Words and Feet

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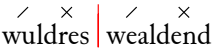
- **Lines**: Two verses to a line
- **Clauses**: Displacement stress relies on clause structure

How Does a Verse Divide Into Feet?

(1) wuldres wealdend

Beowulf 17a (type A1)

How Does a Verse Divide Into Feet?

(1) 

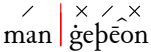
Beowulf 17a (type A1)

How Does a Verse Divide Into Feet?

(2) man ġeþēon

Beowulf 25b (type A1)

How Does a Verse Divide Into Feet?

(2) 

Beowulf 25b (type A1)

Russom Rules

(3) (a) Every foot boundary must coincide with a word boundary.*

(b) In verses with three or more stressed words, the stressed words are assigned to feet in accordance with their syntactic constituency.*

(Russom, *Old English Meter & Linguistic Theory* 15–16)

* Compounds count as two words for the purposes of these rules.

Syntactic Hierarchy

(3) ond Grendles hond

Beowulf 927b (type B)

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(3) ond | Grendles hond

Beowulf 927b (type B)

Russom's Four Principles 1/2

- **Principle I**: *Foot patterns* correspond to native Old English word patterns.
- **Principle II**: The *verse* consists of two feet.
- **Principle III**: *Alliterative patterns* correspond to Old English stress patterns.
- **Principle IV**: The *line* consists of two adjacent verses with an acceptable alliterative pattern.

(Russom, *Old English Meter & Linguistic Theory* 2)

Russom's Four Principles 2/2

"Principles I–IV amount to a claim that many intricacies of Old English meter reduce to intricacies of language. I assume that the native speaker of Old English would have possessed, as part of an internalized grammar, one set of rules specifying the word patterns attested in the language and another set determining the position of stress in a word with a given pattern. I also assume that a native speaker introduced to poetry in the normal way could identify metrical rules as analogues of linguistic rules already learned. Once the native speaker grasped the relation between language and general principles of verse construction, many corollaries that must be made explicit for a speaker of Modern English would have followed as a matter of course."
(Russom, *Old English Meter & Linguistic Theory* 2)

Bliss on Phrasing

"When we come to consider phrasing we find that, since each breath-group contains only one stress, the normal verse with two stresses must consist of two breath-groups divided by a caesura. There are three possible positions for the caesura, depending on whether (1) the first breath-group is shorter than the second; or (2) the two breath-groups are of equal length; or (3) the first breath-group is longer than the second. The position of the caesura is denoted by prefixing the figure 1, 2 or 3 to the letter denoting the rhythmical type to which a verse belongs."
(Bliss, *Introduction to Meter* 12)

"[A]n unstressed word always belongs to the same breath-group as the *following* stress." (Bliss, *Introduction to Meter* 30)

Bliss's Verse Line, Illustrated

```
On-Verse                                    || Off-Verse
Breath-Group 1 | Breath-Group 2             || Breath-Group 1 | Breath-Group 2
```

Notes on Terminology

- Bliss uses *breath-group* for "foot"
- He acknowledges a *caesura* (|) within the verse *and* between the on- and off-verses
- He acknowledges a *pseudo-caesura* (:) between elements of a compound
- Though he does not spell it out, he too believes that word boundaries determine foot boundaries

Bliss's Type A (Basic Patterns)

1A ´ × | ´ ×
grim | ond grǣdig — *Beowulf* 121a

2A ´ × | ´ ×
wordum | wrixlan — *Beowulf* 366a, 874a

(There are further subtypes based on secondary stress etc., but there is no type 3A.)

Bliss's Type B (Basic Patterns)

2B × / | × / nē lēof | nē lāð — *Beowulf* 511a

3B × / × | / on sīdne | sǣ — *Beowulf* 507a

(There is no type 1B.)

Bliss's Type C (Basic Patterns)

2C be sǣm | twēonum

Beowulf 1297b

(There is no type 1C or 3C.)

