Rhyme Scheme

How to figure out the rhyme scheme of a poem: Rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhyming words in a poem. The rhyme scheme of a poem is indicated by using different letters of the alphabet for each new rhyme. For example:

*Mary had a little lamb*  A  (every line ending with a word that rhymes with “lamb” gets an “A”)
*Her fleece was white as snow*  B  (does not rhyme with “lamb”)
*And everywhere that Mary went*  C  (does not rhyme with “lamb” or “snow”)
*The lamb was sure to go*  B  (because “go” rhymes with “snow,” this gets a B)

*It followed her to school one day,*  D  (everything that rhymes with “day” gets a D)
*Which was against the rules.*  E  (everything that rhymes with “rules” gets a E)
*It made the children laugh and play,*  D
*To see a lamb at school*  E
*And so the teacher turned it out*  F  (everything that rhymes with “out” gets an F)
*But still it lingered near*  G  (everything that rhymes with “near” gets a G)
*And waited patiently about,*  F
*Till Mary did appear*  G

"Why does the lamb love Mary so?"  B  (rhymes with “snow” from line 2)
*The eager children cry*  H
"Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know."
*The teacher did reply*  H

Continue assigning letters to each line. If the last word in the line rhymes with any other word that ends a previous line, assign it the same letter. Note that words do NOT have to be spelled the same to rhyme (for example “enough” rhymes with “stuff,” “eight” rhymes with “rate” rhymes with “bait” rhymes with “straight.”

When you have finished assigning letters to the rhyme of each line, you can state the rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme for “Mary Had a Little Lamb” is:

**ABCB DEDE FGFG BHBH**

Practice: Determine the rhyme scheme for this poem:

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.
I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.
I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,
But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height
One luminary clock against the sky
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.
Directions: Read this worksheet. See if you can clap out the rhythm of the Poem Sympathy. You will share on Wed.

Meter

The meter of a poem is its rhythmical pattern. This pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line. How do we determine meter? Follow the steps below.

1. Count the number of syllables in each line. You can do this by clapping on each syllable like you did in elementary school. Number each syllable in the line below.

   The outlook wasn’t brilliant for the Mudville Nine that day

2. Find the first two-syllable word in the line and figure out which syllable has the stress on it. In the above line, the word “outlook” has the stress on the word OUT, so you would mark that syllable with the under it. The syllable LOOK is unstressed, which is indicated by the symbol. Based on this, you should be able to notice a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables throughout the line.

3. Divide the stressed and unstressed syllables into groups using a parenthesis between each set of syllables. Each of these groups is called a foot.

4. Figure out what type of feet the line contains. Below are the most common types of feet in English poetry:

   iamb: a foot with one unstressed and one stressed syllable, as in the word (\、“be/fore” This foot is IAMBIC

   trochee: a foot with a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, as in the word (\、“glo/ry” This foot is TROCHAIC

Depending on the type of foot that is most common in the poem, the lines of poetry are described as iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, or spondaic. However, for our purposes, the only types of meter you need to identify are IAMBIC or TROCHAIC.
I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals —
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting —
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings —
I know why he sings!
Scansion Homework

Scan each line below to determine the meter. Remember, first you count the syllables, then you figure out which syllables are stressed (check the two syllable words first).

1. He thrusts his fists against the post

2. Workers earn it.

3. Double, double, toil and trouble

4. There they are, my fifty men and women

5. When I consider how my life was spent

6. Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

7. Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good.

8. Dark behind it rose the forest,

9. The dinosaurs are not all dead

10. All the saints adore thee