

Scansion

Definition of Scansion

In literature, scansion means to divide the poetry or a poetic form into feet by pointing out different syllables based on their lengths. Scansion is also known as “scanning,” which is, in fact, a description of rhythms of poetry through break up of its lines or verses into feet, pointing the locations of accented and unaccented syllables, working out on meter, as well as counting the syllables.

Examples of Scansion in Literature

Example #1: *Hope is the Thing With Feathers* (By Emily Dickinson)

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all ...

In this example, strong or stressed syllables are underlined. The stressed and unstressed pattern of the syllables show that the poem has used iambic tetrameter with alternating iambic trimeter, while the rhyme scheme used is ABAB.

Example #2: *Twelfth Night* (by William Shakespeare)

If **music** **be** the **food** of **love**, play **on** ...
That **strain** again! it **had** a **dying** **fall**:

These lines contained unstressed syllables followed by stressed syllables, which are underlined. This pattern repeats five times, which means it is iambic pentameter with unrhyming lines known as blank verse.

Example #3: *Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town* (by E.E Cumming)

anyone lived in a **pretty** **how** town
(with **up** so **floating** **many** **bells** down)

spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Though first two lines rhyme in this example. However, there is no strict meter, as it is a free verse poem. You can see the first, second and fourth lines have used iambic tetrameter, while the third line has used tetrameter.

Example #4: *The Raven* (by Edgar Allan Poe)

**Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“’tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—
Only this, and nothing more.”**

The metrical pattern of this stanza is trochaic octameter in which eight stressed syllables are followed by eight unstressed syllables. Each line uses eight pairs of syllables. Total there are sixteen

syllables. The rhyme scheme of this stanza is ABCBB.

Example #5: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (by Alfred Lord Tennyson)

Cannon to **right** of them,
Cannon to **left** of them,
Cannon in **front** of them
Volley'd and **thunder**'d;

This is a good example of dactylic dimeter with two feet in each line. Dactylic foot uses a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. This stressed syllable appears at the beginning and in the middle of the lines. The rhyme scheme of this poem is irregular and unpredictable, and in this stanza it is AAAB.

Example #6: *The Bounty* (by Derek Walcott)

if I confess it, and I confess it. The trickle of underground springs, the babble of swollen gulches under drenched ferns, loosening the grip of their roots, till their hairy clods...

Walcott has used mixed metrical pattern in this poem. In this example, the first two lines are using trochaic heptameter, while the final line is using dactylic tetrameter. In the first line, you can notice the use of caesura in the middle; it breaks the monotony and creates a dramatic effect.

Example #7: *Paradise Lost* (by John Milton)

From what highth fal'n, so much the stronger provd
He with his Thunder: and till then who knew
The force of those dire Arms? yet not for those
Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage...

This is the famous example of a blank verse, using unrhyming lines with iambic

pentameter (ten syllables in a line and five are stressed).

Function of Scansion

Scansion demonstrates variation and regularity in poetry. It also proves very helpful in determining the natural rhythm of a free and blank verse. Moreover, it makes a poem pleasurable as well as more meaningful by marking the stressed and unstressed syllables. In fact, scansion explains how rhythm contributes to beauty, significance and meaning of a poem.