

Prospero: *There's no harm done.*
Miranda: *O, woe the day!*
Prospero: *No hárm.*

Should sound like one complete verse line:

There's no harm done. O, woe the day! No hárm.

- Sometimes the meter is just odd. If you're stumped, you can always ask for a second opinion.
- Remember: There are very few pauses in a verse play. If you're going to pause for emphasis onstage, you'd better EARN IT.

Paraphrase Your Lines

- Put all of your lines into your own words. Not only do you need to understand what it means, but how your character would say it. For example, when Juliet says:

Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

she means

Romeo, Romeo, why are you Romeo Montague, the son of my father's enemy?

...but a modern 14-year old wouldn't say the line that way. Today, Juliet might say:

Romeo! Did you HAVE to be a Montague? Just my luck!

...or something like that. What's most important is that you create a line in your own words.

- Be as SPECIFIC as possible. Try to include every nuance the verse gives you. Identifying rhetorical images, which will be covered later, will help with this.

Find Your Operative Words

- Underline the most important words in every line.
- Verbs (action words) and nouns (person/place/thing) are likely to be operative words
- Adjectives (describes a noun) and adverbs (describes a verb) are sometimes operative, but do not usually overshadow the nouns and verbs they modify. If you want to get fancy, use a solid line for the most important operative and a dotted line for modifiers – still important, but slightly less so.
- Prepositions (anywhere a cat can go), pronouns (I/she/we) and negatives (no, not) are hardly ever operative – they can fall in a stressed position in a line, but should not be highlighted beyond a natural stress.
- In Shakespeare, the most important information usually falls at the END of each line, so words at the END of the line carry more weight.
- When in doubt, ask yourself: "What's the NEW information in this line?" The answer to this question will lead you to your operatives.

“Line Out” Prose Text

Scansion is a very useful tool to help us understand how the ideas in each line are structured. Once we understand how the thoughts are put together, they are much easier to remember and we are on our way to being off book. But what if your text is in prose?

Prose cannot be scanned because it is not written according to any specific metrical rules. However, this does not mean that we cannot analyze prose in order to see how the ideas are structured. Instead of scanning prose, we line it out. **Lining out text** involves arranging it on the page as if it were poetry, with every new thought starting at the far left margin.

Consider the following example from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (for best results, read it aloud):

SPEED: Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learned, like Sir Proteus, to wreathe your arms, like a malcontent; to relish a love-song, like a robin-redbreast; to sigh, like a schoolboy that had lost his ABC. You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock; when you walked, to walk like one of the lions: and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress that when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master.

This could be lined out several different ways, but here is one possibility:

Marry, by these special marks:

*first, you have learned, like Sir Proteus,
to wreathe your arms, like a malcontent;
to relish a love-song, like a robin-redbreast;
to sigh, like a schoolboy that had lost his ABC.
You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock;
when you walked, to walk like one of the lions:
and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress that when I look on you,
I can hardly think you my master.*

Or we could break it up further if we wanted:

Marry, by these special marks:

*first, you have learned, like Sir Proteus,
to wreathe your arms,
like a malcontent;
to relish a love-song,
like a robin-redbreast;
to sigh,
like a schoolboy that had lost his ABC.
You were wont,
when you laughed,
to crow like a cock;
when you walked,
to walk like one of the lions:
and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress
that when I look on you,
I can hardly think you my master.*

The amount that you break your text up and *where* you choose to indent depends entirely on your understanding of the thought. This technique helps you see rhetorical patterns (like the nice set of three things above: wreathe, relish, sigh) and groupings of ideas. If you want to get really fancy you can mark or color-code rhetorical devices such as triplets, antithesis, alliteration, etc.

Marry, by these special marks:

*first, you have learned, (like Sir Proteus),
to wreathe your arms,¹
like a malcontent;
to relish a love-song,²
like a robin-redbreast;
to sigh,³
like a schoolboy that had lost his ABC.*

*You were wont,
when you laughed,
to crow like a cock;
when you walked,
to walk like one of the lions:
and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress
that when I look on you,
I can hardly think you my master.*

Once a text has been lined out, read it aloud again and see how much easier it is to navigate.

ALSO NOTE: This technique can be applied to ANY prose, classical or contemporary. You'll discover a lot about your text if you do this exercise.

Identify Rhetorical Devices

Rhetoric is the use of language to persuade – in other words, any time you choose your words carefully in order to make another person feel something or change his or her mind, you are using rhetoric. In Shakespeare's day, rhetoric was part of the regular grammar school curriculum, so everyone was familiar with a whole array of rhetorical tools. When an actor is aware that these tools are in play, he or she can gain insight into the character's motives and goals. Here is a brief list of rhetorical devices commonly found in Shakespeare:

1. Antithesis: A balanced juxtaposition of two or more words or phrases (not always opposites, but always balanced one against the other):

Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.

2. Repetition of words or phrases. When repetition occurs, it is useful for the actor to ask WHY the character is repeating him- or herself:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,

3. Lists, especially Triplets (groups of three):

*Why should a dog¹, a horse², a rat³ have life,
And thou no breath at all?*

4. Parentheticals: inseting a phrase, image or idea within a continuing line:

*Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,
wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.*

Mark parentheticals in your script; this will remind you to set them apart vocally:

*Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,
(O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!) won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.*

5. Simile: a comparison of one thing to another using “like” or “as”:

a. ...she is spherical, like a globe.

6. Metaphor: a substitution of one image or idea for another (often symbolic):

*Ay, marry, now my soul hath elbowroom.
It would not out at windows, nor at doors.*

7. Rhyme:

*Double, double toil and **trouble**,
Fire burn and cauldron **bubble**.*

8. Alliteration (repetition of initial consonant sounds):

*Thus **conscience** does make **cowards** of us all;*

9. Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds):

*All **hail**, **great** master! **Grave** sir, **hail**!*

10. Change in mode of address: if a speaker switches from “you” to “thou” or from “thou” to “you,” SOMETHING is happening, often relative to the status of the characters or the formality of the situation:

Throughout I.ii of *The Tempest*, Prospero addresses Miranda in the “thou,” but Miranda addresses Prospero in the “you.”

PROS: *Dost thou hear?*

MIR: *Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.*

11. Change in text from poetry to prose or from prose to poetry: these shifts indicate that SOMETHING is going on, often relative to the status of the characters involved, or the formality/informality of the situation.

When working with scene partners, note especially where you “pick up” something from someone else’s line, or when you need to “serve up” a word so that someone else can play off of it.

This handout was created by Esther Williamson, a graduate of the [Academy for Classical Acting](#), and refined a bit by Toni Rae Brotons.