

# CHAPTER 9

## Comprehensive Review—Poetry

### IN THIS CHAPTER

**Summary:** Overview, including definitions, examples, and practice with poetic forms



#### Key Ideas

- ✦ Learn the differences between poetry and prose
- ✦ Understand the structure of poetry
- ✦ Explore various types of poetry
- ✦ Practice interpreting selected poems
- ✦ Compare and contrast given poems

### Introduction to Poetry

Poetry—the very word inspires fear and trembling, and well it should because it deals with the intensity of human emotion and the experiences of life itself. But there is no reason to fear that which elevates, elucidates, edifies, and inspires. Poetry is a gift of language, like speech and song, and with familiarity comes pleasure and knowledge and comfort.

However, it may still be intimidating to read poetry. After all, we've been speaking and reading prose our entire lives. This review assumes that by the time you reach an AP level literature course, you have some experience and facility with poetry. We provide you with definitions, examples, and practice with interpretation. Hopefully, you will provide the interest, diligence, and critical thinking necessary for a joyful and meaningful experience.

Remember our philosophy of firsts? First, we believe that you should read as much poetry as possible. Early in the year, pick up an anthology of poetry and read, read, read. Open to any page and read for pleasure and interest. Don't try to “study” the poems; just respond to them on an emotional level. Consider the following:



- Identify subjects that move you or engage you.
- Are there certain themes you respond to? Are there certain poets you like? List them and read more poetry by them.
- Are there certain types or styles of poems you enjoy? What do they seem to have in common?
- Are there images or lines you love? Keep a record of some of your favorites.

Make this a time to develop a personal taste for poetry. Use this random approach to experience a broad range of form and content. You should find that you are more comfortable with poetry simply because you have been discovering it at your own pace.

When you are comfortable and have honestly tried reading it for pleasure, it is time to approach it on a more analytical level.

## The Structure of Poetry



### What makes poetry different from prose?

How do you know when you're working with poetry and not prose? Simple. Just look at it. It's shorter; it's condensed; it's written in a different physical form. The following might help you to visualize the basic differences:

Prose	Poetry
Words	Syllables
Phrases	Feet
Sentences	Lines
Paragraphs	Stanzas
Chapters	Cantos

It should not be news to you when we say that poetry sounds different from prose. It is more musical, and it often relies on sound to convey meaning. In addition, it can employ meter which provides rhythm. Did you know that poetry is from the ancient oral tradition of storytelling and song? Rhyme and meter made it easier for the bards to remember the story line. Try to imagine Homer in a dimly lit hall chanting the story of Odysseus.

As with prose, poetry also has its own jargon. Some of this lingo is specifically related to form and meter. The analysis of a poem's form and meter is termed *scansion*.

### The Foot

The *foot* is the basic building block of poetry. It is composed of a pattern of syllables. These patterns create the meter of a poem. *Meter* is a pattern of beats or accents. We figure this pattern out by counting the stressed and unstressed syllables in a line. Unstressed syllables are indicated with a ~ and stressed syllables are indicated with a '.

There are five common patterns that are used repeatedly in English poetry. They are:

- The *iamb*            ~ '            (tõ dáy) (bě cáuse)
- The *trochee*        ' ~            (háp py) (líht ly~)
- The *anapest*       ~ ~ '            (õb ví óús) (řě gũ lár)
- The *dactyl*        ' ~ ~            (cíg ě řětte) (iń těr rŭpt)
- The *spondee*       ' '            (down tówn) (slíp shód)

### The Line

Unlike the prose sentence that is determined by subject, verb, and punctuation, the poetic line is measured by the number of feet it contains.

- 1 foot      monometer
- 2 feet     dimeter
- 3 feet     trimeter
- 4 feet     tetrameter
- 5 feet     pentameter
- 6 feet     hexameter
- 7 feet     heptameter
- 8 feet     octameter
- 9 feet     nonometer

### Your Turn

Now answer the following. How many stressed syllables are in a line of:

Iambic pentameter	<u>5</u>
Dactylic trimeter	<u>3</u>
Anapestic dimeter	<u>2</u>
Spondaic monometer	<u>2</u>
Trochaic tetrameter	<u>4</u>

*Note:* Answers can be found at the end of the definition of “meter” in the Glossary of terms.

### The Stanza

You should now understand that syllables form feet, feet form lines, and lines form stanzas. Stanzas also have names:

- 1 line      a line
- 2 lines    couplet
- 3 lines    tercet
- 4 lines    quatrain
- 5 lines    cinquain
- 6 lines    sestet
- 7 lines    septet
- 8 lines    octave

### Your Turn

What is the total number that results from adding up all of the metric references in the following, make-believe poem?

