

HAMLET

QUICK LANGUAGE NOTES



PROSE AND VERSE

Prose is written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure.

Verse is language arranged with a metrical rhythm.

In study of Shakespeare, we tend to use the term “verse” interchangeably with the word “poetry,” because in Shakespeare’s time all poetry had some kind of set meter.

PROSE AND VERSE

Blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter. It is the most common form of language in Shakespeare's plays.

Free verse is poetry that does not rhyme or have a regular meter. You will never, ever, EVER see free verse in Shakespeare.

Rhymed verse is poetry that has a set meter and rhyme.

PROSE AND VERSE

Blank verse is orderly. It's Shakespeare's default mode, but when things start to break down, characters may shift to prose.

In Shakespeare, prose is associated with comedy, lower-class characters, and insanity—or emotional states that are completely overwhelming.

PROSE AND VERSE

Look at your copy of the play. Where do you see prose? Where do you see verse?



PROSE AND VERSE

In Shakespeare, rhymed verse usually appears only in songs or other similar material (like the play-within-the-play, which is in very formal rhyming couplets). (Scenes also often end with rhyming couplets—kind of like announcing “ok, this scene’s over.”)

Interestingly, while Hamlet’s “antic disposition” is often indicated by prose, Ophelia’s madness finds expression in rhymed songs.

USE OF 2ND PERSON

Please read the handout on use of 2nd person in the Elizabethan era.



PUNS, JOKES, INSULTS, INNUENDO

Hamlet loves ‘em!

**“Nunnery,” “fishmonger,” “common,” “kin/kind,”
all the awful things he says in the mousetrap scene
and the “supper” scene...**

ALLUSION

***Hamlet* contains a lot of classical and historical allusions.**

Characters often use these to comment on events or make comparisons between other characters and historical or mythological figures.

Your book contains brief explanations of most of these, but full comprehension may require more research.