

Exercise: Meter practice

Due Wednesday, February 10, by 5 p.m. on Sakai Assignments.

EXERCISE 1

Find the four-line stanza embedded in this prose passage; write it out as a stanza, and mark the beats with B underneath:

Here we are, after fifty years of marriage; hard to believe that she and I have been together that long. She is not without faults, of course: she does not always see the point of little jests her husband makes, and, when the world is out of joint, she makes a hundred small mistakes—mistakes that have oftentimes cost me dearly.

It's helpful to use a monospaced "typewriter" font like Courier in order to line things up more easily when you notate beats.¹

EXERCISE 2

Consider Langston Hughes's poem "Motto":

I play it cool
And dig all jive.
That's the reason
I stay alive.

My motto,
As I live and learn,
is:
Dig and Be Dug
In Return.

Montage of a Dream Deferred (1951) in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Knopf, 1995), 398.

Write it out as a poem with four-beat lines, and then write two sentences on where Hughes's line breaks most disrupt the four-beat pattern and why.

1. Exercises 1–2 are taken from Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53, 57.

EXERCISE 3

Copy out the last two lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 49:

To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
 Since why to love I can allege no cause.

1. Put all the content words (nouns, adjectives, verbs) in **bold**.
2. Look at the remaining function words. Usually these are unstressed, but here some are stressed because of emphasis.
3. With this observation in mind, mark the stressed and unstressed syllables with s and w.
4. Scan the lines according to the Attridge method by noting the beats (B) and offbeats (o), as well as any promotions, demotions, or implied offbeats.
5. Write one sentence about the significance of rhythm and emphasis here.

EXERCISE 4

Pick any two adjacent lines of Barbauld's "Washing-Day" not discussed in class. Copy them out and do your best to scan them according to the Attridge method by marking the stressed and unstressed syllables and then noting the beats and offbeats, as well as any promotions, demotions, or implied offbeats. Write three sentences that reflect on the meter of this poem in relation to its subject matter.

GRADING

Full credit (4.0) will be given for effort, as reflected by a plausible attempt at all the exercises. I will give 0.5 points of extra credit for each correct scansion in exercises 3 and 4.

You may turn in any four exercises late for up to half-credit (2.0), up to the last day of class.