



MTO 15.5 Examples: Adams, Flow in Rap Music

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)

<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.09.15.5/mto.09.15.5.adams.php>

Example 1a. Kurtis Blow, “Basketball” (1984), 0:25–0:43

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1	Bas-		ket-	ball		is		my	fav-		'rite	sport				l
2	like	the	way	they	drib-	ble	up	and	down		the	court			just	like
3		I'm		the	king	on		the	mic-		ro-	phone			so	is
4	Doc-		tor	J		and		Mo-		ses		Ma-	lone			l
5	like		siam		dunks		('n)	take		it	to	the	hoop			my
6	fav-		'rite	play		is		the	al-		ley	oop		l	like	the
7	pick	and		roll		l	like	the	give	and		go		'cause	it's	
8	Bas-		ket-	ball		(a)	Mis-	ter	Kur-	tis		Blow				

Example 1b. Wu-Tang Clan, “Wu-Gambinos” (1995), third verse (the RZA) 2:56–3:35

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1													Sol-	id	gold	
2	crown		is	shin-		in'	we're	blind-		din'	like	some	dia-	monds		l'm re-
3	clin-	in'	in	the	sky	on	a	cloud		with	sil-	ver	lin-	ings	dou-	ble
4	breast-	ed			Bul-	let-	proof	vest-	ed		well	pro-	tec-	ted		
5	The	heart	the	rib-	cage		the	chest		and	so-	lar	ple-	xus	cast-	in'
6	stones				crack-	in'	two	hun-	dred-	and	six	bones			and	watch
7	yo'	ass		get	blown		to a sea	of	fire		and	brim-		stone		
8		How	dare	you	'proach	it	with	dim		poems		the	ov-	er-	fiend	
9	like		no-	ah	bean		green		souls		with	a	sol-	dier	mean	
10		the	grand	ex-	qui-	site	im-	pe-		ri-	al	wiz-	ard	oh	is	the R[i]-
11	za	rec-	tor	come	to	pay	your	ass	a	vi-	sit		Lo-	cal	bi-	o
12	chem-	i-	cal		un-	i-	ver-	sal	gi-	ant	the	black		ge-	ne-	ral Lick-
13	shots	to	Da-	vy		Crock-	ett		on	the	bi-	cen-	tenn-	i-	al	Hap-
14		mil-	len-	i-	um	two	thou-	sand	mic-	ro-	chips		two	shots		of pen-
15	i-	cil-	lin	burst	out		pure	a-	dre-	na-	lin	son	it's	time	for	bou-
16		It's	a	mile-	age	you're		re-	sem-	blin'	nig-	gaz	who	like	fol-	low-
17	Trapped	in-	side	your	pro-	duct	like	a	ge-	nie	in-	side	the	bot-	tle	and...

Example 1c. Lyric chart for “Basketball,” showing accented and rhyming syllables

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1	BAS-		ket-	ball		IS		my	FAV-		'rite	sport				l
2	LIKE	the	way	they	drib-	ble	up	and	DOWN		the	court			just	like
3		l'm		the	KING	on		the	MIC-		ro-	phone			so	is
4	DOC-		tor	J		and			MO-		ses	Ma-	lone			l
5	LIKE		slam		DUNKS		('n)	TAKE		it	to	the	hoop			my
6	FAV-		'rite	play		is		the	AL-		ley	oop		l	like	the
7	PICK	and		ROLL		l	like	the	GIVE	and		GO		'cause	it's	
8	BAS-		ket-	ball		(a)	Mis-	ter	KUR-	tis		Blow				

Example 1d. Lyric chart for “Wu-Gambinos,” third verse, showing accented and rhyming syllables

	1			2			3			4			x	y	z				
	x	y	z	x	y	z	x	y	z	x	y	z	x	y	z				
1										Sol-	id	gold							
2	CROWN		is	SHIN-		in'	we're	BLIND-		din'	like	some	DIA-	monds		I'm re-			
3	CLI-	nin'	in	the	SKY	on	a	cloud		with	sil-	ver	LIN-	ings	dou-	ble			
4	BREAST-	ed			Bul-	let-	proof	VEST-	ed		well	pro-	TEC-	ted					
5	The	heart	the	rib-	CAGE		the	chest		and	so-	lar	PLE-	xus	cast-	in'			
6	STONES				crack-	in'	two	hun-	dred-	and	six		BONES			and watch			
7	yo'	ass		get	blown		to	a sea	of	FIRE		and	brim-			STONE			
8		How	dare	you	'proach	it	with		DIM		poems			the	ov-	er fiend			
9	like		no-	ah	bean		green		souls		with	a	sol-	dier	mean				
10		the	grand	ex-	qui-	site	im-	pe-		ri-	al	wiz-	ard	oh	is	it the	R[i]-		
11	za	rec-	tor	come	to	pay	your	ass	a	vi-	sit		Lo-	cal	bi-	o			
12	chem-	i-	cal		un-	i-	ver-	sal	gi-	ant	the	black		ge-	ne-	ral	Lick-	in'	
13	shots	to	Da-	vy		CROCK	ett		on	the	bi-	cen-	tenn-	i-	al	Hap-	py		
14		mil-	len-	i-	um	two	thou-		sand	mic-	ro-	chips		two	shots		of	pen-	
15	i-	ci-	lin	burst	out		pure	a-	dre-	na-	lin	son	it's	time	for	bou-		tin'	
16		It's	a	mile-	age	you're		re-	sem-		blin'	nig-	gaz	who	like	fol-		low-	in'
17	Trapped	in-	side	your	pro-	duct	like	a	ge-	nie	in-	side	the	bot-	tle	and...			

