The Dactlyic Hexameter

I. **The Scheme**: — u u | — u u | — u u | — u u | — u u | — u

A. The Dactylic Hexameter has **six** (hex-) groups, also known as 'feet' or **metra** ('measures').
B. Each foot can be **either** long-long (— —) **or** long-short-short (— u u). A short is half the length of a long when reciting.
C. The sixth foot always has only two syllables, and the second of these may be either long or short, but is always recited as a long.

II. **Longs and Shorts**
A. Long syllables contain either
   1. a naturally long vowel (η, ω and sometimes α, ι, or υ; any vowel with a circumflex is automatically long).
   2. a diphthong (αι, ει, οι, υι, αυ, ευ, ου, ηυ).
      a. exception 1: if there is an umlaut over the second vowel of one of the diphthongs, treat it as two separate vowels (see Ἀτρεΐδης in the example below).
      b. **exception 2**: diphthongs followed by another vowel are sometimes—but not always—scanned as short (e.g. καί in lines 17)
   3. any vowel followed by a double consonant (pronounced ξ, ψ , ζ = ks, ps, dz respectively) **or** two or more single consonants, whether within a word or between words.
B. Short syllables contain a naturally short vowel—ε, ο, and sometimes α, ι, and υ—which is **not** followed by two or more consonants (previous rule), i.e. it is followed by a single consonant, a diphthong or another single vowel.

III. **Scanning**
The job of dividing up the syllables into long and short according to the scheme. The more you do this, the easier it becomes, until you can just do it at sight. When beginning, however, you must proceed mechanically. It is a little like doing a crossword puzzle or sudoku. Sometimes there remain one or two ambiguities, but almost always the correct pattern may be deduced. Here is a good way to proceed, using line 7 of the *Iliad* as an example.

A. Mark long all naturally long vowels of which you are sure, that is, η, ω and any circumflexed vowel (see II.A.1). Also mark the last syllable long automatically:

— — — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

B. Mark as long any dipthongs (II.A.2):

— — — — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

C. Mark as long all vowels followed by double consonants or two+ single consonants (II.A.3):

— — — — — — — — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

D. Mark as short any ε or ο which is **not** followed by a double consonant (II.B):

— u — u — — — — — u — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

E. At this point usually the rest will fall into place. Short vowels must come in groups of two, so these can be filled in:

— u u — u u — — — — — u u — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

F. Now you can divide the verse into its 6 feet:

— u u | — u u | — — | — — | — u u | — —
Ἀ - τρε - ΐ - δης τε ἄ - ναξ ἀν - δρῶν καὶ δῖ - ος Ἀ - χιλ - λεύς.

OTHER EXCEPTIONS IN PASSAGE. Line 1 scan εω as one long. Line 15 scan έῳ as one short. Line 17 scan ἐυ as two separate vowels; see also II.A.2.b above.