

NOTES ON IAMBIC PENTAMETER

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

pentameter: five feet

foot: one stressed syllable plus one or more unstressed syllables in a repeating pattern

iambic: an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: ˘ ˊ

IAMBIC WORDS

˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
belief arise defend prepare conceive

IAMBIC PENTAMETER LINES

We mourn in black, why mourn we not in blood? *1 Henry VI 1.1.17*

˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
We mourn | in black, | why mourn | we not | in blood?

My child is yet a stranger in the world. *Romeo & Juliet 1.2.8*

˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
My child | is yet | a strang | er in | the world

But soft, methinks I scent the morning air. *Hamlet 1.5.58*

˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ ˘ ˊ
But soft, | methinks | I scent | the morn | ing air

TWO COMMON IAMBIC VARIATIONS

Feminine Ending: The line ends with an extra, unstressed syllable.

Or say 'tis not your seal, not your invention *Twelfth Night* 5.1.327

∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨
Or say | 'tis not | your seal, | not your | invention

In night and on the court and guard of safety *Othello* 2.3.205

∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨
In night | and on | the court | and guard | of safety

Initial Stressed Syllable: The line begins with a single, stressed syllable followed by an *anapestic* foot (two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable: ∨ ∨ /).

Now is the winter of our discontent *Richard III* 1.1.1

/ ∨ ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ /
Now | is the win | ter of | our dis | content

Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word, *The Merchant of Venice* 3.2.99

/ ∨ ∨ / ∨ / ∨ / ∨ /
Veil | ing an In | dian beau | ty; in | a word,