

Some things to remember when reading poetry

1. **Read the syntax literally.** What the words say literally in normal sentences is only a starting point, but it is the place to start. Not all poems use normal prose syntax, but most of them do, and you can save yourself embarrassment by paraphrasing accurately (that is, rephrasing what the poem literally says, in plain prose) and not simply free-associating from an isolated word or phrase.
2. **Articulate for yourself what the title, subject, and situation make you expect.** Poets often use false leads and try to surprise you by doing shocking things, but defining expectation lets you be conscious of where you are when you begin.
3. **Identify the poem's situation.** What is said is often conditioned by **where** it is said and by **whom**. Identifying the speaker and his or her place in the situation puts what he or she says in perspective.
4. **Take a poem on its own terms.** Adjust to the poem; don't make the poem adjust to you. Be prepared to hear things you do not want to hear. Not all poems are about your ideas, nor will they always present emotions you want to feel. But be tolerant and listen to the poem's ideas, not only to your desire to revise them for yourself.
5. **Look up anything you don't understand:** an unfamiliar word (or an ordinary word used in an unfamiliar way), a place a person, a myth, an idea—anything the poem uses. When you can't find what you need or don't know where to look, ask for help.
6. **Remember that poems exist in time, and times change.** Not only have the meanings of words changed, but whole ways of looking at the universe have varied in different ages. Consciousness of time works two ways: your knowledge of history provides a context for reading the poem, and the poem's use of a word or idea *may* modify your notion of a particular age.
7. **Find out what is implied by the traditions behind the poem.** Verse forms, poetic kinds, and metrical patterns all have a frame of reference, traditions of the way they are usually used and for what. For example, the anapest (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one, as in the word *Tennessee*) is usually used for comic poems, and when poets use it "straight" they are aware of their "departure" and are probably making a point by doing it.
8. **Be willing to be surprised.** Things often happen in poems that turn them around. A poem may seem to suggest one thing at first, then persuade you of its opposite, or at least of a significant qualification or variation.
9. **Assume there is a reason for everything.** Poets do make mistakes, but in poems that show some degree of verbal control it is usually safest to assume that the poet chose each word carefully; if the choice seems peculiar to us, it is often we who are missing something. Try to account for everything in a poem and see what kind of sense you can make of it. **Poets make choices;** try to figure out a coherent pattern that explains the text as it stands.
10. **Discuss.** Discussion usually results in clarification and keeps you from being too dependent on personal biases and preoccupations that sometimes mislead even the best readers. Talking a poem over with someone else (especially someone very different) can expand your perspective.

Thanks to Doris Rutherford for sharing.

Some things to remember when analyzing poetry

1. **Answer the prompt. Remember: AP** means **Answer the Prompt**
2. **Mark the poem** and make a plan.
3. The poet is not the speaker; the poet is not the speaker; the poet is not the speaker. The poet uses literary devices and the **speaker** speaks.
4. Write in **literary present tense**.
5. One very useful approach is to begin by identifying three key elements of the poem: the speaker, his/her subject, and the dramatic situation.
6. Make sure your topic sentences are explicit about your structural choices. Frost opens the poem (lines 1-14)... or Frost's first two stanzas...
7. Almost every poem has a series of natural divisions. Look for transitions in theme, subject matter, tone, or chronology and use those for dividing the essay.
8. You are proving a thesis in a poetry explication. Don't forget to write your paper with the central thesis in mind.
9. As you read, look for unusual, distinct or clever phrasing of words or phrases. If a poet violates an expectation of language or presents an idea in an entirely new way, there is likely a reason that you can explore.
10. Look for powerful phrases that have an impact, because of meaning or sound quality. Look for metaphor, symbolism, sound devices.
11. Identify "cool" ideas that you can write about. In other words, if a poem references a historical event or philosophical ideal that you are familiar with, you certainly want to write about it.
12. **Don't fixate on the things that you don't know**; focus on the things that you do. In a poetry explication where you are only given ten minutes to read a poem, there is no way that you can expect to get everything. Emphasize your strengths and focus on those.
13. **Weave in nuggets** from the text of the poem(s). Don't use full quotations, but brief critical nuggets from the text.
14. **Weave** in the use of poetic devices; don't force them in. You want to demonstrate knowledge of the devices and their application, but they are tools, not the **focal point** of your writing.
15. Don't write excessively about sound devices, meter, and rhythm unless you a) have little else to write about or b) are very good at it. They can be really powerful tools for analysis, but are often over-used and trite observations.
16. Make sure that you do more than identify particular devices and techniques. Readers of the essays expect analysis of how the devices function in the piece.

