrical patterns in a poem or a poetic line.

* Different sign systems used.
* Ours will be: \_ = stressed syllable; ᴗ = unstressed syllable; / = the divide between feet.

MAXIMISATION principle – the dominant metrical pattern which dictates the rhythm for the rest of the piece or the surrounding lines.

**BASIC METRICAL PATTERNS**

0. **QUANTITATIVE METRE**

* The **rhythm** **depends** not on the number of stresses, but **on the length of time it takes to utter a line**.
* Only rarely used in English.

1. **ACCENTUAL METRE**

* **Old English poetry** – 2 to 4 stresses with a pause/gap (i.e. **caesura**) in the middle
* **Rap music** – similar pattern (four heavy beats with a pause – rhythmical and semantic – in the middle)

**2. SYLLABIC METRE**

* **Fixed number of syllables** – named using Greek numbers:  
  *penta-, hexa-, heptasyllabic, octos., ennes., decas. hendecas., dodecas. etc.*
* **Rare in English** – in **imported** forms such as **Haiku** (3 lines, usually 5-7-5 syllables)

**3. ACCENTUAL-SYLLABIC METRE** (*sylabotónický*)

* **most widespread** in English
* number of stresses and number of syllables between them is regular

**FOOT** – the **smallest unit of METRE** – each single unit of stress & non-stress.

* **Each** foot should have t**he same no of syllables**
* certain lines can have **one foot incomplete** (i.e. **truncated** line – acephalus/catalectic)
* In scansion, we use slashes (/) to separate the individual feet in a line of poetry
* NB: Feet do not always start at the beginning of a word or semantic unit

**THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF METRICAL FEET:**

1**. Two-syllable feet**

* **IAMB**: ᴗ – (an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one)
* **TROCHEE**: – ᴗ
* **SPONDEE**: – – (often involves repetition – “bark bark”; used for emphasis – “no more”)
* PYRRHIC foot – only unstressed syllables (rare)

2. **Three-syllable feet**

* **ANAPEST**: ᴗ ᴗ –
* **DACTYL**: – ᴗ ᴗ
* AMPHIBRACH: – ᴗ –

In **accentual-syllabic** metre, lines are **named according to the number of stresses** they contain:

monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter, octameter etc.

**Defining the metre**, one combines the **name** of the **feet** (stress pattern) with **number** of **stresses**.

E.g.: Iambic tetrameter, trochaic trimeter, dactylic dimeter etc.

Some combinations of metre and syllabic stress have a special name and are associated with a particular genre or genres:

* **IAMBIC PENTAMETER**: sonnets, blank verse, heroic couplet
* **BALLAD METRE**: also called “**COMMON METRE**” (four-line stanza, alternating lines of **iambic tetramete**r and **iambic trimeter**); as common metre it is also used in hymnody

**B. RHYTHM**

One of the **natural elements** of every language

* helps to make **sense**
* create **emphasis**

In poetry it is used also to create additional meaning

Etym.: rel. to ***rhein***= to **flow** – Middle English – *rime* = measure, meter, rhythm (also rhyme) – Lat. *rhythmus* = **movement in time**

**METRE vs RHYTHM**

* METRE is the **pattern** we have designed **to analyse poetry**
* RHYTHM is the actual **pattern of speech**

Metre and metrical deviations are related to the rhythm of a poem, but **rhythm** is a **more general phenomenon**, related to the variation of **speed**.

Philip Hobsbaum, *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7:

* ‘**Metre** is a **blueprint**; **rhythm** is the **inhabited building**.
* **Metre** is a **skeleton**; rhythm is the functioning **body**.
* Metre is a **map**; rhythm is the **land**.’

Ezra Pound, ‘A Retrospect’ and ‘A Few Don’ts’ in Pavannes and Divagations (1918).

* As regarding **rhythm**: to compose in the sequence of the **musical phrase**, **not** in sequence of a **metronome**.

1. This handout is based in part on Stefanie Lethbridge and Jarmila Mildorf, *Basics of English Studies*, and Mario Klarer, *Introduction to Literary Studies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)