

## Elegy & Elegiac Couplets

Latin elegy is a meter of poetry written exclusively in elegiac couplets. Satires, epigrams, erotic poetry, and many other genres of poetry are often (though not always!) written in elegiac couplets.

An elegiac couplet consists of 2 lines:

1. Dactylic Hexameter
2. A pair of 2½ Dactyls (Or spondees!)<sup>1</sup>

It is scanned by this pattern:

Line 1:      — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — X |

Line 2:              — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — || — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | X |

**NB:** Each dactyl can be substituted with a spondee!

*Example:*

— ◡ ◡ | — — | — ◡ | — ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | — X  
sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediōcra, sunt mala plūra  
— ◡ ◡ | — ◡ | — || — ◡ ◡ | — ◡ ◡ | X  
quae legis hīc: aliter nōn fit, Avīte, liber.

Elegiac couplets have a rising tension that breaks in the second line of each couplet. Much of Martial and Catullus' epigrammatic poetry is written in elegiac couplets!

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<sup>1</sup> Remember that a dactyl is heavy-light-light (— ◡ ◡) and a spondee is heavy-heavy (— —). Since a heavy syllable takes twice as long to say as a light syllable, Romans can typically substitute a heavy for 2 lights. (◡ + ◡ = —)