- The poem is composed of 3 quatrains, 2 couplets and 1 sestet.
- Each quatrain is written in iambic tetrameter.
- The couplets are dactylic dimeter.
- The sestet is trochaic trimeter.

The total number is 74.

*Note:* You can find the answer at the end of the definition of “rhythm” in the Glossary of terms.

~~You will never have to be this technical on the AP exam. However, you will probably find a question on meter, and technical terms may be included in the answer choices to the multiple-choice questions. In addition, sometimes in the poetry essay you may find opportunity to use your knowledge of scansion, or your analysis of the rhyme and meter of the poem, to develop your essay. This can be very effective if it is linked to interpretation.~~

## Rhyme

One of the first processes you should become familiar with concerns the identification of a poem's rhyme scheme. This is easily accomplished by assigning consecutive letters of the alphabet to each new sound at the end of a line of poetry. Traditionally, rhyme scheme is indicated with italicized, lowercase letters placed to the right of each line of the poem.

- *a* for the first
- *b* for the second
- *c* for the third
- *d, e,* and so forth

Try this with the opening stanza from "Peace" by George Herbert.

*Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,  
Let me once know.  
I sought thee in a secret cave,  
And asked if Peace were there.  
A hollow wind did seem to answer, "No,  
Go seek elsewhere."*

You may restart the scheme with each new stanza or continue throughout the poem. Remember, the purpose is to identify and establish a pattern and to consider if the pattern helps to develop sound and/or meaning. Here's what the rhyme scheme looks like for the above selection: *a b a c b c*.

When you analyze the pattern of the complete poem, you can conclude that there is a very regular structure to this poem which is consistent throughout. Perhaps the content will also reflect a regular development. Certainly the rhyme enhances the sound of the poem and helps it flow. From now on we will refer to rhyme scheme when we encounter a new poem.

The rhymes we have illustrated are called **end rhymes** and are the most common. **Masculine rhyme** is the most frequently used end rhyme. It occurs when the last stressed syllable of the rhyming words match exactly. ("The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.") However, there are **internal rhymes** as well. These rhymes occur within the line and add to the music of the poem. An example of this is *dreary*, in Poe's "The Raven" ("Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary"). **Feminine rhyme** involves two consecutive syllables of the rhyming words, with the first syllable stressed. ("The horses were prancing / as the clowns were dancing.")

## Types of Poetry



Because of its personal nature poetry has evolved into many different forms, each with its own unique purpose and components. What follows is an examination of the most often encountered forms.

## KEY IDEA

Most poetry falls into one of two major categories. *Narrative poetry* tells a story. *Lyric poetry* presents a personal impression.

### The Ballad

The *ballad* is one of the earliest poetic forms. It is a narrative that was originally spoken or sung and has often changed over time. It usually:

- Is simple.
- Employs dialogue, repetition, minor characterization.
- Is written in quatrains.
- Has a basic rhyme scheme, primarily *a b c b*.
- Has a refrain which adds to its songlike quality.
- Is composed of two lines of iambic tetrameter which alternate with two lines of iambic trimeter.

The subject matter of ballads varies considerably. Frequently, ballads deal with the events in the life of a folk hero, like Robin Hood. Sometimes they retell historical events. The supernatural, disasters, good and evil, love and loss are all topics found in traditional ballads.

The following is a typical folk ballad. Read this poem out loud. Listen to the music as you read. Get involved in the story. Imagine the scene. Try to capture the dialect or sound of the Scottish burr.

### Bonny Barbara Allan

by Anonymous

After you've read the ballad, consider the following:

It was in and about the Martinmas time,  
When the green leaves were falling,  
That Sir John Graeme, in the West Country,  
Fell in love with Barbara Allan.

He sent his man down through the town, 5  
To the place where she was dwelling;  
"O haste and come to my master dear,  
Gin ye be Barbara Allan."

O hooly, hooly rose she up, 10  
To the place where he was lying,  
And when she drew the curtain by:  
"Young man I think you're dying."

"O it's I'm sick, and very, very sick,  
And 'tis a' for Barbara Allan."  
O the better for me ye's never be, 15  
Though your heart's blood were a-spilling.

"O dinna ye mind, young man," said she,  
When ye was in the tavern a drinking,

That ye made the healths gae round and round,  
And slighted Barbara Allan?" 20

He turned his face unto the wall,  
And death was with him dealing;  
"Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,  
And be kind to Barbara Allan."

