

Exercise: Meter practice

Due Wednesday, February 11, by 10 p.m. on Canvas.

EXERCISE 1

Choose a stanza of “Sir Patrick Spens” not discussed in class, copy it out, and mark the beats with **B**. Remember that the last beat of every other line can be a rest. It’s helpful to use a monospaced “typewriter” font, like Courier, so you can line things up more easily when you notate beats.

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 (no need to mark the meter), and then write two sentences on where Hughes’s line breaks most disrupt the four-beat pattern and why.¹ You can look up “dig” and “jive” in the *OED*.

1. This exercise is taken from Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 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 (**b**), demotions (**o**), double offbeats (**-o-**), or implied offbeats (**[o]**)
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, double offbeats, or implied offbeats. Write three sentences that reflect on the meter of this poem in relation to its subject matter.

GRADING

Each question is graded on the 4.0-point scale. Full credit will be given for scansions that come close, even if they are not perfect, so long as they are accompanied by thoughtful interpretive sentences. The exercise grade is the average of the four grades, rounded to the nearest 0.1.

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

COLLABORATION

You may discuss this exercise with classmates, but you must write it up on your own. If a classmate gives you an answer, credit them for it in your write-up. Presenting someone else's work as your own is plagiarism and a violation of the principles of academic integrity. "AI" tools are not permitted in this class (and perform quite poorly on this kind of exercise).