Example 2a. Blackalicious, “Blazing Arrow,” verse 1 (0:20–0:51)

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
																A-
1	ma-	zin'	phase	your	days	your	ha-	zy	ways	my	bla-	zing	ar-	row		The
2	rays	that	range	from	A-	sia	way	to	Ri-	o	de	Jan-	eir-	o		A
3	craze	you	crave?	but	look	to-	day's	the	day	that	in	a	ma-	jor	way	I'll
4	make	you	say	oh	look	he	saved	the	day	and	al-	so	paved	the	way	(hoo-
5	ray!)	Rock-	in	my	crew	like	ra-	zor	blades	to-	day	and	days	a-	way	from
6	now	o-	kay,	o-	kay	I'm	like	a	la-	ser	ray	keep-	in'	the	stage	a-
7	blaze	and	dan-	g'rous	ways	drop-	pin'	the	phrase	that	pays	all	things	just	ain't	a
8	phase	but	age-	less	ways	a	cage-	y	great	dis-	plays	yo	hey,	this	ain't	a
9	game	so	stays	a-	wake	'cause	if	you	came	to	play	you'll	all	be-	have	in-
10	sane	af-	ter	we	change	the	game	it	won't	re-	main	the	same	(I'll	fade	a-
11	way!)	So	make	your	disc	and	play	this	tape	in	your	Ca-	ma-	ro		A-
12	ma-	zin'	phase	your	days	your	ha-	zy	ways	my	bla-	zing	ar-	row		

Example 2b. “Blazing Arrow,” verse 1, with rhymed syllables highlighted

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
																A-
1	ma-	zin'	phase	your	days	your	ha-	zy	ways	my	bla-	zing	ar-	row		The
2	rays	that	range	from	A-	sia	way	to	Ri-	o	de	Jan-	eir-	o		A
3	craze	you	crave?	but	work	to-	day's	the	day	that	in	a	ma-	jor	way	I'll
4	make	you	say	oh	look	he	saved	the	day	and	al-	so	paved	the	way	(hoo-
5	ray!)	Rock-	in	my	crew	like	ra-	zor	blades	to-	day	and	days	a-	way	from
6	now	o-	kay,	o-	kay	I'm	like	a	la-	ser	ray	keep-	in'	the	stage	a-
7	blaze	and	dan-	g'rous	ways	drop-	pin'	the	phrase	that	pays	all	things	just	ain't	a
8	phase	but	age-	less	ways	a	cage-	y	great	dis-	plays	yo	hey,	this	ain't	a
9	game	so	stays	a-	wake	'cause	if	you	came	to	play	you'll	all	be-	have	in-
10	sane	af-	ter	we	change	the	game	it	won't	re-	main	the	same	(I'll	fade	a-
11	way!)	So	make	your	disc	and	play	this	tape	in	your	Ca-	ma-	ro		A-
12	ma-	zin'	phase	your	days	your	ha-	zy	ways	my	bla-	zing	ar-	row		

Example 3. “Blazing Arrow,” with rhymed syllables represented as percussion

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Blazing Arrow," which uses rhymed syllables as percussion. The score is organized into two systems, each containing four staves. The first system includes staves for Percussion, Electric Guitar, Electric Bass, and Drum Set. The second system includes staves for Perc., E. Gir., E.B., and D. S. The Percussion and Drum Set parts feature a complex, rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The Electric Guitar part consists of a series of chords, while the Electric Bass part provides a simple, steady bass line. The Perc. and D. S. parts mirror the rhythmic complexity of the Percussion and Drum Set parts, respectively. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a common time signature.

Example 4a. Metrical placement of multi-syllabic rhymes in measures 3–5 of “Blazing Arrow”

Example 4a shows three staves of musical notation for measures 3–5 of “Blazing Arrow”. The notation is in a common time signature (C) and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The first two staves appear to be a vocal line, while the third staff is likely a piano accompaniment. The music consists of three measures, with the first measure containing a multi-syllabic rhyme.