And slowly, slowly raise she up, 25  
And slowly, slowly left him,  
And sighing said, she could not stay,  
Since death of life had reft him.

She had not gane a mile or twa,  
When she heard the dead-bell ringing, 30  
And every jow that the dead bell geid,  
It cried, "Woe to Barbara Allan."

"O mother, mother, make my bed!  
O make it saft and narrow!  
Since my love died for me to-day, 35  
"I'll die for him to-morrow."


**STRATEGY**

1. Check the rhyme scheme and stanza form. You should notice it is written in quatrains. The rhyme scheme is a little tricky here; it depends on pronunciation and is what is called a *forced rhyme*. If you soften the "g" sound in the word "falling," it more closely rhymes with "Allan." Try this throughout the ballad, recognizing that the spoken word can be altered and stretched to fit the intention of rhyme. This falls under the category of "poetic license."
2. Follow the plot of the narrative. Poor Barbara Allan, poor Sir John. They are a classic example of thwarted young lovers, a literary pattern as old as Antigone and Haemon or Romeo and Juliet. Love, unrequited love, and dying for love are all universal themes in literature.
3. Observe the use of repetition and how it unifies the poem by sound and structure. "Barbara Allan/Hooly, hooly/Adieu, adieu/Slowly, slowly/Mother, mother."
4. Notice that dialogue is incorporated into the poem for characterization and plot development.


**TIP**

Don't be too inflexible when checking rhyme or meter. Remember, never sacrifice meaning for form. You're smart; you can make intellectual leaps.

Here are some wonderfully wicked and enjoyable ballads to read:

- "Sir Patrick Spens"—the tragic end of a loyal sailor
- "The Twa Corbies"—the irony of life and nature
- "Edward"—a wicked, wicked, bloody tale
- "Robin Hood"—still a great, grand adventure

“Lord Randall”—sex, lies, and death in ancient England

“Get Up and Bar the Door”—a humorous battle of the sexes

“La Belle Dame Sans Merci”—John Keats’s fabulous tale of a demon lover

Have you read ballads? Traditional or modern? List them here. Jot down a few details or lines to remind you of important points. If you’re musical, try singing one out loud.

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### The Lyric

*Lyric* poetry is highly personal and emotional. It can be as simple as a sensory impression or as elevated as an ode or elegy. Subjective and melodious, it is often reflective in tone.

The following is an example of a lyric:

### A Red, Red Rose

by Robert Burns

O my luv’s like a red, red rose,  
That’s newly sprung in June;  
O my luv’s like the melodie  
That’s sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luv am I; 5  
And I will luv thee still, my dear,  
Till a’ the seas gang dry.

Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun: 10  
O I will luv thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o’ life shall run.

And fare the weel, my only luv,  
And fare the weel awhile!  
And I will come again, my luv, 15  
Though it were ten thousand mile.

Now answer the following questions:

1. The stanza form is \_\_\_\_\_
2. The rhyme scheme is \_\_\_\_\_
3. The meter of line 6 is \_\_\_\_\_

4. The first stanza depends on similes. Underline them. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Cite assonance in stanza one. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Line 8 is an example of \_\_\_\_\_
7. Highlight alliteration in the poem \_\_\_\_\_
8. Did you recognize iambic trimeter? How about hyperbole? \_\_\_\_\_

The following are wonderful lyric poems. Read a few.

Edna St. Vincent Millay—"Childhood Is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies"

Emily Dickinson—"Wild Nights, Wild Nights"

Dylan Thomas—"Fern Hill"

Matthew Arnold—"Dover Beach"

Andrew Marvell—"To His Coy Mistress"

### The Ode

The *ode* is a formal lyric poem that addresses subjects of elevated stature. One of the most beautiful odes in English literature is by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

#### Ode to the West Wind

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

5

The wingéd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within the grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion\* o'er the dreaming earth, and fill  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odors plain and hill:

10

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

2

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,  
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

15

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

20

\*Melodious trumpet call



Of some fierce Maenad,\* even from the dim verge  
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
 Will be the dome of a vast sepulcher,  
 Vaulted with all thy congregated might 25

Of vapors, from whose solid atmosphere  
 Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

3

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
 Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams 30

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's† bay,  
 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers  
 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers 35

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
 And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

4

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share 45

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
 Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
 Scarce seem a vision; I would ne'er have striven 50

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

\*Frenzied dancer

†A village near Naples, Italy

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed  
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud. 55

5

Make me thy lyre,\* even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one! 60

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse, 65

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? 70

\*Small, harplike instrument

As always, read the poem carefully. (Find a private place and read it aloud. You'll be carried away by the beauty of the sounds and imagery.) Now answer the following questions.

