

# SHAKESPEARE GLOSSARY

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**'Heightened Language'** – You'll often hear Shakespeare's writing described like this. I'm not convinced it's helpful, it can seem intimidating. I find it more useful to describe it as language that's appropriate for heightened situations. If you are speaking to save your life, your home or the person you love, every word you choose matters. These characters need the images, metaphors and similes that they use – it's the only way they can express themselves appropriately in the situations they find themselves in.

**Prose** – A section of text that doesn't have a set rhythm. This is how we normally speak or write. Prose is often used in Shakespeare's plays by comic characters. It's sometimes described as 'the language of lower status characters', but that's not strictly true – there are examples of military generals, aristocrats, Princes and Kings using prose.

**Verse** – A section of text that has a set rhythm (or meter). The type of verse Shakespeare uses most is **iambic pentameter**. The majority of his plays are written in a mixture of verse and prose. Some characters start using verse when they fall in love, find themselves in a life or death situation or, are simply speaking to someone they trust. Verse is often used in **soliloquies** and is sometimes described as the language of self exploration and truth.

**iambic Pentameter** – A type of verse. The easiest way to understand this term is to break it into pieces.

PENTA – From the Greek word for 'five'

METER – A unit of rhythm in poetry (AKA – a foot)

IAMB – a unit of rhythm made up of an unstressed beat followed by a stressed beat – 'de – DUM'.

So we know that there are **five** (penta) **units of rhythm** (meter) and those units are **iamb**s so a line of iambic pentameter goes like this –

de – DUM de – DUM de – DUM de – DUM de – DUM

It echoes our heartbeat, it's about the length of a natural breath and you'll definitely be using sentences that fit the rhythm everyday without even knowing it! It's really not as hard as you might think.

(It's REALLY NOT as HARD as YOU might THINK. I rest my case...).

**Trochee** – (Pronounced TRO -key) The opposite of an iamb. A type of meter made up of a stressed beat followed by an unstressed beat. 'DUM – de' (like the word 'Shakespeare'). Shakespeare sometimes uses these to shake things up a bit, as well as giving us clues about characters. In Macbeth, for example, the witches almost always use trochees – it immediately makes them sound different from all the other characters in the play.

DOUble DOUble TOIL and TROUble,  
Fire BURN and CAULdron BUBble

SOMETHing WICKed THIS way COMES.

(these lines are technically in trochaic tetrameter if you want to get all fancy about it...)

**A stressed beat / syllable** – Where the emphasis falls.

We use stress and emphasis all the time in natural speech, it allows us pick out the important parts of what we're saying. Most words of more than one syllable have the emphasis built in (it would feel odd to say shakeSPEARE), so lots of the time it will just happen naturally. Not all of the stressed syllables have to have the same amount of emphasis, it's up to you, the actor, to decide what's most important.

**Blank verse / rhyming verse** – Blank verse lines doesn't rhyme with each other. Rhyming verse lines do. Simple!

**Rhyming couplet** – Two successive verse lines that rhyme (and often have the same rhythm). A few of the plays are written almost entirely in rhyming couplets but more often than not, you'll see them at the end of a scene or when a character is finalising an idea or decision.

'Hear it not Duncan, for 'tis a knell/  
That summons thee to heaven or to hell'

(Macbeth)

**Weak ending** – When a line of verse ends on an unstressed beat instead of a stressed beat. Sometimes called a feminine ending. (The fact that those terms are interchangeable is IMO... urgh.)

**Shared line** – When two or more characters share a line of verse.

LADY MACBETH	Did not you speak?	
MACBETH		When?
LADY MACBETH		Now.
MACBETH		As I descended?

**End stopped** – When sentences or thoughts finish at the end of a verse line.

'A glooming peace this morning with it brings.  
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.  
Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things.'  
Romeo & Juliet

**Enjambement** – AKA a 'run on line'. The opposite of 'end stopped' lines. When a sentence or thought continues over into the next verse line.

'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly: if the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here'  
(Macbeth)

**Caesura** – (pronounced suhs-YOUR-a) A natural break or pause in a verse line. This could be indicated by punctuation or a change of subject.

‘This above all: to thine ownself be true’  
(Hamlet)

**Soliloquy** – A monologue delivered to the audience when a character is alone on stage.

**Aside** – When a character speaks directly to the audience, without other characters in the scene overhearing. Usually a short bit of text.

**Sonnet** – A type of poem that has fourteen lines and follows a set rhyming structure. Shakespeare wrote (at least!) 154 on loads of different themes, almost all of his sonnets follow an ‘abab cdcd efef gg’ rhyming pattern. I’ve included a few of my favourites in the Shakespeare resource pack

## LITERARY DEVICES / OTHER WORDS TO LOOK OUT FOR

**Sibilance** – ‘S’ or ‘Sh’ sounds. Some lines are so full of them it sounds like characters are hissing as they speak. Try saying this line out loud:

‘O wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets’  
(Hamlet)

**Onomatopoeia** – When a word sounds like its meaning – Howl, Crack, Cuckoo, Hiss etc...

**Alliteration** – Repetition of the same first letter in a series of words

“Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade, He bravely breach’d his boiling bloody breast.”  
MSND

**Antithesis** – The exact opposite of something.

‘To be, or not to be’  
(Hamlet)

**Similes** – a comparison of two things, saying one is like or similar to the other –

‘That comfort comes too late;  
’Tis like a pardon after execution.’  
(Henry VIII)

**Metaphor** – A comparison that isn’t literally true but highlights similar characteristics.

‘All the world’s a stage’  
(As you like it)

‘My heart is turn’d to stone’  
(Othello)

**Personification** – Attributing human qualities to non human things.

‘The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night’  
(Romeo & Juliet)

You can also look out for the opposite – sometimes humans will be given animal/non human qualities.