

## SHAKESPEARE'S BLANK VERSE

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**Blank verse** is unrhymed 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: ∪ ∕

### IAMBIC WORDS

∪ ∕      ∪ ∕      ∪ ∕      ∪ ∕      ∪ ∕  
belief      arise      defend      prepare      conceive

### REGULAR BLANK VERSE LINES

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

∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕  
We mourn | in black, | why mourn | we not | in blood?

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

∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕  
My child | is yet | a stran | ger in | the world

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

∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕      ∪    ∕  
But soft, | methinks | I scent | the morn | ing air

## TWO COMMON VARIATIONS IN BLANK VERSE

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### 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 STRESS

The line *starts* 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