1. Look at the configuration of the poem. It is divided into five sections. What function might each section serve? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Count the lines in each section. How many? \_\_\_\_\_ Name the two stanza forms you encountered. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Check the rhyme scheme. Did you come up with *a b a b c b c d c d e d e e*? The first four tercets are written in a form called *terza rima*. Notice how this rhyme scheme interweaves the stanzas and creates unity throughout the poem. Did it cross your mind that each section might be a variation on the sonnet form? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Check the meter. You should notice that it is very irregular. (Freedom of form was a tenet of the Romantic Movement.)
5. Stanza one: Did you catch the *apostrophe*? The direct address to the wind places us in the poem's situation and provides the subject of the ode. Highlight the *alliteration* and trace the similes in line 3. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Stanza two: What are the "pestilence-stricken multitudes"? In addition to leaves, could they be the races of man? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Stanza three: See how the enjambment pulls you into this line. Find the simile.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Alliteration can be seen in “azure,” “sister,” “Spring,” “shall.”
8. Stanza four: What images are presented? \_\_\_\_\_ Locate the simile.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Find the contrast between life and death.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Highlight the personification.
9. Identify the essential paradox of the poem and life itself in the couplet.

We are not going to take you through the poem line by line. You may isolate those lines that speak to you. Here are a few of our favorites that are worth a second look:

- Lines 29–31
- Lines 35–42 for assonance
- Lines 53–54
- Lines 55–56
- Lines 57–70

You should be able to follow the development of ideas through the five sections. Were you aware of:

- The land imagery in section 1.
- The air imagery in section 2.
- The water imagery in section 3.
- The comparison of the poet to the wind in section 4.
- The appeal for the spirit of the wind to be the poet’s spirit in section 5.

After you have read the poem, followed the organization, recognized the devices and images, you still have to interpret what you’ve read.

This ode has many possibilities. One interpretation linked it with the French Revolution and Shelley’s understanding of the destructive regeneration associated with it. Another valid reading focuses on Shelley’s loss of faith in the Romantic Movement. He asks for inspiration to breathe life into his work again. Try to propose other interpretations for this “Ode to the West Wind.”

### The Elegy

The *elegy* is a formal lyric poem written in honor of one who has died. *Elegiac* is the adjective that describes a work lamenting any serious loss.

One of the most famous elegies is by Percy Bysshe Shelley. It was written to mourn the loss of John Keats. Here is the first stanza of “Adonais.” It contains all the elements of an elegy.

#### Adonais\*

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!  
 O, weep for Adonais! Though our tears  
 Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!  
 And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years  
 To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,

And teach them thine own sorrow, say: "With me  
 Died Adonais; till the Future dares  
 Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
 An echo and a light unto eternity!"

\* An Elegy on the death of John Keats, author of "Endymion," "Hyperion," etc.

Read this stanza several times. Try it aloud. Get carried away by the emotion. Respond to the imagery. Listen to the sounds; let the meter and rhyme guide you through. Consider the following:

1. Adonais, Shelley's name for Keats, is derived from Adonis. This is a mythological allusion to associate Keats with love and beauty. (The meter will tell you how to pronounce Adonais.)
2. Check the rhyme scheme. Did you come up with *a b a b b c b c c*? See how the last two lines are rhymed to set this idea apart.
3. Line 1 contains a major *caesura* in the form of a dash. This forces the reader to pause and consider the depth of emotion and the finality of the event. The words that follow are also set off by the caesura and emphasized by the exclamation point. Notice that the meter is not interrupted by the caesura. ( ~ , ~ , ~ , ~ , ~ , is perfect iambic pentameter.) This line is a complete thought which is concluded by punctuation and is an example of an *end-stopped line*.
4. Line 2 utilizes repetition to intensify the sense of loss. Here the caesura is an exclamation point. Notice that the last three words of the line fulfill the meter of iambic pentameter but do not express a complete thought as did line 1. The thought continues into line 3. The thought continues into line 3. This is an example of *enjambment*.
5. Lines 2 and 3 contain *alliteration* ("Though," "tears," "Thaw," "the") and *consonance* ("not," "frost," continuing into line 4 with "thou").
6. Line 3 contains *imagery* and *metaphor*. What does the frost represent? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
7. Line 4 contains an *apostrophe* which is a direct address to the sad Hour, which is personified. To what event does the "sad Hour" refer? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
8. Lines 4, 5, and 6 incorporate *assonance*. The vowel sounds provide a painful tone through "ow" sounds ("thou," "Hour," "our," "rouse," "sorrow").
9. Notice how the enjambment in lines 7–9 speeds the stanza to the final thought. This helps the pacing of the poem.
10. Reread the poem. Choose images and lines you respond to.

