

# Setting Words to Rhythm



The first thing you should do when setting words to a rhythm is mark the accented words or syllables in the poetry you are given. Do this by drawing an upright line **just before** each important syllable, which can sometime be in the middle of a word, for example:

|Jack be|nimble,|Jack be|quick  
|Jack jump|over the|candle|stick

If we treat these upright lines as bar lines, we can see which are the strong beats of each 'bar', as well as how many syllables are in each.

The number of syllables in each bar (between each upright line) will determine which rhythmic pattern you use:

	1 syllable per bar e.g. 'quick'	2 syllables per bar e.g. 'Jack be'	3 syllables per bar e.g. 'o-ver the'
$\frac{2}{4}$			
$\frac{3}{4}$			
$\frac{3}{8}$			

So if we were to write a rhythm in  $\frac{3}{4}$  to the verse above, it would look like this:



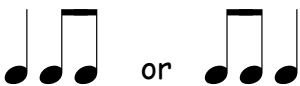



Jack be nim - ble Jack be quick, Jack jump o - ver the can - dle - stick.

Notice how the syllables are spaced exactly under the notes, and words with more than one syllable are 'hyphenated' (which means there is a dash (-) separating the syllables).

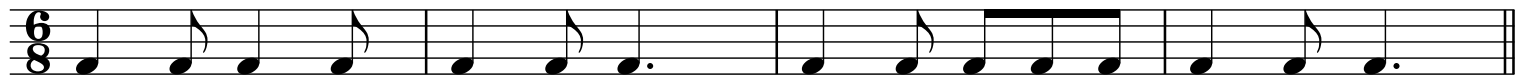
The table above deals with  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and  $\frac{3}{8}$  as there is **one** strong beat per bar in these time signatures. Now let's explore other time signatures...

In the time signatures of  $\frac{4}{4}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$ , there is one strong AND one medium accent in each bar. The upright lines show us where the strong and medium accents are, which means each upright line represents **half** a bar, not a whole bar.

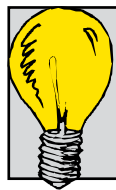
When inventing rhythms in  $\frac{4}{4}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$ , use the following rhythmic patterns:

	1 syllable per <b>half</b> bar e.g. 'stick'	2 syllables per <b>half</b> bar e.g. 'can-dle'	3 syllables per <b>half</b> bar e.g. 'o-ver the'
$\frac{4}{4}$ or <b>C</b>			
$\frac{6}{8}$			

Here is 'Jack be nimble' again, this time in  $\frac{6}{8}$ : (Notice how this time there are only 4 bars instead of 8!)



Jack be nim - ble Jack be quick, Jack jump o - ver the can - dle - stick.



HERE'S A THOUGHT... You can set words to rhythm in any time signature at all. There are 16 different time signatures on the Grade 4 syllabus!

Now you have a go. Set the verse 'Jack be nimble' to a rhythm, using the time signature of  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{8}$  or **C**. Write the words correctly underneath the notes, separating each syllable with a hyphen. If your rhythm goes onto a second line, don't write the time signature again - it should only appear once! (Also, try to keep four bars to a line.)

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

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# The Anacrusis in Poetry



Sometimes the first word or syllable of a line is not accented. All you have to do is remember that the upright lines show us the accented words in each bar.

The | wind was | strong, the | rain was | harsh,

The | storm was the | worst of the | year so | far.


In the first line, 'The' will be an anacrusis.

In the second line, 'The' is not accented and actually belongs in the bar before. It will go in the same bar as 'harsh'.

It's best to use a crotchet anacrusis in  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{4}{4}$  and  $\text{C}$ , and a quaver anacrusis in  $\frac{3}{8}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$ . But here's the most important thing to remember...

## YOU MUST ADJUST YOUR FINAL BAR!


See if you can finish these rhythms to the verse above. (Refer to the rhythmic patterns on pages 48 and 49.) Remember to deduct the value of the anacrusis from the last bar!


  
 The    wind    was    .....

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 The    wind    was    .....

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 **REMEMBER:** Write the time signature on the first line only, even if your rhythm takes up two lines!

# More About Rhythm Writing



Sometimes the second line of poetry is a little shorter, and you may end up with only 7 accents, like this:

I | used to like | Winter but | now I like | Spring  
 The | flowers are | ev'ry | where.



In time signatures like  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{8}$ , it is **not enough** to have only 7 bars - this is not regarded as a 'balanced' rhythm. You must add an 8th bar and tie the last note over, e.g.



Look! The 8th bar  
 allows for the anacrusis

Try writing this verse again in  $\frac{2}{4}$ :

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

.....

## Top Tips for Ripper Rhythms

- 🎩 Mark the accents first and treat the upright lines as bar lines
- 🎩 In  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{8}$ , each accent represents one bar
- 🎩 In  $\frac{4}{4}$  and  $\frac{6}{8}$ , each accent represents HALF a bar
- 🎩 If you have only 7 bars, remember to add an 8th bar and tie the last note over
- 🎩 If there is an anacrusis, make sure you adjust the last bar

Write balanced rhythms to the following couplets. Write the words clearly under the notes, and hyphenate words with more than one syllable. Choose a different time signature for each couplet!

Tomorrow I'm going to wash the car  
My Dad will be very pleased!

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

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Traffic lights traffic lights red and green,  
Then there's amber in between.

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

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They all say it is easy to swim  
But no-one can do it as fast as Jim.



Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

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Go to [www.blitzbooks.com](http://www.blitzbooks.com) for more practice in rhythm writing!

# Adding Variety

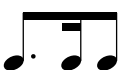




Check out this setting of words to rhythm:

6/8

All of the students who sit the exam must make up a rhythm as best as they can.

It is perfectly correct, but it's BORING! There are some great ways to vary .

You could have  or  or even  ! The trick is to know which bits to change. Make sure the variation suits the words - clap them and say them out loud. Don't change ALL of the rhythms - the idea is to have variety! Now re-write the above rhythm and words, making it much more interesting:

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....





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Here is an example in  $\frac{4}{4}$  :

4/4

The weather was so nice we went to the beach, Even though it was a winter's day!

You could vary this by changing some of the  patterns to  and some of the  patterns to  . Rewrite the rhythm and words here and make it really interesting!

Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_

Words .....

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# Stretching Syllables (Or: Adding Even More Interest)



Sometimes a rhythm can be a little boring, but in a way that is hard to fix, e.g.

**6**  
**8**

For for - ty days and for - ty nights, The rain came down with all its might.

The best way to vary this rhythm is to **add** some notes! But to do this correctly you must remember this rule:

If two or more notes share one syllable, the notes **MUST** have a slur!

(It would be better not to add the notes than to forget the slur!)

e.g. can become or or or even for - ty

Pick some interesting syllables in the rhythm above and add some quavers - with slurs!



**DID YOU KNOW...** a slur connecting two or more notes that share a syllable is called a 'melisma'. There are lots of melismas to be found vocal music - have a look!

Make these rhythms more interesting with some added notes and melismas:

**4**  
**4**

I fell out of a tree one day, I hurt my leg I'm sad to say

**6**  
**8**

I real - ly wish, real - ly wish, real - ly wish that I could fish.



Go to [www.blitzbooks.com](http://www.blitzbooks.com) and download the 'Creative Couplets' page. Compose some really INTERESTING rhythms, using different time signatures and using extra notes and slurs!