Organizational Structures: **Best:** Natural divisions of the poem—ideas, stanzas, themes. The best papers follow the chronological order of the poem. This ensures that you cover the essay from top to bottom and do not miss any important literary concepts in the piece. This technique also makes your essay easier for the AP readers to read and score.

Remember, the essay is not about the literary techniques or an interpretation of the poem. The essay should be an analysis of **why the poem is effective in portraying a theme**. Every

sentence that you write about the poem should be used to convince the reader that the author is working toward a particular idea.

Only if you must: Literary Devices

Remember your time limit; Make decisions accordingly

Poetry Terms

<p style="text-align: center;">language</p> <p>allusion: brief reference to a person, place, thing, event, or idea in history or literature</p> <p>antithesis: the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure</p> <p>hyperbole: the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect</p> <p>image: a short, vivid description that creates a strong sensory impression</p> <p>imagery: a combination of images</p> <p>irony (verbal): use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word</p> <p>litotes: deliberate use of understatement</p> <p>metaphor: implied comparison between two things of unlike nature</p> <p>metonymy: substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant</p> <p>paradox: A statement that initially appears to be contradictory but then, on closer inspection, turns out to make sense.</p> <p>parallelism: similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses</p> <p>personification: investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities</p> <p>simile: explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature</p> <p>synecdoche: figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole</p>	<p>trope: one of the two major divisions of figures of speech (the other being rhetorical figures) which refers to the figurative turning or twisting of some word or phrase to make it mean something else. Metaphor, metonymy, simile, personification, and synecdoche are the principal tropes.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">sounds</p> <p>Accent and Duration</p> <p>foot: a pair of syllables</p> <p>iamb or iambic foot: a pair of syllables, with the first syllable less prominent than the second</p> <p>accent or stress: the sound of a syllable as affected by a change in pitch when spoken</p> <p>duration or quantity: shortness or length of a syllable when pronounced relative to the syllables surrounding it</p> <p>Syntax and Line</p> <p>line: the characters that appear on a single line regardless of grammatical structure</p> <p>syntax: the words in their arrangement, and the dynamic energy the arrangement creates</p> <p>syntactical unit: a sentence, phrase, or clause</p> <p>enjambment: a run-over line</p> <p>Technical Terms</p> <p>trochee: an inverted iamb, where the first syllable is more prominent than the second, as in "Tell me"</p> <p>anapest: the unstressed half of a foot divided into two, as in "the expense"</p>	<p>sprung rhythm: the omission of an unstressed syllable, resulting in the jamming of two stressed syllables together, as in "saw, who" in the line "Wonders I saw, who can tell?" rather than "Wonders I saw, that who can tell?"</p> <p>spondee: a foot of two long syllables, as in the spondaic line "And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste"</p> <p>caesura: a pause in a line often indicated by punctuation, as in the first and third lines of "First, prepare you to be sorry/That you never knew till now,/Either whom to love, or how:"</p> <p>dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter: lines consisting of two, three, four, five, and six feet , respectively</p> <p>Like and Unlike Sounds</p> <p>assonance: repetition at close intervals of the vowel sounds of accented syllables or important words: <i>hat-ran-amber, vein-made</i></p> <p>consonance: repetition at close intervals of the final consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words: <i>book-plaque-thicker</i></p> <p>alliteration: repetition at close intervals of the initial consonant sounds of accented syllables or important words: <i>map-moon, kill-code, preach-approve</i></p>
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