Have you read any elegies? List them here. Jot down the poet, title, and any images and lines you like. Add your own thoughts about the poem.

Following is a list of some of the most beautiful elegies in the English language. Make it a point to read several. You won't be sorry.

"Elegy for Jane" by Theodore Roethke—a teacher's lament for his student.

"Elegy in a Country Church Yard" by Thomas Gray—a reflective look at what might have been.

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" and "O Captain, My Captain" by Walt Whitman—tributes to Abraham Lincoln.

"In Memory of W. B. Yeats" by W. H. Auden—a poet's homage to a great writer.

### The Dramatic Monologue

The *dramatic monologue* relates an episode in a speaker's life through a conversational format that reveals the character of the speaker.

Robert Browning is the acknowledged master of the dramatic monologue. The following is an example of both the dramatic monologue and Browning's skill as a poet.

#### Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in tonight,  
 The sullen wind was soon awake,  
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
 And did its worst to vex the lake:  
 I listened with heart fit to break. 5  
 When glided in Porphyria; straight  
 She shut the cold out and the storm,  
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate  
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;  
 Which done, she rose, and from her form 10  
 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,  
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied  
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,  
 And, last, she sat down by my side  
 And called me. When no voice replied, 15  
 She put my arm about her waist,  
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,  
 And all her yellow hair displaced,  
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,  
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, 20

Murmuring how she loved me – she Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor, To set its struggling passion free From pride, and vainer ties deseever, And give herself to me forever.	25
But passion sometimes would prevail, Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain A sudden thought of one so pale For love of her, and all in vain: So, she was come through wind and rain.	30
Be sure I looked up at her eyes Happy and proud; at last I knew Porphyria worshipped me: surprise Made my heart swell, and still it grew While I debated what to do.	35
That moment she was mine, mine, fair, Perfectly pure and good: I found A thing to do, and all her hair In one long yellow string I wound Three times her little throat around,	40
And strangled her. No pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain. As a shut bud that holds a bee, I warily oped her lids: again Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.	45
And I untightened next the tress About her neck; her cheek once more Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss: I propped her head up as before, Only, this time my shoulder bore	50
Her head, which droops upon it still: The smiling rosy little head, So glad it has its utmost will, That all it scorned at once is fled, And I, its love, am gained instead!	55
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how Her darling one wish would be heard. And thus we sit together now, And all night long we have not stirred, And yet God has not said a word!	60

Read the poem aloud, or have someone read it to you. Try for a conversational tone.

1. Concentrate on following the storyline. (Were you surprised by the concluding events?)

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2. Once you know the "story," look closely at the poem for all the clues concerning character and episode.

3. Automatically check for the relationship between form and content. Quickly scan for rhyme scheme and meter. You should notice a definite presence of rhyme in an unusual form *a b a b b c d c d d e f e f f*, etc. You should be able to recognize that the meter is iambic tetrameter. Rather than scan the entire poem, try lines throughout to see if a pattern exists.
4. *Lines 1–5*: What does the setting indicate or foreshadow? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Lines 6–9*: What diction and imagery is associated with Porphyria?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Lines 10–12*: Why are we told her gloves were soiled?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Lines 20–25*: Try to understand what the narrator is telling you here.  
 This reveals what is important to him. \_\_\_\_\_
- Lines 30–37*: Have you found the turning point? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Remember, literary analysis is like unraveling a mystery. Find motivational and psychological reasons for the narrator's behavior. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Line 41*: Notice how the caesura emphasizes the finality of the event. You are forced to confront the murder directly because of the starkness of the syntax. This is followed by the narrator's justification.
- Line 43*: Did you catch the simile? It's a little tricky to spot when "as" is the first word.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Line 55*: What character trait is revealed by the narrator? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Lines 59–60*: Notice how the rhyming couplet accentuates the final thought and sets it off from the previous lines. Interpret the last line. Did you see that the last two lines are end-stopped; whereas, the majority of the poem utilizes enjambment to create a conversational tone. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did you enjoy this poem? Did you feel as if you were being spoken to directly? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

The AP often uses dramatic monologues because they can be very rich in narrative detail and characterization. This is a form you should become familiar with by reading several from different times and authors. Try one of these: Robert Browning—"My Last Duchess," "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "Andrea Del Sarto"; Alfred Lord Tennyson—"Ulysses."

