

Here's a **sentence fluency** lesson that focuses on the rhythm words can make:

Iambic Summary Sentences

At the end of any lesson, students should be able to write down the **big ideas** they have learned during the lesson. Using writing at a lesson's end provides a quick, formative assessment check of where students' learning currently stands. In five minutes, all students can write a quick summary paragraph, if they are given some time early in the year to practice creating paragraphs. (See "Hamburger Paragraphs" on page 57.)

Later in the year, when you inevitably grow tired of glancing through formulaic, hamburger-like summary paragraphs, you can up-the-stakes and ask your students to write "iambic summary sentences" instead. This is less writing on their parts, but it involves much more thinking and pre-planning—and it promotes rhythm in sentences.

Robert Frost and Shakespeare made iambic rhythm seem simple:

U / U / U / U / U / U /
Some say the world will end in fire. Some say in ice.

U / U / U / U / U /
But soft what light through yonder window breaks?

An iamb is made of two syllables: an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. *The dog* is an iamb in the form of a noun phrase. *Perhaps* is an iambic adverb. *Is cold* is a verb phrase that—you guessed it—takes the shape of an iamb.

U / U / U /
Perhaps the dog is cold. ← a simple iambic sentence.

Here's everything you need to know to create your own iambic sentences:

Which one-syllable words get accented? Single-syllable action verbs (run, laugh, smile, etc.), single-syllable nouns (cake, cat, plant, etc.), single-syllable adjectives (sweet, hot, cold, etc.), and single-syllable proper nouns (*Doc*, *Sue*, *Bill*, *Kohl's*, etc.). When humans speak, we naturally put a little more stress into the pronunciation of these words. Try it. Say something aloud. You'll do it without thinking.

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Which one-syllable words don't get accented? Single-syllable articles and article-like pronouns (*a, an, the, this, each, what, etc.*), single-syllable pronouns (*he, she, it, we, etc.*), single-syllable prepositions (*in, out, through, etc.*), single-syllable conjunctions (*while, when, and, then, but, etc.*), single-syllable helping verbs (*can, might, will, etc.*), and single-syllable action-less verbs (*is, am, are, was, etc.*). Most words we teach are kids to not over-use end up as unaccented one-syllable words.

What about two-syllable words? All two-syllable words have a dominant syllable that gets stressed when spoken aloud. You can say two-syllable words aloud to hear it, and when arguments ensue, you can always check the dictionary. Most two-syllable words are stressed on the first syllable (*pencil, pickle, parrot, etc.*); many foreign words and prefixed words often have the stress on the second syllable (*ballet, review, compare, etc.*).

Three-syllable words: all three-syllable words have one dominant syllable, which can be checked in the dictionary. With some words, it's the first syllable (*cantaloupe, cereal, etc.*) with most words it's the middle syllable (*important, commitment, etc.*), and the occasional few are stressed at the end (*pirouette, tambourine, etc.*)

The task: Ask your students to gather stressed nouns, and two- and three-syllable words as they read, take notes, learn, etc, on a note-taker. There's a blank one on the next page. Below, is an abbreviated example, using Harry Potter words. With a note-taker like this and some time to think, students can create sentences with genuine rhythm.

Stressed one-syllable words	Two-syllable words	Three-syllable words
/: wand, Ron, Snape, spell, owl, rat, train, etc.	/ U: magic, Wizard, Hedwig, Hogwarts, castle, alley, dragon, potion, Draco U /: express, detain, remark, inspire, among	U / U: Hermione, Diagon, detention / U U: animal, Dumbledore, Voldemort U U /: interrupt, understand, apprehend

Some Iambic (and rhythmic) Harry Potter Sentences:

Your magic wand is broken, Ron.

In Hogwarts Castle, potion class is taught by Snape.

Hermione cast her spell on Draco Malfoy.

Mad-eye Moody made me think that Harry Potter found the answer.

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Iambic Summary Sentences Worksheet

Unstressed one-syllable words	Stressed one-syllable words	Important two-syllable words	Important three-syllable words
articles: a, an, the article-like words: this, these, which, that, what, each, such... prepositions: at, by, on, in, near, to, from, down, off, through, out, past, up, of, for, with... pronouns: I, me, you, he, she, him, her, we, us, they, them, who, whose... conjunctions: and, then, but, or, so, when, while, as, etc. helping verbs: can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, have, has, had... non-action verbs: is, am, are, was, were, be, been...	Nouns: fire, ice... Verbs: throw, dash... Adjectives: hot, cold...	/ U words: pencil, pickle...	U / U words: important, reflection...
		U / words: express, inflate...	/ U U words: interview, constable...
		U U / words: understand, pirouette...	

My Iambic Summary Sentence(s):

After recording words from the text or notes in the spaces above, compose summary sentences that go back and forth from unstressed to stressed syllables. Read your sentences aloud to check their rhythm.

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