Finding the Stresses in a Poem

The rhythm of the words in a poem is like the beat in music. This rhythm makes the poem sound musical and interesting to the reader or listener.

Rhythm in poetry is made up of stressed and unstressed syllables or words. A stressed syllable or word in a poem is marked with a / over it. An unstressed syllable or word is marked with a ^ over it.

The stress of single syllable words depends on the words in the line or sentence.

/ ^ / ^ / ^ /

Example 1: Jack and Jill went up the hill.

For multi-syllable words, we mark each syllable with a sign.

/ ^ / ^ / ^ /

Example: Twinkle, twinkle little star.

Write the stressed and unstressed symbols above the beginning of the poem below.

The Walrus and the Carpenter  
from *Through the Looking Glass*  
by Lewis Carroll

The sun was shining on the sea,         After the day was done—
Shining with all his might:             “It’s very rude of him,” she said,
He did his very best to make            “To come and spoil the fun!”
The billows smooth and bright—           The sea was wet as wet could be,
And this was odd, because it was        The sands were dry as dry.
The middle of the night.                You could not see a cloud, because
The moon was shining sulkily,           No cloud was in the sky:
Because she thought the sun             No birds were flying over head—
Had got no business to be there         There were no birds to fly.
Finding the Stresses in a Poem

The rhythm of the words in a poem is like the beat in music. This rhythm makes the poem sound musical and interesting to the reader or listener.

Rhythm in poetry is made up of stressed and unstressed syllables or words. A stressed syllable or word in a poem is marked with a / over it. An unstressed syllable or word is marked with a ^ over it.

The stress of single syllable words depends on the words in the line or sentence.

/  ^ /  ^ /  ^ /

Example 1: Jack and Jill went up the hill.

For multi-syllable words, we mark each syllable with a sign.

/  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /

Example: Twinkle, twinkle little star.

Write the stressed and unstressed symbols above the beginning of the poem below.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
from Through the Looking Glass
by Lewis Carroll

^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The sun was shining on the sea,
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
Shining with all his might:
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
He did his very best to make
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The billows smooth and bright—
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
And this was odd, because it was
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The middle of the night.
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The moon was shining sulkily,
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
Because she thought the sun
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
Had got no business to be there

^  /  ^  /  ^  /
After the day was done—
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
“It’s very rude of him,” she said,
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
“To come and spoil the fun!”
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The sea was wet as wet could be,
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
The sands were dry as dry.
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
You could not see a cloud, because
^  /  ^  /  ^  /
No cloud was in the sky:
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
No birds were flying over head—
^  /  ^  /  ^  /  ^  /
There were no birds to fly.