How many dramatic monologues have you read? List them here and add details and lines that were of interest and/or importance to you.

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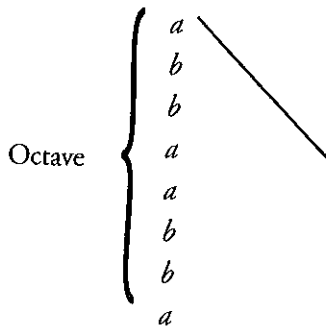
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### The Sonnet

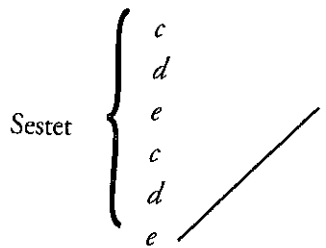
The *sonnet* is the most popular fixed form in poetry. It is usually written in iambic pentameter and is always made up of 14 lines. There are two basic sonnet forms: the *Italian* or *Petrarchan* sonnet, named after Petrarch, the poet who created it, and the *English* or *Shakespearean* sonnet, named after the poet who perfected it. Each adheres to a strict rhyme scheme and stanza form.

The subject matter of sonnets varies greatly, from expressions of love to philosophical considerations, religious declarations, or political criticisms. The sonnet is highly polished, and the strictness of its form complements the complexity of its subject matter. As you know by now, we like to explore the relationship between form and function. The sonnet effectively integrates these two concepts.

Let's compare the two forms more closely. The *Italian sonnet* is divided into an octave and a sestet. The rhyme scheme is:



By observing the natural break between the octave and the sestet and noting how the rhyme connects the lines in each, you should see that this form would be suitable for organizing the poem in the following ways:



- General to specific
- Comparison and contrast
- Question and answer
- Cause and effect
- Before and after



The *Shakespearean sonnet* has a different rhyme scheme and stanza form:

Quatrain {  
a  
b  
a  
b

Quatrain {  
c  
d  
c  
d

Quatrain {  
e  
f  
e  
f

This form is comprised of three quatrains and a couplet. The rhyme scheme indicates the separate nature of each stanza. The Shakespearean sonnet's quatrains lend themselves to the following organizational patterns:

- Beginning, middle, end
- Thesis, example, example
- Past, present, future
- Morning, noon, night
- Birth, life, death

The couplet then serves to present:

Couplet {  
g  
g

- A summary
- A conclusion
- A universal statement

Modern sonnets often vary rhyme and stanza form, but they will always have 14 lines.

For more practice with the sonnet, see Poems for Comparison and Contrast in this chapter. We recommend you read sonnets written by Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, e e cummings, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Keats.

### The Villanelle

The *villanelle* is a fixed form in poetry. It has six stanzas: five tercets, and a final quatrain. It utilizes two refrains: The first and last lines of the first stanza alternate as the last line of the next four stanzas and then form a final couplet in the quatrain.

As an example, read: "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas. Other villanelles that are worth a close reading include "The Art of Losing" by Elizabeth Bishop and "The Waking" by Theodore Roethke.

## Interpretation of Poetry



Interpretation is not license for you to say just anything. Your comments/analysis/interpretation must be based on the given text.

### How do I begin to interpret poetry?



To thoroughly understand a poem, you should be able to view it and read it from three different angles or viewpoints.

The first level is the *literal reading* of the poem. This is the discovery of what the poem is actually saying. For this, you only use the text:

- Vocabulary
- Structure
- Imagery
- Poetic devices

The *second level* builds on the first and draws conclusions from the connotation of the form and content and the interpretation of symbols. The *third level* refers to your own reading and interpretation of the poem. Here, you apply the processes of levels one and two, and you bring your own context or frame of reference to the poem. Your only restriction is that your interpretation is grounded in, and can be supported by, the text of the poem itself. To illustrate this approach, let's analyze a very simple poem.

Where ships of purple gently toss  
 On seas of daffodil,  
 Fantastic sailors mingle  
 And then, the wharf is still.



1. Read it.
2. Respond. (You like it; you hate it. It leaves you cold. Whatever.)
3. Check rhyme and meter. We can see there is some rhyme, and the meter is iambic and predominantly trimeter. The first and third lines are irregular. (If this does not prove to be critical to your interpretation of the poem, move on.)
4. Check the vocabulary and syntax. Are there any words you are not familiar with?
5. Look for poetic devices and imagery.
6. Highlight, circle, connect key images and words.
7. Begin to draw inferences from the adjectives, phrases, verbs.

