How To Scan Roman Poetry: Dactylic Hexameter
the Brust method

This only works when you're sure the poem was written correctly!

Terminology

poetry: writing that typically has a specific rhythm or pattern, and deals with powerful subjects
dactylic hexameter: a type of Latin and Greek poetry that follows a 6-foot pattern (dactyls /spondee)
foot: a division of a line of poetry
syllable: a division of a word that can be broken down either after a vowel or in the middle of a double consonant
(*silentem*, si-len-tem)
long vowel: a "heavy" vowel
short vowel: a "light" vowel
dactyl: a foot consisting of long, short, short (3 syllables) - ᴗ ᴗ
spondee: a foot consisting of long, long (2 syllables) - -
elision: a word that ends in a vowel next to a word that starts with a vowel combines into one megaword
vowel: a, e, i, o, u, y
consonant: all the other letters
diphthong: a combination of two vowels into *one* mega vowel

I.   **Start backwards**. Mark the last foot a spondee, and the second last foot a dactyl.

II.   **Move to the font.** The first vowel of the line will always be long, since both a dactyl and spondee start with a long vowel.

III. **Look for elisions.** The first vowel disappears in these circumstances, and only the second one counts and is pronounced.
   A. a word that ends in a vowel next to a word that begins with a vowel elides (amor**e e**t)
   B. a word that ends in a vowel and an M next to a word that begins with a vowel elides (moeni**am e**t)
   C. A word that ends in a vowel next to a word that begins with an H and a vowel elides (eg**o ho**c feci)

IV.   **Look for diphthongs.** Sometimes two vowels combine into one sound, and only count as one vowel. These are always long. They are: ae, au, ei, eu, oe, ui.

V.   **Look for double consonants.** If a vowel comes before two consonants, that vowel must be marked long. (mi**ss**io) X and Z count as two consonants (because x represents ks and z represents dz).

VI.   **Look for QU and GU.** The U in these circumstances does not count as a vowel.

VII. **Look for I.** An I at the beginning of a word followed by a vowel counts as a consonant (like J).

VIII. **Look for specific endings.** Certain endings for nouns and verbs are always long (e.g. ablative singular in a/us/um words). If you know these or can reference them, mark them off.

IX.   **Fill in the rest.** If there's no specific reason above for a vowel to be long, it's probably short. However, you'll see that as you're filling the line in that in some places you only have room for long vowels (making more spondees).

Rules for Writing in Dactylic Hexameter
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I.   Write a line in normal Latin word order of ~15 syllables.

II.   Mark the line as if scanning. Use the website Wiktionary to help you, as well as your endings charts with the long marks.

III. Rework the line until it fits into dactylic hexameter. This may include doing the following things:
   A. substituting words or phrases that fit better
   B. rearranging the word order
   C. moving words between different lines
   D. re-writing chunks of the poem

IV.   Check the line again.

V.   Check the another time.

VI.   Worst case scenario: your line scans perfectly except for one vowel and you have to re-write a part you think is really good. This is sometimes how the creative process goes. Life can be hard.

VII. Remember that the line must start with a long vowel. Make sure the word you put there has a justifiably long vowel in the beginning!

VIII. Accept the fact that some words are *impossible to use* in dactylic hexameter. E.g., a word like *manumissio* (freeing of a slave) is impossible to fit into dactylic hexameter, since the U is naturally long (check Wiktionary), and the O at the end is naturally long; the first I is long because of the SS, leaving a long-short-long in the middle.