Bliss's Type D (Basic Patterns)

1D 

Beowulf 1653a

(There is no type 2D or 3D.)

Bliss's Type E (Basic Patterns)

2E lissa | ġelong — *Beowulf* 2150a

3E sārigne | sang — *Beowulf* 2447a

(There is no type 1E.)

Bliss's Basic Patterns in Overview

1A grim | ond grǣdiġ — *Beowulf* 121a

2A wordum | wrixlan — *Beowulf* 366a, 874a

2B nē lēof | nē lāð — *Beowulf* 511a

3B on sīdne | sǣ — *Beowulf* 507a

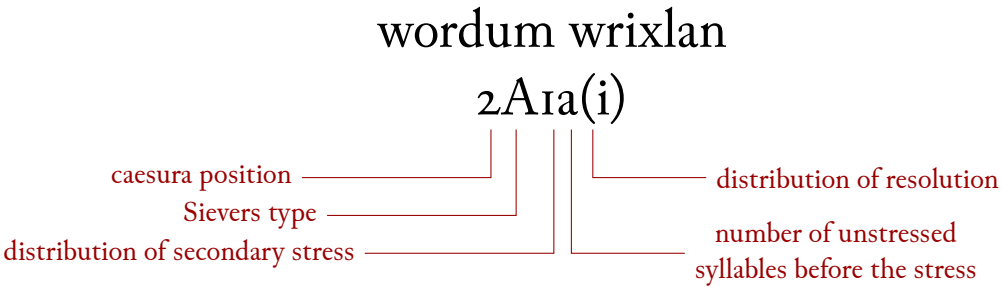
2C be sǣm | twēonum — *Beowulf* 858b

1D lēod | Scyldinga — *Beowulf* 1653a

2E lissa | ġelong — *Beowulf* 2150a

3E sārigne | sang — *Beowulf* 2447a

Bliss Notation in Diagram



Bliss Notation in Diagram

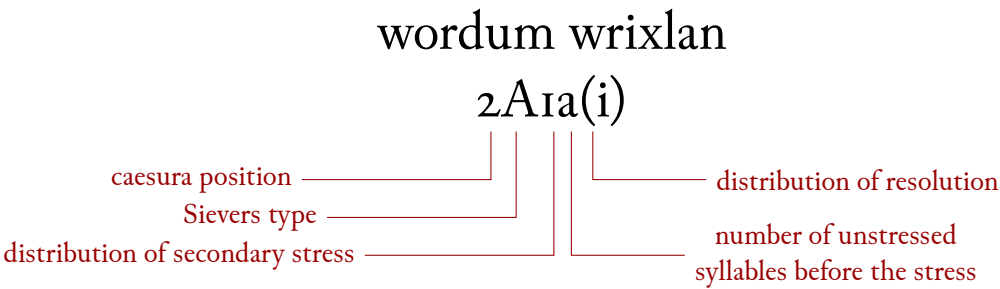


Table 1: Bliss notation explained

caesura position	1 = before the midpoint; 2 = mid-verse; 3 = after the midpoint	§91
secondary stress	1 = none; 2 = in second foot; 3; in first foot; 4 = both	§93
unstressed syllables	a = 1, b = 2, etc.	§93
resolution	i = none; ii = in second foot; iii = in first foot; iv = both	

Some Further Aspects of Bliss Notation

- Light verses have a small letter and lack a foot division: xxxx/\ = a2d
- Type B never has secondary stress; 2B1 and 2B2 distinguish between x/x/ and x/xx/ instead. §94
- Type-D verses with tertiary stress are grouped under 1D1 and 1D*1; Sievers D1 becomes Bliss 1D2, while Sievers D2 becomes Bliss 1D3. §93
- An asterisk denotes expansion in types A, B, E as well as D. §93
- Hypermetric verses are modelled as one regular verse overlaid onto the last syllables of another regular verse, e.g. a1e(2A1a). §§99–102

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