***‘Hamlet’ Writing Style***

**Verse and Prose**

*Hamlet*, like Shakespeare's other plays, is written in a combination of verse (poetry) and prose (how we talk every day).

**Verse**

Reading *Hamlet* often feels like reading a lengthy poem and that's because Shakespeare's characters often speak in verse.

What kind of verse do they speak? Well, the nobles typically speak in unrhymed "iambic pentameter" (also called "blank verse"). Don't let the fancy names intimidate you – it's pretty simple once you get the hang of it. Let's start with a definition of "Iambic Pentameter":

An "iamb" is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. "Penta" means "five," and "meter" refers to a regular rhythmic pattern. So "iambic pentameter" is a kind of *rhythmic pattern* that consist of *five iambs* per line. It's the most common rhythm in English poetry and sounds like five heartbeats: ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM, ba-DUM.

Let's try it out on these two lines from *Hamlet:*

o THAT this TOO too SOLid FLESH would MELT
thaw AND reSOLVE itSELF inTO a DEW.

Every second syllable is accented, so this is classic iambic pentameter. Since these lines have no rhyme scheme ("melt" and "dew" don't rhyme), we call it "Unrhymed Iambic Pentameter," which is also known as "Blank Verse."

Blank verse, as we've said, is typically reserved for the nobility and other important characters since it's kind of a formal way to speak. Think, for example, of Claudius's opening speech in Act I, scene ii, where he addresses the court. Hamlet's soliloquies are *usually* in verse as well but he also speaks a lot of prose. (This has a lot to do with all the role-playing he does, which you can read about in "Art and Culture.")

**Prose**

Not everyone in the play speaks in blank verse, which we've established is the elegant, high-class way of talking. Characters lower on the social scale – like the gravediggers (which is about as low as we get in *Hamlet*) don't talk in a special poetic rhythm; they just talk. Hamlet himself, however, sometimes speaks in prose, and even some of his most poetic or most important lines don't fall into that iambic pentameter beat. Take, for instance, the following line: "How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (2.2.250). That's high on the Poetry Richter scale yet it's written in prose. It's also worth noting that when Ophelia goes mad, she communicates through prose and songs.

**Hamlet Analysis**

Literary Devices in Hamlet

[**Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/symbolism-imagery.html)

Hamlet's constant brooding about death and humanity comes to a head (grotesque pun intended) in the infamous graveyard scene, where Hamlet holds up the unearthed skull of Yorick, a court jester Ham...

[**Setting**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/setting.html)

The story of Hamlet is set in the late middle ages (14th and 15th centuries or, 1300 to 1499) in and around (mostly) the royal palace in Elsinore, a city in Denmark.Sixteenth Century VibeDespite th...

[**Genre**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/genre.html)

Hamlet fits into the generic category of "Tragedy." More specifically, Hamlet is a classic "Revenge Tragedy," a popular genre in England during the late 16th and early 17th century that includes pl...

[**Tone**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/tone.html)

When we talk about the play's "tone," we're talking about mood, atmosphere, and/or the play's attitude toward its subject matter. For the most part, Hamlet happens to be a very dark and introspecti...

[**Writing Style**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/writing-style.html)

Hamlet, like Shakespeare's other plays, is written in a combination of verse (poetry) and prose (how we talk every day). (Note: The play Richard II is the one exception to this rule – it's th...

[**What's Up With the Title?**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/title.html)

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark…The title is pretty straightforward. The play is a tragedy about a guy named Hamlet, who is a prince in Denmark.

[**What's Up With the Ending?**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/ending.html)

Hamlet is a revenge tragedy and all of Shakespeare's tragedies end in death. (You can read more about his by going to "Genre.") At the same time, the play's conclusion is deeply concerned with cont...

[**Plot Analysis**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/plot-analysis.html)

Mom just married Dad's brother. Also, war may be on the way.Only a month after the old King of Denmark dies, his queen remarries – to his own brother. Hamlet is not happy to have his uncle as...

[**Booker's Seven Basic Plots Analysis: None**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/booker-plot.html)

Christopher Booker's analysis of the Seven Basic Plots cites Hamlet as a specific counterexample to his theory of basic plots. According to Booker, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark doesn't...

[**Trivia**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/trivia.html)

So you know how most people think of Hamlet as a skinny blonde Scandinavian? When Gertrude describes Hamlet as "fat and scant of breath" (5.2.269) during his duel with Laertes, some scholars interp...

[**Steaminess Rating**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/sex-rating.html)

There's a whole lot of sex in this play but, it's not particularly sexy, especially when Hamlet imagines his mother's bed as a "nasty sty." Here's how Hamlet explains to his mom why she should stop...

[**Allusions**](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/allusions.html)

Virgil, the AeneidNero (III.i.394)Sir James Hales (V.i.16-20)

**Symbols**

Yorrick’s Skull - This symbolizes the way that death ultimately brings everyone to the same level so that kings rot the same way as beggars.

Poison - At the end of the play, this kills nearly all of the characters symbolizing that you can bring yourself down with your own bad intentions.

The play - Hamlet orders the actors to reenact the death of his father to see the reaction that Claduius give him.  This symbolizes the guilt that Claudius feels.

**Style**

 Shakespeare is often considered one of the world’s greatest playwrights, and has a style to back it up.  He writes with poetic diction using eloquent words and phrases.  He uses irony and drama to create and sustain suspense through the play.  Shakespeare uses much figurative language and imagery.

**Dominant Philosophy**

 Bad things can happen to good people with one fatal flaw.  This is a theme often used in this sort of tragedy.  Hamlet was a good person in the beginning of the play and tried to avenge his fathers death like a good son.  His sense of revenge however got the best of him resulting his own death and the death of his loved ones.