

Scansion markup:

- ∪ unstressed syllable
- ∩ usually unstressed syllable
- / stressed syllable
- ∩ usually stressed syllable
- | break between feet
- || caesura (pause)
- ^ missing element

Ex. 1: Romeo and Juliet

ROMEO

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That thou her maid art far more fair than she:

Be not her maid, since she is envious;

Her vestal livery is but sick and green

And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.

It is my lady, O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!

She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?

Her eye discourses; I will answer it.

I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:

See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET

Ay me!

three lines?

ROMEO

She speaks:

No, count the syllables.

ONE iambic pentameter line...
to be spoken WITHOUT PAUSES!
(they're sharing a heartbeat!)

regular iambic pentameter line

two syllables slurred as one (elision):
Juliet = jewel - yet
envious = en-vyus
livery = liv-ry

all three syllables...
en-vi-ous
why?

only three feet (six syllables)... two-beat pause... WHY?

could be either trochees OR spondees...

awkward rhythms: Romeo is confused and lacks confidence...

trochee

spondee

the rhythm of the opening of the speech is irregular and disjointed, showing confusion.

too many thoughts?

Ex. 2: Hamlet

HAMLET

To be, or not to be, that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause: there's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life;

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,

And lose the name of action.--Soft you now!

feminine endings; extra unstressed syllables at the end of lines trail off from what could be strong endings... the extra syllables lead us to see that Hamlet has too many thoughts going through his head!

could be either iambs OR spondees...

this line has only 8 syllables...

why?

The actor needs to take a breath... the next sentence covers 13 lines!

again, feminine endings

awkward rhythms; his resolution really is "sicklied o'er"...

he's interrupted (someone walks in on him); it happens quickly... no pause (10 syllables)