Understanding Meter in Poetry

**Rhythm** in poetry is created by the “stresses” or “accents” in the words of the poem. For example, in words that have more than one syllable, one of the syllables is usually pronounced more strongly than the others. For example, in the word “basketball”, the first syllable is pronounced more strongly: “BAS-ket-ball”. Words that contain only one syllable might normally be stressed, or they might not. Usually little words like “and” and “I” and “the” are not stressed. But single-syllable verbs like “like” or “play” usually are stressed. The best way to figure out which words or syllables in a word are stressed is to read the line aloud. In the line below, the stressed syllables have been capitalized, and the unstressed syllables are lowercase.

I LIKE to PLAY BASketball

The rhythm that is created by combining stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry is called **meter**. A **foot** is the group of stressed and un-stressed syllables that make up the meter of a poem. Now look at the sample line again. This time, vertical lines have been placed in the line between each foot. There are three feet in this line of poetry.

I LIKE | to PLAY | BASketball

Poems can have any number of feet in their lines, but usually each line has the same number of feet.

**EXERCISE – IDENTIFYING FEET**

Draw lines between the feet in the lines of poetry, like in the example above, and then write on the blank how many feet are in each line.

1. Silly Sally ate a pumpkin.  
2. Jonathon rode on a bicycle.  
3. My mother ate a piece of pie.  
4. Ask and ye shall receive.  
5. I like cotton, I like candy.  
6. First is the worst, last is the best.