

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 1: Beginning Scansion



We have now gone through the whole of the Aeneid set text for IGCSE. You should keep working at memorizing the translation using the flash cards you have made or those I have put up on quizlet: <https://quizlet.com/gb/617807965/aeneid-cambridge-international-igcse-2023-25-flash-cards/>.

This term we will deepen our understanding of the set text by going through it again concentrating on Virgil's literary style and devices and on scansion. Scansion reveals the rhythm of the poem. In Latin all syllables are either long or short according to the length of the vowel in the syllable. It is the pattern of long and short syllables that give the poetry life and movement when it is read aloud. You will have noticed this mark $\bar{\quad}$ above a vowel indicating that it is a long vowel. The mark is called a macron. Can you remember the difference between *femina* and *feminā*?¹ Short syllables can also be marked using the sign \sim above the vowel. These marks are not universally included in Latin texts and will not appear in your exam paper. However, you need to learn how to use them.

Virgil wrote all his poetry in hexameters. Although there is no rhyme in this poetry it is very musical because of the way the hexameters work. Every line has six “feet” or groups of syllables and each foot can be either a **dactyl** $\bar{\quad}\sim\sim$ or a **spondee** $\bar{\quad}\bar{\quad}$. In addition the very last syllable of the line can be short if the poet wishes to give the final foot the pattern $\bar{\quad}\sim$ which is called a **trochee**. In addition in the middle of the third foot (or sometimes the fourth) there is a break between two words called a **caesura**. Vertical lines can be used to divide the line into feet and a double vertical line shows the caesura.

The available patterns can be expressed like this:



Here we can see the six feet with the caesura in the third foot and the choice of syllable lengths available for each foot indicated. Notice that the fifth foot **must be a dactyl**. Notice too that there are only ever **two syllables in the last foot**.

¹ *Femina* is nominative or vocative singular. *Feminā* is ablative singular.

With the aid of these patterns the poet creates a variety of rhythms often to reflect the meaning of the text. For instance a “galloping” pattern might be:

— ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — | | ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡

A smooth calm effect might be produced by a pattern such as:

— — | — — | — | | — | — — | — ◡ ◡ | — —

You can imagine the effect if you say the patterns out loud using “doom” for long and “dee” for short syllables:

“doom dee dee, doom dee dee, doom dee dee, doom dee dee, doom dee dee, doom dee.”

“doom doom, doom doom, doom doom, doom doom doom, dee dee, doom doom.”

Here is the first line of your set text with the feet and quantities (longs and shorts) marked:

sērvāt | [um] ēx ūn | dīs Strōphă | dūm mē | lītōră | prīmum

Don't worry for the moment about the letters in square brackets just **miss them out altogether** as you say the line. Practice saying this line over and over, bringing out the longs and shorts as you do so. Now look back at lesson Year 2 Term 2 Week 1 Day 2. Can you say the first line with the correct rhythm without looking at the scanned text above? Practice until you can.