**Shakespeare and Iambic Pentameter**

Iambic pentameter is the meter (or rhythm and pattern) that most of Shakespeare’s sonnets and the blank verse of his plays conform to.

* 5 iambs in every line of Shakespearian verse
* Iamb means Unstressed Stressed pattern
* 10 syllables per line

**Example:**

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,   
Profaners of this neighbor-stained steel—   
Will they not hear? What, ho! you men, you beasts!

**Feminine Endings**

To be, or not to be: that is the ques**tion**:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suf**fer**

The slings and arrows of outrageous for**tune**,

Or to take arms against a sea of trou**bles,**

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

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consumma**tion**

**Shared Iambs**

LADY MACBETH I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.

Did not you speak?

MACBETH When?

LADY MACBETH Now?

MACBETH As I descended?

LADY MACBETH Ay.

MACBETH Hark!

Who lies i' the second chamber?

LADY MACBETH Donalbain

**Prose**

Why does Shakespeare shift from verse to prose? He uses prose for a variety of purposes. Often lower class or comic characters speak prose while the more socially or morally elevated characters speak in verse, but this is far from always the case. Some of Hamlet's most important speeches, such as his advice to the players, are in prose. The conversational tone of prose can make a character seem more natural at a particular moment or it can indicate the degeneration of a noble nature as it does with Othello. A swift movement from prose to poetry or the reverse is always an indication that a change is taking place. Shakespeare is remarkably skillful in his flexible use of verse forms and prose.

**KENT:** Sir, in good faith, in sincere verity,  
Under th’allowance of your great aspect,  
Whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire  
On flick’ing Phoebus’ front—

**CORNWALL:** What mean’st by this?

**KENT:** To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so much. I know, sir, I am no flatterer. He that beguiled you in a plain accent was a plain knave, which for my part I will not be, though I should win your displeasure to entreat me to’t.  (2.2.98-105)