

Aeneid Book VI Analysis 2: More Scansion



The next step in understanding scansion is learning how to determine whether a syllable is long or short. There are six rules. You must learn these but don't worry; once you have practised using them you will gain a feeling for how it all works. I suggest you make yourself a chart or reference card to keep handy as you work on this topic.

Here are the six rules:

1. A word ending in a vowel or *-m* which is followed by a word beginning with a vowel (or *h*, which does not count as a consonant) has its last syllable cut off (elided) so that it does not count at all in scansion.
2. All diphthongs (combinations of vowels that are pronounced together, like the *ae* in *feminae*, are long. NB:- the *u* that always follows *q* does not count as part of a diphthong, so, for instance, *-que* “and” is short.)
3. A vowel before two consonants, either in the same word or with one at the end of one word and another at the beginning of the next word, forms a long syllable. BUT if *l* or *r* is the second consonant (in the same word) the syllable can sometimes be either short or long e.g. *patrem*. Double *l*, double *r*, and *x* always make the preceding syllable long and *h* is ignored. The *digraphs* (two-letter combinations) *ch*, *ph*, *th*, *qu* and sometimes *gu* and *su* count as single consonants.
4. A vowel before another vowel in the same word which is not a diphthong but pronounced separately is usually short, e.g. *rei*. This rule applies even if the next vowel has been elided.
5. The final *-a* of a first declension noun in the ablative singular is long, as you already know. Most other final *a*'s are short.
6. Final *-i* and *-o* are usually long.

The first step when scanning a line is to apply rule one and find any elided vowels and put the syllables affected in brackets. Can you find one in this line?

pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas¹

Answer on the next page.

¹ This line from the text in the syllabus set for 2022 but you can still learn how to do this using it.

pandere res alta ter(ra) et caligine mersas

Notice the word ending in *a* followed by a word beginning with *e*. This causes the syllable containing the *a* to be elided or cut out.

Next look at the end of the line and mark off the last five syllables:

pandere res alta ter(ra) et ca | ligine mersas

These will always have the pattern: $\bar{ } \sim \sim | \bar{ } (\sim)$ although the final syllable may be long or short.

The pattern sounds like the words, “**mu**-sic of **Ho**-mer” in English. The final syllable is usually long.

The next task is to count up the remaining syllables.

If there are twelve there will be four dactyls ($\bar{ } \sim \sim$)

If there are eleven there will be three dactyls and a spondee ($\bar{ } \bar{ }$)

If there are ten there will be two dactyls and two spondees

If there are nine there will be three spondees and a dactyl

If there are eight there will be four spondees.

How many syllables are there in: *pandere res alta ter(ra) et ca...?*

Answer on the next page.

There are nine syllables so there will be three spondees and a dactyl. All we have to do now is find out where they fall in the remainder of the line.

So... mark as either long or short all the syllables which you can using the six rules. Obviously when you have done this any single syllable between two long syllables will itself be long. There will be some syllables you cannot determine in this way although reading the line aloud may help.

*pandere res **alta** ter(ra) et ca | liginē mersas*

In the line above there are no diphthongs. There are vowels preceding *nd*, *lt* and *tc*. These will be long. Also preceding *rr* which might be long. No ablative *a*'s. No final *i*'s or *o*'s. Can you work it out? Answer on the next page.

You can practice on any lines of your current set Virgil text and check your answer by pasting the text into this on line tool: <http://www.pedecerto.eu/public/scansioni/scansioni>. Check that it is set to hexameters in the drop down box and then press “do” and hey presto!

Another presentation of how to do scansion can be found here:

https://www.quia.com/files/quia/users/mcsueberry/Latin3b/Scansion_Rules

Sometimes it helps to read more than one explanation of a topic! This explanation goes on to include other meters besides hexameters. This is not necessary for IGCSE.

pāndĕrĕ | rĕs āl | tā tĕr(ra) | ĕt cā | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas

I worked in the following way:

Vowels followed by two consonants are long so:

pāndere res āl ta tĕr(ra) ĕt ca | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas

ca is between two longs so must be long:

pāndere res āl ta tĕr(ra) | ĕt cā | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas

ta is between two longs so must be long:

pāndere res āl | tā tĕr(ra) | ĕt cā | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas

āl is the second half of a foot so the first half must be long:

pāndere rĕs āl | tā tĕr(ra) | ĕt cā | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas

Therefore the dactyl must be the first foot:

pāndĕrĕ | rĕs āl | tā tĕr(ra) | ĕt cā | līgĭnĕ | mĕrsas