As an example, we have provided the following notes:

#### Movement

- Toss
  - Mingle
  - Still
- } Progression

#### Images

- Ships
  - Seas
  - Sailors
  - Wharf
- } Literally nautical  
 Figuratively on a dock

**Syntax**

- Ships of purple = purple ships (Where or when do you see purple ships?)
- Seas of daffodil = daffodil seas (When would seas be yellow?)
- Fantastic sailors = sailors of fantasy = clouds moving, birds flying (What might they be?)
- Wharf is still = place is quiet = ?

Put your observations together and formulate your interpretation. Write it below.

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Some students have said that they saw a field of flowers, bees and butterflies, a coronation, a celebration, and/or a royal event. These are all valid interpretations. Remember, this is only a simple exercise to acquaint you with the approaches you can use to analyze complex poetry. By the way, Emily Dickinson was writing about a sunset over Boston harbor.

**Poetry for Analysis**

This section will walk you through the analysis of several poems, presenting the poetry and a series of directed questions for you to consider. For maximum benefit, work with a highlighter and refer often to the poem. *Always* read the entire poem before you begin the analysis.

**The Snake**

by D. H. Lawrence

A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat  
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carobtree  
I came down the steps with my pitcher  
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough  
before me. 5

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the  
edge of the stone trough,  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom, 10  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently. 15

Someone was before me at my water trough,  
And I, like a second comer, waiting.  
He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,

- And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment, 20  
 And stooped and drank a little more,  
 Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth  
 On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.
- The voice of my education said to me 25  
 He must be killed,  
 For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are  
 venomous.
- The voice in me said, If you were a man  
 You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off. 30
- But must I confess how I liked him,  
 How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my  
 water-trough  
 And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,  
 Into the burning bowels of this earth? 35
- Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?  
 Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?  
 Was it humility, to feel so honoured?  
 I felt so honoured.
- And yet those voices: 40  
*If you were not afraid, you would kill him!*  
 And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,  
 But even so, honoured still more  
 That he should seek my hospitality  
 From out the dark door of the secret earth. 45
- He drank enough  
 And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,  
 And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,  
 Seeming to lick his lips,  
 And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air, 50  
 And slowly turned his head,  
 And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream,  
 Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round  
 And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.
- And as he put his head into that dreadful hole, 55  
 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered  
 farther,  
 A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that  
 horrid black hole,  
 Deliberately going into blackness, and slowly drawing himself 60  
 after,  
 Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
I picked up a clumsy log  
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter. 65

I think it did not hit him,  
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in  
undignified haste,  
Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front, 70  
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.  
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!  
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.  
And I thought of the albatross, 75  
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
Now due to be crowned again.  
And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords 80  
Of life.  
And I have something to expiate:  
A pettiness.

1. Since there is no regular rhyme scheme or length of lines or stanza form, we may conclude that this is *free verse*. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
2. After reading the poem, you should be able to determine the situation, which is \_\_\_\_\_, and the speaker who is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The first stanza establishes the conflict, which is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Find evidence of the developing conflict in lines 4–6. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Find examples of alliteration and assonance in lines 7–13. Notice how the sounds are appropriate for a snake rather than just random sounds.
6. Read line 12 aloud. Hear how slowly and “long” the sounds are, like the body of the snake itself.
7. Circle or highlight the imagery in lines 16–24. \_\_\_\_\_  
Notice how the scene is intensifying.
8. Restate the speaker’s position in lines 25–28. \_\_\_\_\_
9. In lines 31–38 identify the conflict and the thematic ideas of the poem. Highlight them.

10. Identify the opposition facing the speaker in lines 36–39. State it. \_\_\_\_\_
11. In lines 46–54 highlight the similes presented. Explore the nature of a snake and the connotation associated with one. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Interpret the setting as presented in lines 55–62. \_\_\_\_\_
13. The poem breaks at line 63. Highlight the change in the speaker at this point. Who is to blame for this action? \_\_\_\_\_
14. In line 75 there is a reference or allusion to the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Coleridge, which is a poem in which a man learns remorse and the meaning of life as the result of a cruel, spontaneous act. Is this a suitable comparison for this poem’s circumstances? Why? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Identify the similes and metaphor in lines 66–71. \_\_\_\_\_
16. Elaborate on the final confession of the speaker. May we conclude that the poem is a modern dramatic monologue? \_\_\_\_\_



After you have considered these ideas, expand your own observations. Might the entire poem be a metaphor? Can it be symbolic of other pettinesses? Can you interpret this poem socially, religiously, politically, psychologically, sexually?

The following poem is particularly suitable for the interpretation of symbolism. Apply what you have learned and reviewed and respond to this sample.

**The Sick Rose**  
by William Blake

O Rose, Thou Art Sick!  
The Invisible Worm  
That flies in the night  
In the howling Storm,

Has found out thy bed  
Of Crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.



Try your hand at interpreting this poem:

1. Literally
2. Sexually
3. Philosophically
4. Religiously
5. Politically

Apply the following thematic concepts to the poem:

1. Passion
2. Deceit
3. Betrayal
4. Corruption
5. Disease
6. Madness

Interesting, isn't it, how much can be found or felt in a few lines. Read other poems by Blake, such as "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience."

## Poems for Comparison and Contrast



Sometimes the AP exam requires you to compare and contrast two poems or prose selections in the essay section. Do not panic. The selections will usually be short and the points of comparison or contrast plentiful and accessible. This type of question can be interesting and provide you with a chance to really explore ideas.

Following are two poems suitable for this kind of analysis. Read each poem carefully. Take a minute to look at them and allow a few ideas to take shape in your mind. Then plan your approach logically. Remember, form and content are your guidelines.

### **She Walks in Beauty**

by Lord Byron

She walks in Beauty, like the night  
 Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
 And all that's best of dark and bright  
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes:  
 Thus mellowed to that tender light  
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies. 5

One shade the more, one ray the less,  
 Had half impaired the nameless grace  
 Which waves in every raven tress,  
 Or softly lightens o'er her face; 10  
 Where thoughts serenely sweet express,  
 How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
 So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
 But tell of days in goodness spent,  
 A mind at peace with all below,  
 A heart whose love is innocent!

15

**Sonnet 130**  
 by William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
 I have seen roses damasked red and white,  
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
 And in some perfumes is there more delight  
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
 I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.  
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
 As any she belied with false compare.

5  
10



It is essential that you read each poem again, marking, highlighting, connecting, etc. those points you will develop. List or chart your findings before you begin to write your essay.

**Common Elements**

- Both have the same topic—to a lover
- Both address and adore the beloved
- Both use similes: “She Walks”—“like the night”; “Sonnet 130”—“nothing like the sun”.
- Both rely on nature imagery: “She Walks”—“starry skies”; “Sonnet 130”—“Coral, roses”
- Both deal with light or dark
- Both include references to lover’s hair: “She Walks”—“raven tress”; “Sonnet 130”—“black wires”
- Both appeal to the senses: “She Walks”—“raven tress”; “Sonnet 130”—perfume, roses, music, garlic stink
- Both use alliteration: “She Walks”—“cloudless climes”; “Sonnet 130”—“goddess go”

**Differences**

- Form: “She Walks” lyric, has sestet; “Sonnet 130,” 12 + 2 (3 quatrains and couplet)
- Kind of love: “She Walks” serious and adoring; “Sonnet 130”—critical and humorous
- Diction: “She Walks”—positive; “Sonnet 130”—negative
- Ending: “She Walks”—adoring; “Sonnet 130”—realistic
- Tone: “She Walks”—idyllic; “Sonnet 130”—realistic

*“Practice. Practice.  
 Practice.”*  
 —Martha W.  
 AP teacher



To recap: If you are given two selections, consider the following:

- What is the form or structure of the poems?
- What is the situation or subject of each?
- How are the poetic devices used?
- What imagery is developed?
- What thematic statements are made?
- What is the tone of each poem?
- What is the organization or progression of each poem?
- What attitudes are revealed?
- What symbols are developed?

## Rapid Review

- Poetry has its own form.
- The foot, line, and stanza are the building blocks of poetry.
- Meter and rhyme are part of the sound of poetry.
- There are many types of rhyme forms.
- There are many types of poetic feet. They may be iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic, or spondaic.
- There are several stanza forms.
- Narrative poetry tells stories.
- Ballads are simple narratives.
- Lyric poetry is subjective and emotional.
- Odes are formal lyrics that honor something or someone.
- Elegies are lyrics that mourn a loss.
- Dramatic monologues converse with the reader as they reveal events.
- The sonnet is a 14-line form of poetry.
- The villanelle is a fixed form that depends on refrains.
- Levels of interpretation depend on the literal and figurative meaning of poems.
- Symbols provide for many levels of interpretation.
- When comparing and contrasting poems, remember to consider speaker, subject, situation, devices, tone, and theme.