Blank Verse

Definition of Blank Verse

Blank [verse](http://literarydevices.net/verse/) is a literary device defined as un-rhyming verse written in iambic [pentameter](http://literarydevices.net/pentameter/). In poetry and [prose](http://literarydevices.net/prose/), it has a consistent meter with 10 syllables in each line (pentameter); where, unstressed syllables are followed by stressed ones and five of which are stressed but do not [rhyme](http://literarydevices.net/rhyme/). It is also known as un-rhymed iambic pentameter.

Features of Blank Verse

1. Blank verse poetry has no fixed number of lines.

2. It has a conventional meter that is used for verse drama and long [narrative](http://literarydevices.net/narrative/) poems.

3. It is often used in descriptive and reflective poems and dramatic monologues — the poems in which a single character delivers his thoughts in the form of a speech.

4. Blank verse can be composed in any kind of meter, such as iamb, trochee, spondee and dactyl.

Types of Blank Verse Poetry

1. Iamb pentameter blank verse (unstressed/stressed syllables)

2. Trochee blank verse (stressed/unstressed syllables)

3. Anapest blank verse (unstressed/unstressed/stressed syllables)

4. Dactyl blank verse (stressed/unstressed/unstressed syllables)

Examples of Blank Verse from Literature

The Earl of Surrey introduced blank verse in English literature in 1540. Milton, Shakespeare, Marlowe, John Donne, John Keats and many other poets and dramatists have used this device in their works. Have a look at some examples of blank verse:

Example #1

**Some**thing there **is** that **does**n’t **love** a **wall**.  
That **sends** the **fro**zen-**ground**-swell **un**der **it**,  
And **spills** the **up**per **boul**ders **in** the **sun**;

(*Mending Walls* by Robert Frost)

This poem has no proper rhyme scheme. However, there is consistent meter in 10 syllables of each line. It is following iambic pentameter pattern with five feet in each line. Only the first line is written in trochee pattern. All the stressed syllables are marked in bold.

Example #2

But,**woe** is **me**, you **are** so **sick** of **late**,  
So **far** from **cheer** and **from** your **for**mer **state**,  
That **I** dis**trust** you. **Yet**, though **I**dis**trust**,  
Dis**com**fort **you**, my **lord**, it **no**thing**must**…..

(*Hamlet* by William Shakespeare)

*Hamlet* is a perfect example of a typical blank verse. It is written in iambic pentameter. Shakespeare employed the deliberate effort to use the syllables in a particular way. Shakespeare brought variation by using caesuras (pause) in the middle of the line, as in the third line. Shakespeare has other literary pieces that are also good sources of blank verse examples.

Example #3

You stars that reign’d at my nativity,  
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,  
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist  
Into entrails of yon labouring clouds,……  
So that my soul may but ascend to Heaven…

(*Dr.Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe)

Marlowe developed this potential in the late 16th century. Marlowe was the first author who exploited the potential of blank verse for writing a powerful speech as given here. The pattern utilized here is iambic pentameter.

Example #4

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crags  
Match’d with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race….,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

(*Ulysses* by Alfred Lord Tennyson)

Just look at the above example in which the first line is written in regular pentameter. However, there is a little variation in the stressed pattern in the following lines that is again revived in the last two lines and does not follow any rhyme scheme.

Example #5

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death.…….”

(*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare)

William Shakespeare wrote verses in iambic pentameter pattern; without rhyme. *Macbeth* is a good example of blank verse. Many speeches in this play are written in the form of blank verse.

Function of Blank Verse

Originated from Latin and Greek sources, blank verse is widely employed as a vehicle in English dramatic poetry and prose to create specific grandeur. Blank verse has similarity to normal speech but it is written in a variety of patterns, which bring interruptions such as pauses. Therefore, the intention is to produce a formal rhythmical pattern that creates musical effects. Hence, it tends to capture the attention of the readers and the listeners, which is its primary objective.