Let's face it. This is what scares students off the most. They look at the plays and see a "foreign" language. However, with a little information and practice, what seems difficult can become easier.

One thing that causes confusion is that Shakespeare's word order may not be familiar. Today, our language follows this pattern, typically: SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT. For example: *I drove the car.* Shakespeare would play around with this order and in his work, you might see some unusual word arrangements. He did this to create rhythm and rhyme, to emphasize certain words or phrases, and/or to create speech patterns:

I drove the car: S-V-O  
Drove the car I: V-O-S  
The car drove I: O-V-S  
Drove I the car: V-S-O

With so many possible combinations, how does a modern reader figure it out? Look for what's familiar: locate the subject and the verb and rearrange the sentence until it makes sense.

One thing that hasn’t changed is that when reading Shakespeare, like today’s English, the reader needs to pay attention to punctuation marks. A comma requires a short pause, but periods, question marks, semi-colons, colons and dashes require a longer one. When we get to the end of a line of verse or prose, we don’t pause unless there is a punctuation mark. It’s the same with Shakespeare. When you read his work, read from punctuation mark to punctuation mark to get the meaning.

**LET'S LOOK AT SOME LINES FROM SHAKESPEARE:**

*Oh, where is Romeo? Saw you him today?*  
~*Romeo & Juliet* (I i)  
*Where is Romeo? Have you seen him today?*

*Neither a borrower nor a lender be,  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend.*  
~*Hamlet* (I iii)  
*(You) shouldn’t borrow or lend money because you’ll often lose the friend and the money.*

*This above all: to thine own self be true.*  
~*Hamlet* (I iii)  
*Above all, be true to yourself.*

*If’t be so, For Banquo’s issue have I fil’d my mind,  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murther’d*  
~*Macbeth* (III i)  
*If it’s true, then I have ruined my mind and murdered Duncan for Banquo’s children.*