Example 4b. Metrical placement of multi-syllabic rhymes in measures 6–10 of “Blazing Arrow”

Example 4b shows five staves of musical notation for measures 6–10 of “Blazing Arrow”. The notation is in a common time signature (C) and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes. The first two staves appear to be a vocal line, while the remaining three staves are likely a piano accompaniment. The music consists of five measures, with the first measure containing a multi-syllabic rhyme.

Example 6. “All Caps,” verse 1, voice part, with phrase markings showing syntactic units

So nas-ty that it's prob'-ly some-what of a tra-ves-ty ha - ving me dai-ly to-tal peo-ple you can call me your ma-je - sty keep your bat-ter - y charged you know it won't

stick, yo and it's not his fault you kick slow should-a let your trick he chick hold ya sick glow plus no-bod - y could - n't do nut - tin' once he let the brick go

and you know I know that's a bunch of snow the beat is so butter peep the slow cut-ter as he ut-ter the calm flow don't talk a-bout my moms, yo

sometimes he rhyme quick, sometimes he rhyme slow or vice ver - sa whip up a slice of nice verse pie hit it on the first try vil - lain the worst guy

spot hot tracks like spot a pair of fat ass - es shots of the scotch from out the square shot glas - ses and he won't stop 'til he got the mas - ses

'n show 'em what they know not thru flows of hot molasses do it like the ro - bot to head - spin to bug - a - loo took a few min - utes to con - vince the ave - rage bug - a - boo

it's ug - ly like look at you it's a damn shame just re - mem - ber all caps when you spell the man[']s name

Example 8a. N.W.A., “100 Miles and Runnin’” (1990), second verse (Dr. Dre), 1:26–2:10

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1	RUN-	nin’	with	my	BROTH-	ers		head-	ed	for	the	HOME		BASE		
2	WITH	a	stead-	y	PACE		on	the	FACE		that	just		re-		TRACED
3		the	ROAD		a-	HEAD		goes	ON		and	ON				this
4	shit	is	get-	ting	long-	er	than	a	muth-	a-	fuck-	in’	MAR-	a		thon
5			RUN-	nin’	on		but	NEV-	er	run-	nin’	out			stay-	in’
6	wired			and	if	I	get	tir-	ed	I	can	still		try	out	
7	HITCH-		hik-		in’			if	that’s	what	I	got-	ta	do		but
8	NO-	bod-	y’s	pick-	in’	up	a	nig-	ga	with	an	att-	i-	tude		con-
9	FUSED				YO		but	DRE’S		a	NIG-	ga	with	NUT-	tin’	ta
10	LOSE				one	of	the	FEW		that’s	been	ac-	CUSED		and	a-
11	BUSED		of	the	CRIME		of	POI-		son-	ing	YOUNG		minds		but
12	you	don’t		know		SHIT			’til	you		been	in		MY	
13	shoes			and	DRE		is	BACK		FROM		the	C		P	
14	T				drop-	pin’	some	shit		that’s	D	O		P		E
15				so	FUCK		THE	P		O		L		I		C
16		E		and	AN-	y	moth-	a-	fuck-	a	that	dis-	a-	grees		
17	STEP-	pin’		RUN	nin’		HARD			HAUL-	in’		ASS			’cause
18	I	been	a	nig-	ga	known		for	hav-	in’	a	no-	to-	ri-	ous	past
19		my	MIND		was	SLICK		but	tem-	per	was	TOO		QUICK		
20	now	the	F	B	I’s		all		o-	ver	my	dick				

Example 8b. N.W.A., “100 Miles and Runnin’,” verse 2, showing accented syllables

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1	RUN-				BROTH-			HEAD-				HOME		BASE		
2	WITH		stead-		PACE				FACE							TRACED
3			ROAD			HEAD			ON			ON				
4	shit		get-		long-		than		muth-		fuck-		MAR-			
5			RUN-						NEV-							
6									tir-							
7	HITCH-								that's			got-				
8	NO-															
9	FUSED				YO			DRE'S			NIG-		NUT-			
10	LOSE							FEW					CUSED			
11	BUSED				CRIME			POI-				YOUNG				
12						SHIT									MY	
13					DRE			BACK		FROM						
14	T				drop-											E
15					FUCK		THE	P		O		L		I		C
16		E			AN-											
17	STEP-			RUN			HARD			HAUL-			ASS			
18													to-			past
19		my	MIND		was	SLICK			tem-	per		TOO		QUICK		
20	now				l's				o-							

Example 9. N.W.A., “100 Miles and Runnin’,” verse 2, placement of accented syllables in mm. 9 (top) and 3

The image displays two musical staves in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The top staff is in common time (C) and the bottom staff is in 7/8 time. A bracket labeled '4:3' spans the first four measures of each staff. The lyrics are written below the notes, with numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 indicating fingerings for accented syllables.

Staff 1 (Common Time):

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3
 FUSED YO, but DRE'S a NIG - ga wit NUT - tin' ta

Staff 2 (7/8 Time):

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 4
 the ROAD a - HEAD goes ON and ON (YOW!)