

# SAMPLE SCANSION – VERGIL, *ECLOGUE 1*



All meters have a basic form, consisting of a sequence of long and short syllables, to which a poet must adhere. In certain extremely rare instances, a competent poet may break from the scheme for particular effect, but in general assume that the poem follows the prescribed form.

**Let's take a look at the first line in Eclogue 1:** (*Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*)

All of the *Eclogues* are composed in **dactylic hexameter**, the meter best known for its use in epic poetry. Every line of hexameter poetry follows a basic metrical scheme, which consists of five feet (*metra*) of dactyls (long short short) and a spondee (long long).

In schematic representations of meter, — denotes a long syllable (*longum*); U denotes a short syllable (*breve*); an

X denotes a *syllable anceps*, a syllable that can be either long or short;

— U U — U U — U U — U U — U U — —

If we were to articulate the above pattern, we would say:

long short short long short short long short short long short short long short short long long

Think of a long syllable as a quarter note and a short as an eighth note (exactly 1/2 of a long). Because you can say two short syllables in the same amount of time as one long, a long can substitute for the two shorts in every dactyl:

— U U — U U — U U — U U — U U — —

**Now let's examine the first line of Eclogue 1:** *Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi*

The first step in scanning is to be able to differentiate the syllables of a line: simply put, a syllable must contain at least one vowel. It begins with a consonant or vowel and stops at its opposite, if it begins with a consonant, it ends with a vowel and vice versa; the only exception is if the syllable is followed by two or more consonants (even if the second consonant is in the next word), in which case, the first consonant(s) will be included in the preceding syllable and the last consonant will start the following syllable. This is called a “closed syllable.”

**Eclogue 1.1 yields the following syllables: Ti-ty-re-tu-pa-tu-lae-re-cu-bans-sub-teg-mi-ne-fa-gi**

1. **Ti:** according to the metrical scheme, must be long: since it is not long by position it must be **long by nature** (you can confirm this by checking a dictionary).
2. **ty:** can be either long or short: it is not long by position or nature; therefore it must be **short**.
3. **re:** must be **short** to complete the dactyl.
4. **tu:** must be **long**; it is **long by nature**.
5. **pa:** can be either long or short: it is not long by position or nature; therefore it must be **short**.
6. **tu:** must be **short** to complete the dactyl.
7. **re:** can be either long or short: it is not long by position or nature; therefore it must be **short**.
8. **cu:** must be **short** to complete the dactyl.
9. **bans:** must be **long**: Since the vowel is followed by 2 consonants (*nss*), it is **long by position**.
10. **sub:** can be either long or short; Since the vowel is followed by 2 consonants (*bt*), it is **long by position**.
11. **teg:** must be **long**: Since the vowel is followed by 2 consonants (*gm*), it is **long by position**.
12. **mi:** can be either long or short: it is not long by position or nature; therefore it must be **short**.
13. **ne:** must be **short** to complete the dactyl.
14. **fa:** must be **long**; it is **long by nature**.
15. **gi:** must be **long**; it is **long by nature**.

**On a scanning worksheet, we would represent this information thus:**

Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi