AP English Literature

A Crash Course Study Guide

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Introduction

Thank you for downloading, *AP English Literature: A Crash Course Study Guide*. These posts are a compilation from our site, where we provide hundreds of practice questions and review to know for a variety of AP exams, including AP English Literature. You can check out more pointers, including our Ultimate List of AP English Literature Tips, at our blog. We hope you find this short collection helpful in your preparation for AP English Literature! A few of the references to practice questions will not work since you're reading this in print, but you can go to our subject guide page to practice the questions mentioned throughout the book.

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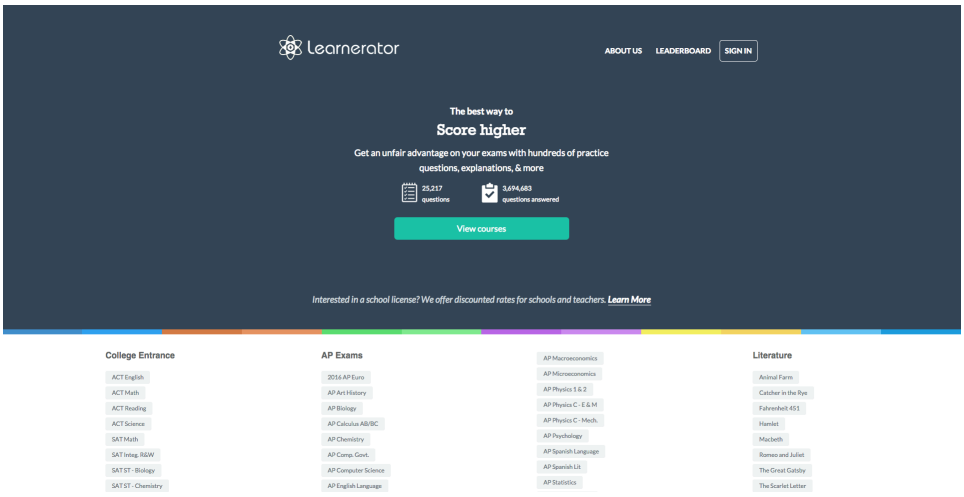

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How to Tackle AP English Literature Multiple Choice Questions

General Overview

Before you start preparing for the multiple-choice section of the AP English Literature and Composition exam, here are some things you should know: The multiple-choice section is 1 hour long and consists of 55 questions. Overall, it's worth 45% of your final exam grade.

The purpose of the multiple-choice section is to test your "critical reading of selected passages." This phrase was taken directly from the College Board's Course Description handbook. It just means that the multiple-choice section of the exam tests your ability to comprehend and then analyze the intended meaning of complex prose (or poetry).

Now that you know the breakdown and purpose of this section, let's discover how to prepare for it.

Reading Critically

How to Read Critically for AP Literature Multiple-Choice

The multiple-choice section of the AP English Literature and Composition exam may sometimes appear intimidating because of the complexity of the selected passages. However, if you strengthen your ability to read critically, you can better your understanding of the work the first time reading it through, which will save you time when answering the questions.

The core of critical reading is annotation. Here are some things you should do when you're reading through the passage for the first time:

Underline descriptions of people or objects

Be it prose or poetry, you will most likely encounter a question asking you to evaluate the author's attitude towards a person, object or topic. Paying attention

to word choice and descriptive phrases early on will help you answer those types of questions.

This is what a question asking you about attitude may look like:

Example: Evaluating attitudes

What attitude do unmarried men of Clarence's age have toward women such as Mrs. Stanhope?

A. Exhilarated
B. Indifferent
C. Apprehensive
D. Solicitous
E. Heedless

How to answer: Refer back to the passage and look at the descriptive words or phrases you've underlined in reference to the question. Use that information to guide your answer. You can practice answering this question and others like it here.

Example 2: Interpreting phrases

In context, the word "intimate" (lines 24–25) is best interpreted to mean

A. Suggestive and lyrical
B. Tender and friendly
C. Inexorably penetrating
D. Sensual and charming
E. Strongly private

How to answer: The multiple-choice section of the exam often asks you to interpret word choice or phrases. These types of questions are really just asking you to determine the meaning. Re-read the line or phrase (or your own annotations if applicable), come up with an answer in your head, and then go back to the question. It is better to clarify the meaning of the word or phrase first, and then go back to the question because that way you will avoid getting confused with the different choices. Try answering this question here (PG 19).

Summarize the main points

After each paragraph (or stanza if it is a poem), make one or two quick bullet point notes about the main idea of the paragraph. If you need to refer back to the passage, these bullet points will help you skim the text for the main idea without having to re-read major parts of the text.

Here is an example of when your bullet point summaries will be useful:

Example: Utilizing bullet point summaries

Paragraph Two ("This was July…barn) reveals that

A. Dirt tastes different each month
B. Moses has a predetermined ritual
C. Moses' connection to nature is complex
D. Moses might be crazy
E. The first hard spring rain makes dirt taste better

How to answer: You don't want to spend time re-reading entire paragraph's to accurately answer these types of questions. This is why your bullet point summaries will save you time in the long run. You can practice answering this question here.

Note any obvious linguistic techniques

You should pay close attention to diction. If you notice a figure of speech as you're reading through (e.g. metaphor, simile, polysyndeton etc.) underline or encircle it. Don't just take note of them. There will most likely be a question asking you to evaluate what you think the particular literary choice means. Try to think of this as you're reading through to save time on the questions. Always ask yourself "why?" For example, "why is the poet using repetition here? What does this mean?"

- You can find a helpful list of literary techniques that have appeared on previous exams by Googling "AP English Language and Composition Exam: 101 Key Terms." (Yep, AP English Language—not a typo). Create flashcards with these terms either online or by hand. Don't try to memorize 100 key terms two days before the exam. Instead, spend 30mins every day at least two weeks before the exam committing these to memory.
- This is what a question involving figures of speech may look like:

Example 1: Definition recall—figures of speech

The sentence, "The kind whisper went to my heart like a dagger," (line 45) employs what literary technique?

A. Simile
B. Paradox
C. Allusion
D. Metonymy
E. Anagnorisis

How to answer: To answer this type of question, you would need to know the definition of the options given in the answers. First re-read the indicated sentence, decide on an answer in your head, and match that answer to the options given. You may use process of elimination if you don't fully know the definition of one or more terms. Practice answering this question and others like it here.

Make a note of the tone

The multiple choice section of the AP English Literature and Composition exam often asks you to evaluate the speaker's tone or the tone of the passage overall. You definitely should not re-read the entire passage to get an idea about the tone. Instead, after your first time reading it through, make a quick note (mental or otherwise) on what you think the tone of the passage is (e.g. critical, lauding, indifferent etc.).

Here is what a question on tone may look like:

Example: Evaluating tone

Marlow's tone in this passage would most accurately be described as

A. Ambivalent
B. Indignant
C. Hectoring
D. Whimsical
E. Cynical

How to answer: Tone is the result of the author's use of imagery, symbols, diction etc. The best way to determine tone is to note the speaker's word choice when s/he is describing an object or discussing a topic. Use the descriptions that you underlined when reading through to help guide your evaluation of the tone of the piece. You can practice answering this question here.

Pay attention to the format of the composition

The multiple-choice section of the exam will most likely present you with different formats of prose (and sometimes poetry). You should be able to a) describe the composition or layout of the piece (e.g. is it a monologue, a historical analysis etc.), b) evaluate sentence or argument structure and c) interpret how structure contributes to meaning.

- These are what questions about format may look like:

Example 1: Describing composition (A)

The passage as a whole is best described as

A. A dramatic monologue
B. A melodramatic episode
C. An evocation of a place
D. An objective historical commentary
E. An allegorical fable

How to answer: This type of question is straightforward, but you would need to have some familiarity with different forms of prose. You can use context clues in the piece and process of elimination to help you arrive at the best answer. This question was taken from a previous practice exam, which can be found here (PG 25).

Example 2: Evaluating argument structure (B)

How does the author structure St. John's final argument to Jane (Lines 143-152)?

A. Appeals to her emotions as a woman
B. Presents the logical consequences of her choice
C. Declares his undying love and affection to her
D. Uses a misleading either-or argument

E. Makes St. John's argument with calm antipathy

How to answer: The purpose of this question is to test your ability to analyze argument structure. To answer this question, use the bullet point summaries you made after each paragraph as a reference. This will help jog your memory. You can practice answering this question here.

Example 3: Interpreting structure (C)

The primary rhetorical function of lines 14–22 is to

A. Provide support for a thesis supplied in lines 1–2
B. Provide evidence to contrast with that supplied in the first paragraph
C. Present a thesis that will be challenged in paragraph three
D. Introduce a series of generalizations that are supported in the last two paragraphs
E. Anticipate objections raised by the ideas presented in lines 12–14

How to answer: These types of questions are really just asking you to determine the purpose. Re-read the line or phrase (or your own annotations, if applicable), come up with an answer in your head, and then go back to the question. It is better to first clarify the meaning of the word or phrase, and then go back to the question because you will avoid being confused by the different choices. You can practice answering this question here (PG 22).

You should try using these tips when you are taking practice exams. Do not try this for the very first when you are taking the actual exam. Critical reading requires practice.

Test-Taking Tips

Test-Taking Tips for AP English Literature Multiple-Choice Section

As we've discussed, the focus of the AP English Literature and Composition exam is to test your ability to read critically. Working within the framework of this knowledge will help you save time on the exam. Below are some useful tips on what to do when you're actually taking the multiple-choice section of the exam:

Read through the passage before tackling the questions

Reading the passage first will help you build a basic understanding of the work before answering the questions. Some people suggest reading the questions first so you know what to focus on when you're reading the passage. This is also a plausible method, but it may encourage you to ignore other contextual details in the prose. You can try both, and see what works better for you.

Distinguish between factual and interpretive questions

Generally speaking, two types of questions usually appear in the multiple-choice section of the exam: factual questions and interpretive questions. Factual questions are straightforward and don't involve much analysis. Interpretive questions ask you to make educated deductions and substantiate them with support from the passage/poem. It is important to pay attention to the type of question you are answering. You don't want to waste time and effort on a straightforward question. Hint: Spend more time thinking about questions related to attitude, tone, meaning and purpose. Spend less time on questions asking about the definition of a term, structure of the composition, type of poem etc.

Example 1: Factual question

The rhyme scheme of this poem is

A. AAB
B. ABC
C. ABA
D. BAA
E. BAB

Practice answering this question and others like it here.

Example 2: Interpretive question

The purpose of the imagery in stanzas 1-5 is to

A. Warn of death
B. Juxtapose mortality with nature settings
C. Show the positive traits of nature
D. Contradict lines 1 and 3
E. Introduce hyperbole

Practice answering this question and others like it here.

Draw conclusions from contextual clues

You can answer both factual and interpretive questions by paying attention to contextual clues. Contextual clues help you define words you don't know, and give you insight into the tone or attitude towards a subject. Context clues include synonyms, antonyms, comparisons, examples, and detailed explanations. Here are a few things you should pay attention to:

- *The title of a poem*. It can offer additional insight into the subject of the poem, or the overall meaning.
- *Explanations that appear after a word*. If you are asked to define a word you don't know, pay specific attention to the words/sentences that precede or follow the word.
- *Synonyms*. You can pick up on the tone of a poem or the attitude of a subject by analyzing word choice. If you noticed, the author is using words that are close in meaning, you can use these words to help you infer tone and/or attitude.

Use process of elimination

There is no penalty for guessing, but an educated guess is better than choosing at random. You are encouraged to answer all the multiple-choice questions because no points are rewarded for blank answers. Let's walk through the steps of process of elimination together:

- Cross out answers that don't seem plausible (i.e. what you *know* is wrong)
- Encircle potentially accurate answers.
- Scrutinize between potential answers by using your previous knowledge or context clues
- Make your best guess

Key Takeaways

Take practice tests online

You don't want to be surprised when you sit down for the actual exam. Get familiar with the structure and patterns of the exam. This will help boost your

confidence! A quick Google search will help you gain access to free online practice exams. You can also find sample questions and take practice tests here and here.

The multiple-choice section is only challenging if you go in unprepared. If you happen upon a figure of speech, or a vocabulary word you don't know—don't freak out! Just try to use the context clues offered in the question itself and within the piece to help you figure out the meaning of the word or term. Skip the question if necessary. Again, there are no penalties for guessing. You are awarded points for the questions you answer correctly.

Study items most likely to appear on the test

Here is a comprehensive (but non-exhaustive) list of topics that usually appear in the multiple-choice section of the AP English Literature and Composition:

- Meaning of a word in context (i.e. the effect of a specific phrase)
- Speaker's tone and attitude towards subject
- The tone of the passage as a whole
- Poetry: rhythm, descriptive imagery, symbols
- Figures of speech (e.g. analogy) or other literary techniques (e.g. parallel function)
- Structure and composition of the passage

How to Read a Poem for AP English Literature

General Overview

This is it—in the next week, month, or year, you need to prepare yourself to take one of the most important tests of your high school career. You've been studying non-stop for the AP English Literature exam. Maybe you've already read essays, analyzed short stories, and memorized half of the Oxford English Dictionary in preparation. Maybe you're just getting started. Either way, you're here and you need to learn the basics of reading poetry.

What to Expect

The first thing that you should keep in mind as you prepare for the poetry section of the AP English Literature exam is that this section will not focus on any time period, author, or style. According to the College Board, your knowledge of poetry must extend from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first—from Shakespeare, to Dickinson, to Silverstein. You could be asked to do anything from identifying the meter or figurative language present in a poem to analyzing the deeper meaning behind a specific line of verse. That's a lot of material; with such a wide range of possibilities, the question is, how do you prepare for something this broad?

Forms of Poetry

When in doubt, start with being able to identify different kinds of poetry. While there are many categories of verse that could appear on the test. This section will address those most likely to appear on the AP Test. The first form of poetry that you should familiarize yourself with is the couplet. These consist of a pair of rhyming lines and usually form a closed unit like a sentence. They can exist on their own, or be integrated into other poems such as the Shakespearean sonnet. Next on the list is the ode; this is a poem that is dedicated to a person, place, or thing. Odes usually come in about five stanzas consisting of three or four lines each, and have no set rhyming scheme.

As you study for the test, you will find that the sonnet is perhaps one of the most important poems to familiarize yourself with. This poem consists of fourteen

lines, usually of varying rhyme schemes. There are multiple types of sonnets, however the most commonly found is the Shakespearean sonnet, which consists of three quatrains, or stanzas consisting of four lines, and an ending couplet, a pair of rhyming lines. In past tests, students have been questioned about the rhyming format of sonnets. This can be remembered as such: ABABCDCDEFEFGG, with the matching letters signifying rhyming lines. For instance, if you read Shakespeare's sonnet #95, your annotations might look something like this:

A - How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,

B - Which like a canker in the fragrant rose,

A - Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!

B - O in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!

C - That tongue that tells the story of thy days,

D - (Making lascivious comments on thy sport)

C - Cannot dispraise, but in a kind of praise,

D - Naming thy name, blesses an ill report.

E - O what a mansion have those vices got,

F - Which for their habitation chose out thee,

E - Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,

F - And all things turns to fair, that eyes can see!

G - Take heed (dear heart) of this large privilege,

G - The hardest knife ill-used doth lose his edge.

Take careful note of how the letters correspond to the rhyming scheme. By remembering this pattern, you should be able to easily identify a sonnet during your exam.

Last but not least of poems to know is the epic. If you've read *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey*, then you've read an epic poem. This poetry is basically a long poem that narrates the life of a hero on a quest. Beowulf demonstrates the years-long battle between an ancient king and a mythical creature, while The Odyssey chronicles the many adventures of one man on his journey home following the Trojan War. These are only two examples; the quest can be either historical or mythical, and usually includes multiple adventures on the hero's journey to a common goal, be it peace, glory, or simply the urge to find home again.

Some other types of poetry that you might like to study include haikus, limericks, sestets, and cantos. Make sure to pay attention to any specific formatting differences such as number of syllables, rhyming lines, metaphor, tone, or themes that can help you to easily identify these forms.

Words to Know

When preparing for the poetry section of the AP exam, one of the most important aspects to focus on is vocabulary. While there are some aspects of poetry and literature that remain the same, poetry is a different style so you can expect that there is a different set of descriptive words to know. One of the most important things to memorize is rhythm. This word describes the effect brought about by poets by using **meter**, or stressed and unstressed syllables, in order to achieve a certain sound. In the poetic world, rhythm and meter are often used interchangeably. However, **rhythm** is usually used to address the effect of a string of syllables, while meter addresses more specific sounds.

There are five sub-definitions of meter that you should learn. The first is known as an **Iamb**. This is a pattern composed of an unstressed syllable tailed by a stressed syllable. The word 'per-FORM' is a good example of this. Next comes the **Trochee**; this is when one stressed syllable is paired with an unstressed syllable. For example, the word 'WIN-dow.' Third on the list is **Dactyl**: one stressed syllable paired with two unstressed syllables. Phrases such as 'RUN a-way' are often used by poets. The opposite of Dactyl is **Anapest**. This meter is composed of two unstressed syllables, followed by one stressed. A good example of Anapest is the phrase 'in the END.' Last of the types of meter is the **Spondee**. A spondee is made up of two stressed syllables; 'The Earth' is a good example of this.

Next on the need-to-know list is **allegory**. This is commonly used to describe a poem, or part of one, that indicates a deeper meaning or abstract concept. This can be religious, moral, philosophical or even political.

One word often used in tandem with the allegory is a **symbol**. This is an image or phrase that says one thing, but represents something else. It is usually shown as a physical thing representing an emotional or spiritual state. For example, in Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Raven," the author uses a raven to represent the state of despair that he has fallen into.

A word that is often used beside allegory is the word **allusion**. This is when a poet references another work without explicitly stating the title. As with allegory, it is often used to explore biblical or political parallels within a work. However, it usually denotes a shorter, and more specific reference, such as the line, "So Eden sank to grief/So dawn goes down to day" from Robert Frost's poem, "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

Another term to know is **metonymy**. This word describes the use an attribute to describe something rather than the actual name used. For example, the use of the word "geek" in place of "Computer Technician" in order to describe someone's occupation.

The next two terms, paradox and irony, are again closely associated with one another, and can be confused with at first glance. A **paradox** is a statement that originally seems like it is a reasonable and acceptable statement, but upon further study makes no sense or contradicts itself. For instance, in *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus encounters a Cyclops and states that he is "Nobody" despite the fact that he is a well known figure, both in and out of the tale. **Irony,** however, is an expression that means the opposite of what it actually says, and can be used to describe a tone or use of humor rather than cause confusion or retrospection in the reader. One good example of irony can be found in William Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet* when Romeo finds Juliet asleep and, assuming she is dead, kills himself just before she opens her eyes.

Reading Closely

The AP English Literature test is meant to gauge your ability to understand poetry. To do this, you need to know how to interpret various methods employed by poets, and identify the meaning behind them. Some possible methods that you

will be tested on include your knowledge of figurative language such as metaphor or personification, your ability to interpret symbolism and tone, and—perhaps the most important of all—your ability to identify the main idea or theme that the poet is trying to get at.

The first step in applying what you know to poetry is known as Close Reading. This means that as you read, you should pay close attention to parts of the poem that may be important. Some ways to tell what is important are:

- If a line is repeated more than once throughout the poem.
- If the section uses a symbol or allusion to express a feeling or theme.
- If the rhythm or meter of the poem changes consistently.
- If the poet employs metaphor or personification to express a non-physical state of being.

Annotating Poetry

During the test, you will need to be able to read through poems and identify important phrases of verse. In the 2014 AP English Literature free response section, students were asked to read *For That He Looked Not Upon Her* by George Gascoigne and analyze how the attitude of the speaker was expressed through the form, diction and imagery used throughout the poem below:

You must not wonder, though you think it strange,

To see me hold my louring head so low;

And that mine eyes take no delight to range

About the gleams which on your face do grow.

The mouse which once hath broken out of trap

Is seldom ‘ticèd with the trustless bait,

But lies aloof for fear of more mishap,

And feedeth still in doubt of deep deceit.

The scorched fly which once hath ‘scaped the flame

Will hardly come to play again with fire,

Whereby I learn that grievous is the game

Which follows fancy dazzled by desire:

So that I wink or else hold down my head,

Because your blazing eyes my bale have bred.

You can find and print the question here and use it to practice your skills. One way to analyze a poem such as Gascoigne's without having to reread the piece of poetry over and over is to annotate, or take notes beside the poem as you read it. Use this opportunity to keep track of rhyme and meter, of allusions or metaphors, repeating lines, or anything else that looks important to you. While there is no set method of annotating, some tips that you might find helpful as you explore this method include underlining, encircling, or highlighting anything that catches your interest as you read. Keep an eye out for quotes, breaks in verse or voice, punctuation, allusion, and other key clues. For instance, in Gascoigne's poem, you might mark the phrase "my louring head" and use that phrase to emphasize the heartbroken feeling projected by the narrator.

Another useful tip to keep in mind is the ability to identify who the speaker or narrator of the poem is. From the title of Gascoigne's poem, and the use of terms such as "I" and "you," we can speculate that the narrator is the "He" referred to in the title of the piece, and that he is speaking to his former lover about why he is unable to continue their affair.

Next, as you read mark anything that indicates an incident that takes place in the poem, or that indicates the narrator's emotional reaction to the event. Phrases such as "will hardly come to play again with fire," "mine eyes take no delight," and "the mouse which once hath broken out of trap" all indicate feelings of wary refusal by the narrator to be drawn into his lover's "trustless bait" and give hints as to why he is so determined to refuse.

Word choice is important as well. Does the speaker sound intimate, mysterious, or abstract as he speaks? What do you think the metaphor of "the mouse which once hath broken out of trap" says about the way that Gascoigne's narrator views his past relationship? How does the way that he describes his opponent as

"desire," "blazing eyes" and "gleams which on your face doth grow?" What can you speculate has happened between these two in order to produce the narrator's feelings of discomfort?

The next step is to identify the rhythm and/or meter being used, as well as the type of poem itself. Analyze the rhyming scheme demonstrated throughout the poem; do the rhyming lines alternate? How many lines are there altogether? Use what you know about the different forms of poetry to draw new knowledge of this poem.

Next, paraphrase. If you're stuck on part of a poem, try putting it in your own words. Gascoigne's poem is useful to use as practice because it was written in the sixteenth century and some words, such as "louring," "ticed" and "bale" may be unfamiliar to you, although their meaning can be drawn from the context in which they are used. Try writing the lines in your own words in order to better understand and compare the language to your own.

Poems to Study

Because the AP Exam is changed every year, there's no way to determine what specific poems are going to be present in the test. The most beneficial way for you to study, then, is to look at poems that have been used in past tests. Some poems that you may find useful to study are:

- William Shakespeare's sonnets, particularly sonnets 18, 75 and 130.
- We Real Cool by Gwendolyn Brooks, paying special attention to the syntax and style used to develop the narrator's voice.
- My Last Duchess by Robert Browning, for practice with metaphor and form.
- A Story by Li-Young Lee, in order to expand voice and annotation skills.
- We Grow Accustomed to the Dark by Emily Dickinson, for imagery.
- Sow by Sylvia Plath, for metaphor and imagery.

If you follow these guidelines as you study and prepare for the poetry section of the AP exam, then you should be in a good place when the time comes to sit down and earn that college credit. For more information, you can find an in-depth guide to reading poetry at the AP College Board here.

What to Know about Poetry for AP English Literature

General Overview

Before you tackle the AP English Literature and Composition exam, it's very important to get comfortable dealing with poetry. Works of poetry appear in both the multiple-choice and free response section of the AP English Literature exam.

All types of poetry from various time periods will appear on the AP English Literature exam. According to the College Board, the selected poetry can range from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first century.

The good news is that you can prepare for the poetry components of the exam by getting familiar with the question patterns. Let's explore some of those patterns together!

Multiple Choice Review

Poetry in the Multiple-Choice Section of the AP English Literature Exam

In the multiple-choice section, questions about poetry range from straightforward to interpretive. You may be asked to identify the rhyme scheme of a poem, or to give the definition of a certain literary term (e.g. polysyndeton). More interpretive questions ask you to explain the meaning of a phrase in context, or to examine the effect of a particular poetic device.

Here are common questions you might face in the multiple-choice section:

Questions about the subject

Questions about the subject of the poem are pretty straightforward. You're really just answering the question "Who or what was this poem talking about?" However, sometimes the figurative nature of poems makes it difficult to figure out the subject matter.

Hints: To identify the subject of a poem you should pay attention to the title of the poem, and any pronouns or proper nouns being used. You should also get comfortable with extended metaphor, personification and apostrophe. Sometimes the subject of the poem is hidden within these figurative devices. If you can identify these devices, you can break them down to figure out the subject of the poem.

Extended Metaphor

Extended metaphor is when an author uses a single metaphor or analogy multiple times throughout a poem. The purpose of extended metaphors is to create a more clear comparison between two items. Don't get confused between the subject and the comparison! First, ask yourself, "What two objects are being compared?" Then use the other clues (e.g. proper nouns or pronouns) to figure out which object within the metaphor is the subject. Most likely, the subject will be mentioned just once, and the comparison will continue throughout the poem. Also, the subject is (usually, but not always) the noun that comes before "is."

For example, in Emily Dickinson's poem "Hope is the thing with Feathers" (excerpt below) she compares hope to birds. If you were asked to identify the subject of this poem, you would be incorrect to say she is discussing the nature of birds. As you can see, hope is only mentioned once, and it precedes "is."

Excerpt: "Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul, / And sings the tune without the words, / And never stops at all"

Personification

Personification is when human characteristics are attributed to a person, animal, or object. Sometimes the title of the poem will offer insight into the object being personified. Sometimes you have to go on a scavenger hunt for clues, and then approach the poem like you are solving a riddle.

For example, in Emily Dickinson's poem "She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms" (excerpt below), it is not wholly explicit what the subject of the poem is because of the extensive use of personification and metaphor. Here, Dickinson is comparing a sunset to a woman cleaning her house.

The clues in the underlined sentences help you piece together the subject. Approach such poems like solving a riddle and use the imagery as clues.

She sweeps with many-colored brooms,
And leaves the shreds behind;
Oh, housewife in the evening west,
Come back, and dust the pond!

You dropped a purple ravelling in,
You dropped an amber thread;
And now you've littered all the East
With duds of emerald!

And still she plies her spotted brooms,
And still the aprons fly,
Till brooms fade softly into stars
And then I come away.

Apostrophe

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which someone absent or dead, or something nonhuman is addressed as if it was alive and present and was able to reply. The exclamatory "O" is often used to signal such an invocation. If you can recognize where apostrophe is being used, then you can identify the subject of the poem. Look for any capitalized words within the poem, and figure out if the author is speaking *to* that person or abstract idea.

For example, in John Donne's poem "Death Be Not Proud," (excerpt below) death is the abstract subject of the poem. The fact that "Death" is capitalized and is being addressed as "thee" and "thou" show that apostrophe is being used.

Excerpt: "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;"

Questions about theme

Don't confuse questions about the theme with questions about the subject! The subject of a poem is the topic, while the theme is the central idea of the poem. Questions about the theme ask you to examine the poem as a whole. Common

themes include love, death, and power. Poets use a number of poetic devices that come together to form the overall theme of the poem.

Hints: After you read through the poem for the first time ask yourself, "What is this poem trying to express?" and, "What is the larger idea of the poem?" Pay attention to the figurative language, imagery and symbols being used in the poem – these elements come together to form the theme. To do this, underline any vivid descriptions of nouns, and note any metaphors or allusions being made. If you're really stuck, try re-reading the conclusion of the poem (i.e. the last stanza). Decide what you think the tone of the last stanza is (e.g. is it loathing? Is it hopeful?). Then go through the answer options to see if any options about the theme fit with the tone of the last stanza.

Now let's try putting this into practice. Read through Walt Whitman's poem "O Captain! My Captain" and try answering a question about the themehere. Pay special attention to the adjectives used, the imagery surrounding death and the tone of the last stanza.

Questions amount tone

Tone related questions are largely interpretive. You are trying to determine how the author feels towards the subject matter. Tone is rooted in the imagery, descriptions and the rhythm of the poem. Word choice plays a big role here. Key words that can give you insight into the tone are usually embedded within the imagery.

Hint: As you are reading through the poem, circle the adjectives being used to describe the subject. Then, when you encounter a question about the tone, go back to scan the circled adjectives. Finally, pick the answer option that best categorizes those adjectives, or which appears to be the closest synonym to the circled adjectives.

Now read through William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweep" and practice answering a question about tone here. As you read through the poem, pay special attention to the descriptions of objects. Circle any adjectives that stand out to you, and then choose the word in the answer options that best categorizes those adjectives.

Questions about rhythm

The rhythm of a poem is the pattern of stressed versus unstressed syllables. Questions about the rhythm are usually straightforward. You just have to go back to the poem to determine the meter.

Knowing some common forms of meter (unit of rhythm) found in poetry will help you answer these questions.

Hints: Memorize the four most common types of meter (described below). When you encounter a question about rhythm, don't waste time or effort going through all the answer options. First, go back to the poem, use your knowledge of meter to determine the rhythm of the poem, then go back to pick the correct answer choice.

Iamb Meter

In iambic meter the first syllable is unaccented and the second is accented. "Dust of Snow" by Robert Frost is written using iambic meter:
"The **way** a **crow**/Shook **down** on **me**"

Trochee Meter

In trochaic meter the first syllable is accented and the second is unaccented. An example can be found in Sir John Suckling's "Song":**Why** so **pale** and **wan**, fond **Lov**er?

Dactyl Meter

In dactylic meter the first syllable is accented and the second and third are unaccented. **T**he Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Lord Tennyson is contains dactyl meter: "**Half** a League**, Half** a League**, Half** a League**, on**ward."

Anapest Meter

In anapestic meter the first two syllables are unaccented and the third syllable is accented. Lord Byron's poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib" uses anapest meter: "For the **An**gel of **Death** spread his **wings** on the **blast**."

Refer to the descriptions of meter above, and try answering a question about rhythm here.

Questions about shifts in the poem

Sometimes you are asked to analyze changes in the flow of a poem. These questions could be about conceptual shifts (e.g. shifts in tone), or more explicit changes in the rhythm of the poem. You may be asked to explain the meaning behind the shift, or simply to identify the lines wherein the shift occurs.

Hints: Questions about shifts ask you to analyze what is changing within a poem. Pay special attention to words of contrast like "yet," and "but" because these signal a possible change in attitude. To answer, quickly re-read the line or stanza where the identified shift occurs. Then read 2-3 lines before and after the shift, and ask yourself "What changed?"

Try answering this practice question about shift here. This question asks you to identify where the shift occurs. Put a star next to the lines identified in the answer options. Then apply the tips above, paying attention to context and words that indicate contrast.

Questions about poetic devices

This is a very broad topic. Poetic devices include imagery, allusions, symbols, and different figures of speech (e.g. metaphor, asyndeton etc.). One poem can include multiple combinations of poetic devices. You will most likely encounter a question that asks you to explain the effect of using a particular device.

Hint: The best way to prepare for these types of questions is to practice your critical reading skills. Tips for critical reading: 1) note the title of the poem 2) underline obvious figures of speech and 3) put a star next to descriptive phrases. Doing this will help you identify devices more quickly, and will strengthen the accuracy of your interpretations.

Try answering the below questions about poetic devices:

What is the literary term most accurately used to define "Time" in line 1? (You can find this question here).

A. Paradox
B. Anagnorisis
C. Chiasmus
D. Apostrophe

E. Allusion

How to answer: As you can see, it helps to know the definitions of various literary terms. The best way to study literary terms is to create flashcards and spend 20 minutes every day (at least two weeks before the exam) committing these terms to memory. Don't spend time trying to recall the definition of every term in the answer options. Instead, re-read the specified line, and then decide on an answer in your head before going back to the answer options.

The purpose of the imagery in stanzas 1-5 is to (Practice answering this question here).

A. Warn of death
B. Juxtapose mortality with nature settings
C. Show the positive traits of nature
D. Contradict lines 1 and 3
E. Introduce hyperbole

How to answer: The purpose of imagery is to draw associations in the reader(s)' mind. To answer the question above, first apply the hints regarding subject and theme. This will help clarify the meaning behind the poem. Then ask yourself what idea the author is associating with the subject/theme of the poem.

Questions about diction

Usually these questions want you to figure out the effect of a word or a phrase use in the context of the poem. Sometimes, these questions want you to interpret the meaning of a specific word.

Hint: Remember that you are trying to determine the meaning of a word in context, so go back and re-read the verse or phrase in question. It will help you eliminate incorrect answer options more quickly. You can try to utilize context clues to help you define words that you don't know. Context clues include the phrases used after a word, and your interpretation of the sentence directly before and directly after the word in question.

Try answering a question about diction here. First, determine the subject of the poem by noting the title, and any pronouns being used.

Free Response Review

Poetry in the Free Response Section of the AP English Literature Exam

If you practice your critical reading skills for the poetry portions of the multiple-choice section, then you're killing two birds with one stone. You can use those skills to help you ace the free-response section. The free response section consists of 3 essays and is 2 hours long.

In the free response section of the AP English Literature exam, you will most likely be asked to discuss how a specific aspect of a poem lends to meaning (e.g. how controlling metaphor expresses the attitude of the speaker). According the College Board's scoring guideline, your score reflects the quality of the essay as a whole — its content, style, and mechanics.

Here's what to do when you're answering the free response question about poetry:

Write an introductory paragraph

The introductory paragraph should include the poet's name, and the title of the poem (in quotation marks). You should also include your thesis as the last line of the paragraph. In your thesis, state what specific examples (found in the poem) you think will help illustrate your point. It is very important that your logic is based on examples you find within the poem. Outside examples can bolster your essay, but should not be your core support.

Define literary terms

If you use a literary term in your essay, you should define it. You don't need to waste time writing out the line where you think application of the term exists. You can use shorthand. For example: "The chiasmus used in line nine illustrates X. Chiasmus is a reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases."

Remember to state the effect

Not only should you define literary terms, but you should also always remember to discuss the purpose or meaning behind its use. When you're building your examples, state the specific poetic device you think illustrates your point. Define

the term, and then explain why you think it is important. The free response question wants to examine your ability to interpret complex pieces of poetry, so it helps to break it down in this manner.

Maintain a consistent voice

You should stick to present tense throughout the essay to maintain a consistent voice. Also make sure that your sentences flow and that your use of subordinate clauses are constructed appropriately.

Focus on organization

The organization of the essay should be logical. Before you even write your introduction, you should take two minutes to outline your essay. Hint: explain one example per paragraph. Five paragraphs (6-8 sentences per paragraph) should be enough to convey your main ideas. Paragraph one should be your introduction, and the last paragraph should be your conclusion. Try to craft three main points, and discuss one per paragraph. Your main (or body) paragraphs should include specific illustrative detail.

Stay on topic

Rambling in the free response section is an easy way to lose points. Stick to your outline! When you're analyzing poetry there can be a lot to discuss, but the examples you choose should only serve to answer the question. If you're talking about meter, then don't start talking about extended metaphor in the same paragraph unless necessary.

Write a conclusion

Your conclusion should reinforce the main points of your essay. Offer a quick three-sentence synthesis of your thesis (word it differently from your introduction). You should not include any new ideas or new examples in this paragraph.

Key Takeaways

We just went through a lot; so before you head off to take some AP English Literature practice exams, let's review everything that was said. Here are some key takeaways from this lesson:

Multiple-choice section:

- There are common types of questions about poetry that appear in the multiple-choice section of the AP English Literature exam. If you familiarize yourself with the common types of questions, they become easier to answer.
- Though this list is not exhaustive when it comes to poetry, you will most likely have to answer questions about the subject, theme, composition, tone, rhythm, the use of various poetic devices, and diction.
- Practice multiple-choice questions here.

Free response section:

- Your responses to the free response questions on poetry should be organized and logical. It will be more persuasive if you use examples evidenced within the poem to illustrate your point.
- Like with most essays, you should start with an introduction and end with a conclusion. Five paragraphs, 6-8 sentences each should be enough to sufficiently respond to the question.
- There can be a lot to discuss when it comes to poetry, but you should only focus on explaining the poetic devices that actually help you answer the question. Hint: stay on topic!
- You can practice answering free response questions here.

How to Approach Prose Passages for AP English Literature

General Overview

The AP English Literature exam is divided into two sections: a multiple choice question made up of roughly 55 questions, which you will have sixty minutes to answer, and an essay portion that allows forty minutes each for three essays.

The following topic outline contains information that is relevant for both the multiple choice section as well as the essay portion. Both sections will assess your understanding of literary prose passages.

Recognizing and Defining Prose and Fiction

If you've survived an entire year of AP English Literature, chances are you know the difference between poetry, prose, and drama.

But it is still worthwhile to review the definition and hallmarks of literary prose.

Prose -- which is any form of writing that does not conform to a specific metrical structure, as poetry does -- is the most common form of writing. (We will speak more concretely about that "specific metrical structure" in the poetry section.)

Sending a text? You're using prose. Reading a textbook? You're reading prose. Reading a novel? A science article? This topic outline? All prose. But if prose is simply defined as being "not poetry" -- which, in essence, is its definition -- there is a wide gap between what constitutes the different types of prose.

Of course, literary prose is distinguished from other types of prose -- science articles, your AP Biology textbook, that e-mail from loony Aunt Sally -- in that it follows specific conventions.

For one, literary prose generally tends to be fiction, which means that everything you're reading may be TRUE, but none of it actually HAPPENED -- or at least not in that order, or in that form. (Of course, memoirs, autobiography, essays, and the like may all be written in literary or narrative prose, but in this section we will

address literature solely; many of the same conventions will still apply to these non-fiction forms.)

The hallmark of fiction, other than the fact that it is made up, is that it generally follows a certain structure (which we will speak about later on in this outline.) More importantly, fiction *tells a story*.

A story features *characters* who experience *events* in some sort of *time or place*. It contains dialogue -- internal, external -- that conveys a sense of emotion or conflict. A high-quality piece of fiction will often contain themes, morals, bigger ideas, connections or allusions to real-life events or ancient mythologies; often, fiction will contain some form of message -- whether it's about man's inhumanity to man (*Lord of the Flies*), the evils of government (*1984*), the corrupting influence of power and ambition (*Macbeth*), or simply how difficult it is to come of age (*Catcher in the Rye*).

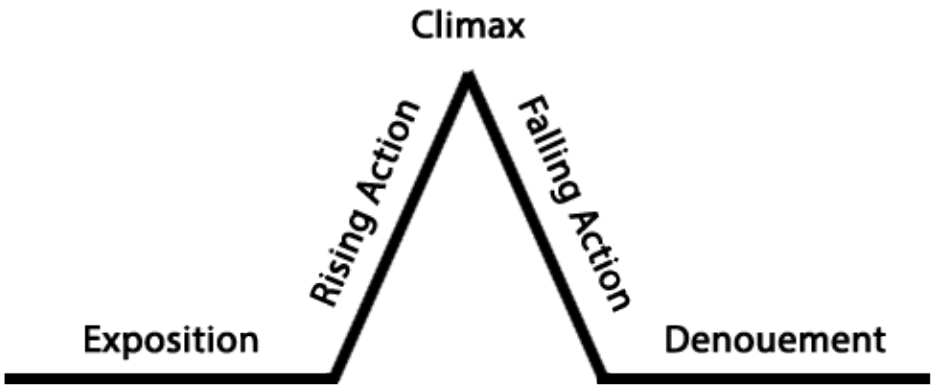
Lastly, fiction is written differently from other prose, such as that science textbook or that family e-mail thread. Literary writers utilize language and structure in compelling, startling, and often beautiful ways. They will load the text with allusions, literary devices, elaborate or intricate structures or plot twists, and use all of these as a vehicle to carry the story.

In the next sections, you will learn more about the ways in which authors play with structure, time, place, language, literary devices, allusions -- rearranging the basic elements of "story" to create something unique and meaningful.

Scaling Freytag's Pyramid, or Structure

You may know it as "plot structure" or by its proper name of "Freytag's Pyramid," but chances are you are already familiar with the pyramidal structure that describes the various elements of plot.

Not every piece of fiction will follow this general structure, and this structure is not relegated solely to the realm of fiction. But by and large, when discussing the elements of plot, you will refer to Freytag's Pyramid.



A. Exposition:

The base of Freytag's pyramid is the "Exposition," or -- roughly understood -- "the beginning." This beginning is where we meet the characters, get introduced to the world of the story, and get a taste for some of the conflict that will arise later on.

Every exposition looks different; some may begin with an introduction of characters, while others may immediately outline the scope of the world that the reader has just entered. But all serve to introduce the reader to the story. Think of the exposition as the "pilot episode" for the rest of the book -- the hook meant to grab your attention and make you care about the characters, the plot, the world, and the language of the story.

To test your understanding of exposition, check out this question on the first chapter of the novel *The Known World* and see if you can analyze why the author chose to start his story in the way that he did.

B. Rising Action

This is when "things begin to happen." The plot begins to thicken, as they say -- characters begin to get into all sorts of conflicts, whether internal or external, more is revealed about the world of the story, and dramatic tensions begin to arise. This is what we might call "the middle" of the story -- when things are happening but nothing has come to a head yet.

It can be somewhat difficult separating out the rising action from the exposition in some cases, particularly in stories where nothing much seems to happen. But it's important that you are able to recognize on a general level *what* an author is

trying to accomplish in the rising action of a story, regardless of whether you can explicitly identify this as "rising action." This is where you should pay particular attention to conflicts, to simmering tensions, to clues or hints that the author may be using to foreshadow future events.

C. Climax

The climax is the "peak," the point to which all the rising action -- all the conflicts, all the tensions, all the dramatic interludes and literary devices -- has been building. This is where secrets are revealed, plots are twisted, characters come to epiphanies or major realizations, and the story reaches its apex.

But the climax doesn't have to look like an episode of a Thursday night procedural -- there is no "recipe" that determines how a climax actually appears or functions. There are many stories where nothing much seems to happen and the climax is largely internal -- the point at which a character makes a startling realization, or learns an essential truth about him or herself, or makes a major decision that does not impact anyone else. Again, the important thing here is to be able to recognize what an author is doing and how s/he leads up to a climax. What devices did s/he use? What allusions did s/he make? In what way did the language influence the telling of the story? Again, rather than simply labeling this part of the story, you'll want to think critically about how the story functions, and why the author made the choices that s/he did in order to propel the story to this point.

D. Falling Action

The falling action is the aftermath, the fallout, the moment in the story in which the characters grapple with the consequences of what has been said, done, decided. This is where the story begins to wind down. Not every story will have a falling action, and certainly the falling action can't always be neatly defined. Again, it's more important that you can recognize the aftermath of the climax -- understanding both how and why the author created this particular "fallout" situation for the characters. This is where a lot of rich character analysis will happen, as you watch characters grapple with consequences, decisions, and the resolutions (or partial resolutions) of the major conflicts of the text.

E. Resolution / Denouement

Ah, the "end" of the story -- the part of the text in which everything gets all tied up and the characters live happily ever after.

Or not.

In genre fiction -- mysteries, romances, and the like -- this is when the killer is caught, the marriage is planned, the detective shuts down another satisfying case and prepares for the next.

But in modern literature, you're far more likely to see an open ending -- the kind of ambiguous ending that concretely concludes the particular events of the story while leaving the door wide open for a multitude of unpredictable things to happen next. In the books you'll read for AP English Literature, it is far more likely that the resolution will *not* contain some kind of definitive "end action;" instead, the story will draw to a close, and you, the reader, will have the distinct sense of life going on somewhere beyond the pages of the book you have just finished.

Thus, to analyze a resolution or denouement for its own sake is not particularly useful; it is highly unlikely you will be asked to identify the component parts of a story, particularly as Freytag's pyramid was developed to analyze ancient Greek drama, which followed a particular structure that today's more open-ended or modernist texts do not.

Instead, keep this term in your mind so that you can accurately discuss the elements of story; rather than referring to "the end" of a text, refer to the specific events of the "resolution" or "denouement." It's also helpful to have a general understanding of these terms, as they will likely come up on the AP English Literature exam.

Finally, Freytag's pyramid will only take you so far; it is far more important to have a good working understanding of how the author creates drama and meaning -- *how* the world is built and the characters are introduced in the exposition, *why* the author chose to reveal a particular conflict during a certain point in the story -- than to nitpick over whether specific events belong in the falling action or in the resolution.

Literary Devices

Aside from structure, one of the main distinctions between literary prose and other forms of prose is the use of literary devices. Literary devices are just one way for an author to create layers of meaning, and to use language to tell the story.

One of the major complaints that students express when reading literature is that authors don't just *say* what they *mean*. Instead, they cloak meaning in metaphor, in allusion, in allegory. They confound a traditional linear story structure by buckling it in on itself, giving you hints in the form of flashback or foreshadowing, alluding to the events of the climax well before it happens, tacking the end on to the beginning.

But even when writers don't play with or invert the traditional structure of a story, they distinguish themselves by use of other literary devices that make the language "pop." Metaphors, similes, allusion, the use of diverse syntaxes for different characters, pepperings of particular dialects, figurative language, imagery, deeply descriptive language -- all of these are ways that the author enhances a story.

For more on literary devices common to prose, see here.

Though it's important to be able to name and identify these literary devices when you see them, it is far more important to be able to perform an analysis of how and why they are used. Yes, it's very impressive to refer to a writer's use of "synecdoche," but it is even more impressive (and important) to explain *why* a writer's words are ironic, as well as *how* the writer creates or describes a specific situation. So even if you don't remember the definition of "litote" on test day, it's much more important that you pay careful attention to how a writer constructs a piece so that you can refer to specific literary devices when writing your knockout analysis of a major literary work.

For more practice on literary devices, see here, here, here, here, and here.

Tone and Mood

Tone and mood may already be familiar to you -- these refer to how the writer creates a specific feeling to the text, or conveys an emotion. Tone is usually

defined as “how the writer feels about something,” but in the world of the text, the writer should be (and usually is) absent. Instead, tone will now refer to the way the characters feel something -- how they express their emotions, how they speak about certain things, what they feel.

It is important for you to be able to analyze tone and how tone is constructed because this will help inform your understanding of characterization; a character’s feelings and emotions, particularly as regards a certain topic, will help to create your understanding of how that character “works,” leading to a richer analysis of why the author made particular choices and how s/he executed them.

Tone is created through diction (specific word choice) and imagery; pay close attention to the language of the characters and of the world you are inhabiting, because the language will form the backbone of any analysis of tone that you perform. Be prepared to cite specific examples from the text when discussing how an author creates tone.

The AP English Literature exam loves to ask about shifts in tone -- when the character’s perspectives *changes*. Read closely and again, consider language; make sure you are reading closely enough to catch subtle gradations between one emotion and the next.

For more on tone and tone shifts, see here and here.

Like tone, mood is closely related to emotion. We can think of mood as the general atmosphere of the text; for example, a story that starts “it was a dark and stormy night and the wind wailed over the moors like a despondent lover” will most likely be dark, dramatic, a little gothic (and probably written by an 8th grader). Whereas a story that starts “The lollipop kingdom of Princess Bluebell was a sunshiny place to be, indeed” will likely have an entirely different mood. Again, mood depends on language -- what words did the author choose to express a specific feeling? How does the structure of the sentences and the imagery used create a specific atmosphere to anchor the story?

Consider, for example, the way this paragraph is written:

Everyone in Sameland conforms. No one is different. We love our country. We love our leader. We do not seek reward. We work for work’s sake. Sameland is the best country in the world. Sameland is the only country in the world.

There are no particularly descriptive words in this passage, no flowery imagery. But the sentence structure here -- short, sharp, staccato -- creates an almost military effect that helps us to understand that Sameland is not a very nice place to be, creating a specific and ominous mood.

Think of tone as being in the foreground (specific to certain individuals, and seen in what the characters express) and mood as being the background, or general atmosphere, or a particular piece.

Think you got it? Practice your understanding of mood here.

Tropes, Allusions, and Archetypes

As discussed in the Literary Devices section, allusions are an important device that helps an author anchor a story more firmly in a larger context. In other words, allusions and references help authors create multiple layers of meaning that further enrich and enliven the story.

Frequent use of allusions is one reason (among many) for you to become as widely read as possible -- the larger the pool of books you have read, the greater your capacity to understand the allusions that authors will make. In the Western canon, allusions are often drawn from Biblical or mythological sources, so having a basic understanding of the Bible and of Greek mythology will serve you well.

You don't need to be a Biblical scholar or a mythologist, but you should understand the major tropes so that you can point out parallels and deepen your analysis of specific characters or plot points. For example, Shakespeare often peppers his work with references to the Bible (see Act I, scene iii of The Merchant of Venice) as well as to all forms of mythology.

Think you've got it? Test your understanding of allusions here.

Moreover, writers will return again and again to specific tropes and/or archetypes -- established or expected themes, motifs, and expressions.

For example, "star-crossed lovers" is a common trope (the love that cannot be -- what a delicious subject for so many writers), while Romeo and Juliet are our archetype of "star-crossed lovers" -- the most commonly accepted "perfect example" of a specific trope.

A word about allusions, archetypes, and tropes: you may have heard that you should stay away from cliche. But one of the best things about AP English Literature is that it gives you the chance to read widely and see just how different and how meaningful specific tropes, allusions, and archetypes *become* in the hands of a gifted writer. So though "star-crossed lovers" may be a commonly accepted idea, and Romeo and Juliet the idealized example, there is plenty of room for a writer to play with these concepts in literature. This is where meaningful engagement with the text begins -- in the ability to parse a situation or character with a full understanding of *where* this character came from -- in what literary or historical tradition they are based.

This will become important when we speak about context, further down.

Location, Location, Location, or: Setting

It's Rule #1 of real estate, and it's important in literature, too: the setting of a story will influence the story itself, as well as the characters. In fact, sometimes the setting becomes like another "ghost" character in the background, influencing and shaping the characters' actions, motivations, and emotions.

There are two types of setting: spatial and temporal. The spatial setting refers to the physical location -- where the characters are in space. New York? Nigeria? Panem? The moon?

The temporal setting refers to the *time* -- 1955? 3034? 2000 B.C.E?

Spatial and temporal setting will deeply influence and guide the trajectory of the story, as the writer will need to be true to the constraints of the setting. A story set in 2000 B.C.E will likely not contain modern technology or modern attitudes about gender equality, whereas a story set in a fictional place in the far future will likely feature all sorts of choices and technologies that are not available to us today, thereby changing what is possible in the world of the story. The trick in analyzing setting is understanding where and how the setting influences each part of the story -- does it create more opportunities for characters to interact? Does it provide a conflict? Does it engender specific attitudes or serve as an impetus for a particular action or emotion?

Setting is created in multiple ways, including descriptions of physical objects and references to particular times or technologies. A well-constructed setting relies on

constant reinforcement of these elements. For example, Harry Potter's world would not have been the same without a running description of Hogwarts School (particularly with the introduction of new and surprising facets of the school; the dynamism of these descriptions allowed to reader to step into Harry's shoes as a newcomer, and kept the setting from feeling stale across six books.) Think also of Gatsby -- East and West Egg (and what they symbolize) can be considered characters in their own right, anchoring and influencing different characters' desires, motivations, and interests.

As always, more important than the ability to define "spatial" and "temporal" is your ability to understand how different elements of the setting are *created* and their influence on the story, the characters, and the message.

For more on setting and its influence, check out this question.

Characterization

One of the most important elements of literature is characterization -- the way that characters are described and observed, the way they interact with each other, the way they pursue goals and react to conflicts.

Good literature features characters who are "round" -- well-developed, multi-dimensional, interesting... in other words, real. A "round" character is not necessarily a likeable one, or a "good guy." Instead, round characters are simply those that are very well-developed and complex, who have more than one motivation, more than one primary emotion, and who show growth (in whatever sense and on whatever fronts) over the course of the book.

Authors use both direct and indirect characterization to describe characters; direct characterization is simply a straight description: "She was tall, with long black hair and dark green eyes." Most authors will use this pretty regularly in order to establish some baseline idea of who the character actually is.

However, simply reading straight descriptions of a character can get pretty boring, and thus authors also rely on indirect characterization -- on allowing us to observe the character in his or her natural habitat or during conversations and interactions with other characters, in order to assess how s/he feels, thinks, acts, and reacts to particular stimuli.

In general, the majority of the characters you will encounter over the course of your AP English Literature readings will be "round" characters -- high-quality literature rarely contains "flat" characters unless they are there to make some kind of point or serve as archetypes.

When answering AP English Literature questions or responding to essay prompts, you need to demonstrate that you understand how to think about and analyze characters -- that you "get" how they work and what their function is. You'll need to pay close attention to the way they speak (diction, syntax), their interests and priorities, their backgrounds, their emotional connections, their social contexts (more on this later on), and even how they conduct themselves physically through space. (Are they agile hunters? Lethargic couch potatoes? Sick? Well? Particularly beautiful or ugly? Untraditional in their gender expression? How does their physical form affect and impact the way they interact with the world, and influence how the world treats them?)

You don't need to answer every single one of these questions for every single character you encounter in a given novel. But make sure that you understand how to parse at least some of this information as you analyze characters, because this is where their *complexity* lies. This is where a real and thorough analysis can be performed.

Because much of the heavy lifting of characterization is done indirectly -- through observation of the characters as they interact with others and with the world around them -- you can expect to make multiple inferences about a character's nature, interest, and disposition. Regardless of the question and of the type of character or situation, make sure that you can comfortably make and support inferences about the character's motivations, emotions, and actions.

Think you've got it? Check out some characterization questions here and here.

Elements of Character

There are different elements that influence all of the above. Your AP English Literature class will include multiple diverse representations of characters from all walks of life; doubtless their experiences are informed by the bodies they inhabit, the affiliations they hold, and the interests they develop over time. When analyzing a work of literature, pay close attention to how elements like race,

gender, physical ability, orientation, religious and political affiliations, and other potentially "explosive" subjects influence the character's desires and decisions.

This is not a new concept; think back to our Merchant of Venice example and remember that every character makes decisions based on his or her affiliation -- or his or her feelings regarding a particular affiliation. (And while The Merchant of Venice is a fairly anti-Semitic play, it is worth analyzing because it may be the first time in English literature that Jews are portrayed as real characters rather than caricatures of total evil.)

Shylock makes specific decisions because of his religious restrictions; his daughter Jessica also makes decisions around those affiliations (as well as the fact that she is a woman). Bassanio, meanwhile, is motivated partially by his love for Portia.

This is just one example of how characters' affiliations will impact their decision-making; as always, be informed and aware of everything you know about a character. Often, it is these particular elements -- gender, physical ability, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic class -- that will make a story truly interesting and a character truly well-rounded.

Don't be afraid to make controversial statements about characters, *provided you can back them up with direct and specific references to the text*. Modern texts are not afraid to play with concepts of identity, so use what is in the text to help drive your understanding of characters.

Think you've got it? Assess your understanding of characters' rich internal lives here.

Context

As mentioned in above sections, context matters. Characters do not exist in hermetically sealed vacuums, and so how a character speaks, feels, acts, thinks, or interacts with the rest of the world will necessarily be impacted by his or her social and historical context. Again, consider Jim in *Huck Finn* or Shylock in *Merchant of Venice*. All of these characters are anchored in a specific historical and social context that helps to inform, shape, and influence their actions and motivations. If *Huck Finn* were written today, it would look completely different;

removing slavery from the social context would necessarily create an entirely different book, even if many of the other elements remained the same.

As mentioned in the section on allusions, you don't have to be a historian to pick up on context (and be able to analyze it intelligently.) But you do need to be familiar with the world of a book in order to perform a meaningful analysis. Any discussion of *The Great Gatsby* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* necessarily relies on some discussion of race, class, and history. For open-ended essay questions in particular, choose a book whose historical and social context is familiar to you so that you can perform an analysis that is both intelligent, meaningful, specific, and well-rounded.

Think you can pick up on context clues and use them to perform a well-rounded analysis? Practice here.

Theme and Message

Theme -- every English teacher's favorite word. When analyzing either a section of a work or a work in its entirety, you'll need to be able to parse out or analyze the themes that the author highlights.

There is a distinction between the theme and the main idea. If the main idea is specific and can be described in full sentences ("The main idea of this passage was that jealousy is a disfiguring emotion"), then the theme is somewhat more broad and encompassing and can be expressed in just one or two words ("the theme of this piece is jealousy.")

But how do you determine the themes? How do you parse out any messages that the author is trying to impart?

Themes and messages rely on repetition. A passage will return over and over, or be preoccupied solely with, specific themes. So if you're noticing a significant amount of repetition, or you're seeing details that all point back to the same concept, then chances are that you have found your theme.

On the AP English Literature exam, it's unlikely that a multiple choice question will be overly concerned with determining either the main idea or the theme of an excerpt. But the essay questions will almost certainly have room for a discussion of theme, since it's one of the anchoring discussion points in all of literature and

literary analysis. So make sure that you've spent some time before the exam practicing how to determine the theme, the final "takeaway" that the author wants to impart. Whether through repetition of specific words, certain concepts, or just key details, authors have multiple ways to establish theme, which will make your analysis much easier to perform.

Think you've got it? Check out these practice questions here -- and remember, the AP English Literature exam will not merely ask you "what is the theme of this passage?" Instead, be on the lookout for different wordings that ask you to perform the same function. "What is the main concern of this story" is simply another way of asking "what is the theme of this story? What is it trying to say?" If you are able to answer this question, you will have taken the first step in effectively analyzing and evaluating a piece.

How to Approach Poetry Passages for AP English Literature

General Overview

Poetry questions will make up a significant portion of the exam. Of the four to six passages you'll be asked to analyze on the test, roughly half will be poetry, and at least one of the essays you'll be asked to write will deal with poetic analysis.

So it behooves you to have a strong understanding of how poetry "works."

Paying the Meter, or The Difference Between Poetry and Prose

If prose is defined as "anything that isn't poetry," then how do we define poetry?

Generally understood, poetry is written in verse, which follows some kind of *structure*. Until the late 19th century, poetry always followed a specific structure -- metrical straitjackets into which meaning would be stuffed.

But what *is* meter? And what is its relationship to form?

Meter is the *rhythm* of the poem -- i.e. the number, pattern, and stress of the beats in each line.

Though meter is meant to make a poem "flow" -- to make it sound pleasing and musical to the ear -- assessing and creating the meter is often a lot of grunt work, as it involves counting syllables and muttering under your breath to determine whether a beat is stressed (long / emphasized) or unstressed (short / not emphasized).

To "scan" (i.e. assess or determine) the meter of a poem, you'll need a good working understanding of how the English language is actually pronounced so that you know which syllables to emphasize and which to leave unstressed. (This is one of many reasons that some believe that poetry is untranslatable -- stress patterns simply don't translate across different languages.)

The most common form of meter that you will be asked to assess (or at least recognize) is iambic pentameter (used heavily in Shakespeare).

An "iamb" is simply an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable; the word "pentameter" refers to the fact that there are five groups of syllables (aka "feet") in a given line. In other words, if there are five iambs (unstressed/stressed syllable pairs) in a line of poetry, the meter of the poem is iambic pentameter.

For example:

Shall *I* (one pair of syllables = "foot")

com*pare* (one pair of syllables = "foot")

thee *to* (one pair of syllables = "foot")

a *sum* (one pair of syllables = "foot")

mer's *day* (one pair of syllables = "foot")

It can be a little bit tricky to train your mind to think in this way, but the nice thing about poetry is that it's meant to "flow" and sound almost musical, which can make scanning the meter a little bit easier.

Though iambic pentameter is among the most common and recognizable meters -- notable for the pleasingly singsong-y rhythm it creates -- it's worthwhile for you to be able to recognize other forms of meter, even though you will never be called upon to use them in your own writing, and you will rarely have to identify a poem's meter out of context. Still, understanding meter will help to significantly deepen and enrich your understanding of poetry. (If nothing else, you'll gain an appreciation for how brutally difficult it is to write in a specific meter.)

Trochee → an inverted iamb, a trochee is a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Here is an example from Auden:

Earth, re

ceive an

hon oured

guest;

Spondee → a spondee is a pattern of stressed and stressed syllables.

An example from Longfellow:

By the

shore of

Git che

Gum me

Anapest → unstressed, unstressed, stressed (three syllables in all)

An example from Rowling:

Oh Pott*er*

you rot*ter*

oh what *have*

you done

Dactyl → stressed, unstressed, unstressed (also three syllables).

(A fun trick for "dactyls" -- "dactyl" is a fancy word for "finger," because your finger is segmented into three parts -- everything leading up to the knuckle (long), then the area from the knuckle to joint (short), then from the joint to the tip (short.) I.e., a dactyl is a "finger" made up on long (stressed), short (unstressed), short (unstressed) syllables.

Dactylic hexameter (i.e., six dactyls in one line) is most often associated with epic poetry. The Odyssey and the Iliad are written in dactylic hexameter, though true dactylic hexameter is close to impossible to achieve in English, so this is a less than perfect example:

Sing, god dess,

the *an* ger

of Pe *le*

us‘s son

A *chi* lles"

Even if you aren’t familiar with the meter of specific poems, just remember the following:

-In order to determine meter, you’ll need to parse the stressed and unstressed syllable and figure out how many feet are in a given line (five? It’s pentameter. Three? Tetrameter. Six? Hexameter. And so forth.)

For more practice with meter, see here and here.

-On test day, you may forget every single thing you ever learned about meter. But just as important as meter is form -- a related concept. If meter is the rhythm of a poem, then the form provides its “rules,” determining the rhyme scheme, the number of lines, even the number of syllables per line. Later in this topic outline, we will devote more time to a specific form, the sonnet; other common forms include elegies, doggerel, villanelles, sestinas, and odes.

Lastly, on the AP test, you’ll need to differentiate between “free verse” (poetry with no specific metrical structure, as seen here) and “blank verse,” (unrhymed iambic pentameter, often seen in Shakespeare, as here.)

Think you’ve got it? Practice your understanding of the “rules” of poetry -- meter, verse, form, and rhyme scheme -- here.

The Sonnet

Sonnets are such a special and commonly studied form of poetry that they deserve their own section here. We will focus on three kinds of sonnets:

The Shakespearean Sonnet

The Shakespearean sonnet, which is 14 lines written in iambic pentameter, is likely the most familiar to you.

The poem is divided into three "quatrains" (sections, in essence) of four lines each (quat = four); the last two lines, called a couplet, resolve the conflict outlined in the three quatrains.

The Shakespearean sonnet's rhyme scheme is:

abab (first quatrain)

cdcd (second quatrain)

efef (third quatrain)

gg (couplet)

Of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, only three do not conform to this structure.

You may have heard that Shakespeare's sonnets -- and sonnets in general -- are mostly concerned with romantic love. The first 126 are addressed to a beautiful young man, whereas the final sonnets (127 - 154) are all about a "dark lady" who is toying with the hearts of both the poet and the young man. Leaving aside questions of whether this truly reflects Shakespeare's personal life and feelings, you'll want to think about *why* Shakespeare chose this difficult and highly structured form in order to convey his turbulent passions.

For more on the Shakespearean sonnet -- particularly rhyme scheme, stanza, and other forms of poetic organization -- check out these practice questions.

The Petrarchan Sonnet

Developed by a group of Renaissance poets and claimed by Petrarch, the Petrarchan sonnets were written in Italian, a language with a cadence that differs vastly from that of English. Most Petrarchan sonnets were written in iambic pentameter, just as English sonnets were, but many were written in tetrameter and even hexameter.

Unlike the Shakespearean, or English, sonnet, this form is divided into an "octave" (8 lines) and a "sestet" (6 lines) -- there are still fourteen lines, but they are differently grouped.

The first eight lines, which serve roughly the same function as the first three quatrains of an English sonnet, are organized in the rhyme scheme:

a / b/b/a/a/b/b/a

The sestet (last six lines) are generally organized in a

c/d/e/c/d/e or c/d/c/d/c/d structure.

This part of the poem begins to comment or try and solve the problem outlined in the octave; the change in rhyme scheme indicates a "turn" or "shift" (also known as the volta) that marks the difference between the problem of the octave and the solution of the sestet.

When analyzing a Petrarchan sonnet, pay special attention to the volta; the AP English Literature exam will focus many of its questions on the rich landscape of the changing emotions expressed in this turn.

For more "turn" questions (which apply whether the form is English or Petrarchan) see here.

The Spenserian Sonnet

Developed by Edmund Spenser, the Spenserian sonnet is another fourteen-line poem, but unlike the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets, the poem does not seek to set up some sort of problem that is then resolved in the final two (Shakespearean) or six (Petrarchan) lines.

The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian sonnet is distinct: abab / bcbc / cdcd / ee. This links every single quatrain to the one that comes before it, so that the Spenserian sonnet's "volta" is not always found in the same place, as is common in the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets.

Should the essay question focus on sonnets, you'll want to have a good working understanding of the difference between the three major forms, but even if you don't remember every single difference between the three, you'll likely be able to

figure it out based on the distinctive rhyme schemes. For example, you'll know the Petrarchan sonnet instantly as it usually does not end with a rhyming couplet, as the Shakespearean and Spenserian sonnets do. You'll recognize the Spenserian sonnet for its unusual rhyme scheme, which in turn will help you figure out how it's divided (like Shakespeare's, into three quatrains and a couplet). If you remember just one thing about each sonnet, you'll be able to determine its exact form easily.

But more important that simply identifying form is your ability to analyze what each form actually seeks to do. As always, play close attention to the words being used and to the "turn" -- this is the "meat" of any sonnet-based question on the AP English Literature exam.

For more on "turns" or voltas, check out these questions here and here.

Rhyme Scheme

We briefly touched on rhyme scheme in the previous section, but it's important for you to be able to analyze how a poem's rhyme scheme works. Rhyme scheme is often related to form -- a sonnet, for example, necessitates a rhyme scheme; so does a limerick -- but this is not always the case. Rhyme schemes, as noted above, are expressed in letters: a, a, b, b, c, c, and so forth. Matching letters rhyme with each other. To figure out rhyme scheme, all you need to do is skim the poem and figure out which words rhyme with one another; usually, rhymes are found at the ends of lines, making your job easy.

But sometimes writers seek to heighten the drama of a piece, or to create a different tone to it, or to highlight a specific theme or feeling, or merely to increase the musicality of the poem. In that case, the poet might use internal or middle rhyme -- rhymes found within the poem itself, in places other than the end. A famous example from pop music is The Beatles' song Hey Jude:

Hey Jude

Don't make it *bad*

Take a *sad* song and make it better

Remember to let her into your *heart*

Then you can *start* to make it better

Internal / middle rhymes can also be found within a single line:

"All *alone*, I let out a *groan"*

As with all poetry, think about the intentionality of the rhyme -- poets choose specific schemes for a reason, so consider why an internal rhyme makes sense within the context of a poem. Is the author trying to convey a particular meaning by rhyming two internal words? Is the line in question particularly beautiful or meaningful? What is the poet trying to do?

This is a question you should ask yourself when considering other forms of rhyme, such as slant rhymes (rhymes that are almost rhymes, but not quite). For example:

All *alone,* I let out a *groan*

I called to my mother, but no one was *home*."

Home sounds just similar enough to "alone" and "groan" to be considered a type of rhyme, but though the vowel sound is the same, the consonant is sufficiently different that this isn't a true rhyme at all.

The same is true of "eye rhymes" -- rhymes that look the same but actually aren't rhymes at all. "Good" and "food" seem like they should rhyme, but don't. So do "love" and "move." All writing is intentional, and perhaps no writing more so than poetry, so consider why a poet would try to "fool" you with an eye rhyme. More importantly, consider whether or not this actually works -- whether it helps to create a real sense of rhythm, or whether it just looks strange and confusing.

Rhyme scheme is one of the most fun elements of poem, as it harkens back to some of the most elemental forms of language and wordplay. Enjoy practicing questions on rhyme scheme here.

Imagery

One of the primary distinctions between poetry and prose -- other than the meter and form, of course -- is that poetry often contains different forms of imagery that seek to engage all five senses. While prose often utilizes various literary devices

that see to enhance the reading experience and beautify the language, poetry is particularly noted for its embrace of beautiful and sensuous imagery.

When thinking of imagery, just remember the five senses; as you read the poem, mark down which images relate to which sense. It is unlikely that a poem will contain imagery that appeals to every single one of the five senses, but you'll want to get into the habit of annotating poetry and taking stock of the types of images used in order to provide proof for any assertions that you may make later on in the course of writing your essays.

The five senses are:

Sight (visual imagery)

Hearing (auditory imagery)

Taste (gustatory imagery)

Smell (olfactory imagery)

Tough (kinesthetic imagery)

When reading the following poem, for example, noting the imagery surrounding the food (gustatory). Think about how it impacts how you actually read the poem -- does it make the food seem appealing, or is another emotion at work here?

Similarly, consider the imagery in the last line of this poem; though subtle, think about how the line about the "whip crack of the mortgage" uses auditory imagery to create a specific and intense feeling.

Get into the habit of labeling the images that you read with whatever symbol will most accurately and quickly connote the five senses for you; you'll be amazed at how much more effectively you'll be able to marshal evidence and back up your opinions when you have fully annotated the text.

Figurative Language, continued

Closely related to imagery is figurative language. Doubtless you are familiar with common literary devices such as personification, metaphors, similes, and allusions; for a more complete list of terms, see here as well as here.

Rather than redefine these terms and definitions, we will instead focus on how to use this figurative language to analyze the poem. As always, mark up the poem; label any instances of figurative language, whether personification, allusion, similes, metaphors, or anything else. This will help get you thinking about how the author creates a particular mood or imparts a specific theme; if you have concrete evidence to back up your claims, you are already primed to write a well-supported essay.

For a fuller review of common literary devices and figurative language, see here,

here, and here. These questions will assess your understanding of the types of poetic devices you are likely to see on the exam; they should also spur you to begin thinking about the effectiveness of these devices. Think about *why* a poet would make a specific allusion or reference to myth (as here), or what can possibly be achieved by cloaking your meaning in figurative language (as here). Most important, as you consider these ideas, remember Keats' theory of "negative capability," which undergirds his entire theory and philosophy of poetry and art. Keats believed that poetry -- a form designed to celebrate beauty and mystery -- should trump established knowledge; for this reason, poetry's obliqueness or unusual phrasing is celebrated rather than derided. If a line or a verse is so laden with metaphor, or studded with simile, or loaded with hard-to-parse but gorgeously worded phrases, that is a function of its "negative capability" -- its desire for beauty and mystery. This may be a frustrating concept for an AP English Literature student to consider, but it is a fundamental one to remember if you are seriously invested in the analysis of poetry. Sometimes, you have to simply appreciate the image, whatever it is, and understand the work that it is doing in the poem is very different than the work that a straightforward line of prose might strive to do.

Remember this, and you'll be well on your way to creating an effective analysis of imagery in poetry.

Poetic Devices

Poems are structured to be able to "hold" or contain all of the gorgeous and mysterious imagery we just spoke about in the previous section. As such, they are often formed strangely -- just think of e.e. cummings' famous poems, which are written entirely in lowercase and often feature words or letters that simply trail off the page like lost ducklings (a cummings-esque image, indeed).

This is not a conversation about structure or meter -- the prefabricated "houses" in which poems live -- but instead about what happens inside a modern poem. For example, when analyzing a poem, you'll need to understand why a line leaves off when it does; in older forms, such as sonnets or villanelles, this is because the form demands it. But in newer forms, such as free verse, you will have to determine the "method to the madness."

For example, this modern free-verse poem contains multiple instances of enjambment, in which one line runs over to the next with no punctuation ("we could sell / the black walnut tree / to the lumberman"). When analyzing poetry, specifically in the essay section of the test, think about *why* a poet would choose to structure specific lines in this way, lacking punctuation. What effect does this create?

Similarly, be able to analyze the caesura -- the complete pause in a line of poetry. This is closely related to enjambment, but not exactly the same; to understand it, you'll need to figure out *why* the poet has chosen this form. Generally, caesuras are used to create a sense of drama in the poem, to increase the tension or otherwise heighten the emotion that the poet is trying to convey. Remember that poetry is meant to be read aloud -- that there is music to the cadences and the rhythms -- and so it is always helpful to read to yourself, quietly, under your breath, in order to receive the full effect of the poem.

Tone

Briefly discussed in the section on sonnets, tone is an extremely important part of poetry. This conveys a *feeling*; all writing should strive to convey a meaningful emotion, but perhaps there are few more potent forms of emotional writing than poetry. There's a reason that people express their love, eulogize their dead, lament their losses, celebrate their victories, spin epic ballads of their peoplehood, and pray to their gods in poetry. There may be no better form to celebrate pure emotion.
For this reason, pay close attention to how specific poems convey emotions -- what words and structure they use in order to connect the reader with some form of deep emotion. Tone is created in a myriad of ways -- through language, through rhyme scheme, through the structure and form of the poem itself, through imagery, through figurative language and poetic devices -- so pay close attention to the general feeling that you get as you read the poem. Think about what the author is trying to say, and how s/he expresses it.

Figure out whether you can use the words in this poem to understand its tone.

Then, remember that -- as in a sonnet -- there will often be a "turn" or "shift" in tone. Poems express complex emotions and provide a snapshot or tell a story about something specific; for that reason, poetry is very often not one-note, but instead contains rich and varied emotions.

As you read a poem, highlight or circle specific "tone words" -- any words that convey a specific feeling or emotion -- and figure out if there are any changes in the poem. If the first few tone words you circle all point to one emotion, and later words point to a different emotion, find the first instance of a tone word that points to a second emotion and circle it; chances are, you have found your "volta," your shift. (Even better, all that annotation means you'll be ready to cite evidence when writing your essay about tonal shifts.)

Think you've got it? Practice your understanding of tonal shifts in poetry with this question. And for further practice on attitudes that the poet might hold -- which, by the way, you can easily deduce or infer in the exact same way that you determine the tone -- check out this question.

Contemporary Poetry

The AP will probably feature at least one contemporary poem. There is no secret to analyzing contemporary poetry, other than to realize that its rhyme scheme and preoccupations might be different or untraditional. But when reading contemporary poetry, think back to the social and historical context discussed in the topic outline on approaching prose questions. Consider whether the author is trying to address a specific problem. Think about the shifting attitudes and social or historical context in which the author is writing. This will help you analyze the many nuances of the poem.

For example, though WWI is no longer exactly "contemporary," this poem is a prime example of the importance of analyzing the social and historical context. If you did not know about the atrocities of WWI -- or the fact that this poem was a strong reaction to it -- then the poem would lack its power and its punch. But once you understand that the poem was written as a protest against the nationalist pep that led thousands of soldiers to enlist and die for their countries, you can easily recognize this as the bitter polemic -- against war, against government, against death -- that it truly is.

If you are seeing a poem for the first time and have no idea of its context, read any accompanying blurbs that the AP test gives you. See if you recognize the author's name. If they give you a date of birth, that could also be helpful -- 1576 is a and 1976 are both clues that let you know the general historical and social context of a poem.

As always, to be aware of the nuances that exist in poetry, keep your eyes open. Pay attention to the words used, the ideas mentioned, any allusions that the author incorporates.

General Takeaways

If there is any secret at all to doing well on the AP English Literature test, it is simply to pay close attention, to mark down and marshal your evidence, and to read widely and carefully. Do this, and you will be sure to find success on every section of the test, from the multiple choice questions to the essay portion.

Want to practice more poetry questions? Check out this section of Learnerator's AP English Literature practice questions, and remember to read carefully!

How to Approach Drama Passages for AP English Literature

General Overview

Drama is kind of like a cross between poetry and prose; it contains rich symbolism and literary devices, is often written in meter, and expresses complex emotions -- but overall, it tells a moving story about specific characters. In order to effectively analyze dramatic passages, you'll need the entire toolkit that you amassed in the previous two outlines. Much of what you read here will hearken back to what you learned in the Prose and Poetry sections of this outline, and you will be referred back to those outlines in order to refresh your understanding of setting, device, and structure.

To be able to analyze a dramatic passage, you must remember that plays were meant to be performed. Though Shakespeare is a mainstay of the modern American English classroom, he would have been horrified to see his plays duly (and dully) read in context of the classroom, rather than performed in the vibrant and chaotic atmosphere of the Elizabethan theater. So when you are reading a dramatic passage -- whether Shakespeare or Mamet, Albee or or Wilson -- remember that you are reading a living text, one in which characters move around and declaim and talk to each other and interact and breathe.

This will help you come into a fuller understanding of the elements of drama.

Telling the Story

Much like a traditional prose story, dramas are structured like a pyramid. (In fact, Freytag's Pyramid was developed to analyze ancient Greek dramas.) Dramas have an extra little "bump" on the way up the pyramid, though, called an "inciting incident" -- the issue, conflict, or event that gets "the ball rolling" and gets the characters to truly interact in a significant and possibly conflicted way. This inciting incident can be anything, but it must lead to the "rising action" and get the characters shaken up and ready to embrace the conflicted ride ahead of them.

Other elements of plot are exactly the same across prose and drama, so for a refresher course on the elements of plot, see here. And for extra practice on the

inciting incident, check out this question; try and figure out why this question will help move along your understanding of the inciting incident.

Genres

There are three main genres in drama: tragedies, comedies, and histories. These designations mainly apply to ancient and Shakespearean dramas, as today's dramas have more nuance and are harder to categorize with any level of concrete specificity.

Tragedies are exactly what they sound like -- sad plays where someone dies at the end. Macbeth is a tragedy; so is Romeo and Juliet. To test your knowledge of tragedies, check out this question.

Comedies are a little bit harder to parse; they are not necessarily traditionally light-hearted and fun (though they can be). Instead, the defining feature of a comedy is that it ends in marriage. A Midsummer Night's Dream is the perfect example of a Shakespearean comedy, as it is lighthearted and a little bit bawdy (Shakespeare truly enjoyed his saucy jokes) and it ends with everyone enmeshed in their own private Happy Ever After. So though it might not make you laugh, it would have had Elizabethan audiences in stitches; more importantly, it would have given them that classic "happy ending" that audiences so crave. For more on Shakespearean comedies, see the Midsummer Night's Dream questions.

Finally, we have Histories -- plays that outline the lives and times of a specific historical figure. Again, Shakespeare did this well with plays about English monarchs Richard and Henry. The events of the play might be "based on real events" (i.e. somewhat fictionalized but overall true, or true-ish, accounts of the lives of specific historical figures. Scholars have spent some time researching whether Shakespeare got his history right, and if you want to impress your English teacher, you should catalogue and assess their findings in a well-structured research paper.) For more on Shakespeare's histories, check out these questions.

Characterization

Dramas are almost purely characterization. We rely on the characters to *tell* us what they are thinking and feeling (either in monologues/soliloquies or in their conversations with other characters), and we have the privilege of observing them

interact with one another in multiple types of situations. Therefore, a deep understanding of characterization is an elemental part of analyzing drama. In order to truly appreciate the playwright's characterization, we must be aware of two things:

1.Character Types and Patterns

2.The structure of the play, and how characterization is revealed in different moments of the play and in different structures

The first thing to consider is the character type and pattern. In our previous discussion on prose passages, we touched upon the concept of foils and archetypes. Foils -- characters that serve to contrast each other in a deep and meaningful way -- are especially apparent and important in dramatic texts (particularly Shakespearean plays). Hamlet, for example, has his foils in Laertes, Horatio, and Fortinbras -- all of these characters serve to contrast with him in one way or another, emphasizing the depths of his insanity. Because plays are so firmly rooted in dialogue, we can use characters' speech patterns, syntax, and diction to help reveal which characters may be acting (pun intended) as foils for each other.

(For more on diction and word choice -- and how this influences characterization -- see this question).

Another pattern to keep in mind is that of the archetype; if foils help us compare and contrast different characters, then archetypes help us understand the function of specific characters. In the prose section, we discussed Romeo and Juliet as an archetype (or perfect example) of all star-crossed lovers. In some ways, Hamlet has become our archetype for a moody, emotionally disturbed teenager; Holden Caulfield owes a lot to Hamlet, even if he wouldn't agree.

Macbeth has become our archetype for somewhat weak power-hungry men easily turned into monsters (see: Frank Underwood in Netflix's popular House of Cards, or George Pemberton in Ron Rash's brilliant novel Serena.) When analyzing characters, ask yourself: is this character an archetype -- a perfect example of a well-known trope? In ancient Greek or Shakespearean plays, you will find yourself saying "yes" to that question far more often than you will in more contemporary plays, which seek to explore singular or "modern" events that would have confounded an archetypal character. But if a character's beliefs seem

very set and specific -- if s/he makes decisions that are easily recognizable because we have seen them before in other characters -- then consider: what is the function of this character? What is s/he doing, and for what purpose? What larger message is the author trying to convey?
Consider, for example, a woman who has become an archetype for a dissatisfied housewife struggling with an emergent feminism (a feminism that is so emergent, incidentally, that it predates that label by a hundred years.) When answering this question, ask yourself: how did this character become an archetype for a dissatisfied woman chafing against the restraints of her traditional lifestyle? What other, older archetypes does she draw upon or resist as she yearns towards a kind of egalitarianism and freedom? And how do her motivations, opinions, and speeches serve her as she fights for the things that she wants?

These are important questions to ask yourself when thinking about characterization -- not just in dramas, but in all literary works.

Equally important to the analysis of this question is a deep understanding of structure, and how structure functions to enrich a character's motivations, emotions, and comprehensibility to the reader.

Plays are written as dialogues, or conversations between two or more people. This can be an incredibly useful place to observe some indirect characterization in action; after all, the way characters speak to one another (and the things they choose to speak about) can reveal volumes about how a character "works:" what s/he thinks, feels, believes, who s/he really is.

But remember also that monologues -- impassioned speeches addressed to another characters -- serve to help us understand the character's emotions just as well as dialogues, because monologues are where they tell us directly what is on their mind. And soliloquies might be the most useful tool of all, since this is where a character will reveal to us -- and only to us, the audience, not to any other characters in the play -- what they are thinking, feeling, and craving. So pay close attention to the structure of the plays, and watch out for monologues and soliloquies, as they just might reveal the inner workings of a specific character's mind in a way that allows the audience to truly connect with that character.

For more on how monologues are structured -- and how they help us come to a richer understanding of characterization -- see here and here.

Stage Notes

Monologues and soliloquies are not necessarily specific to dramas -- though they are most common on the stage -- but one particular structure is: stage notes. Since a play doesn't have any room to describe the setting in much detail (especially as the audience sees the stage right before them), the playwright has to rely on stage notes to give the audience of some sense of what is happening at any given time. This is useful both for the actors (who need some direction as regards what to do with their bodies in physical space) as well as for "the readers at home," who aren't viewing the play as traditionally intended, but following along.

When watching a play, you don't need to worry about stage notes since you them in action before you. You may notice things like a character's movement -- how s/he arrives or exits the stage, where s/he stands or sits, or how s/he acts and reacts physically to other characters in the same space -- but you will not see the descriptions that the playwright has included as directions for the characters. While "exit stage right" doesn't tell you very much about a character's motivation or emotions, "stalks off stage in a huff" or "whispers" tell you a lot about how the lines are intended to be delivered and how the play is supposed to be performed. So make sure that you are reading the stage directions, especially as they will help you visualize the setting in your mind. Is it described as "threadbare" and "poor"? "Opulent"? "Mysterious"?

For more practice with stage directions, see here.

Remember, stage notes can often indicate a character's engagement with specific props. These props -- such as poor Yorick's skull in Hamlet, or even the witches' cauldron in Macbeth -- can serve as *symbols* in the world of the play.

You may remember symbolism from your analysis of poetry and prose; symbols in drama are interesting because they are often physical. You can see them in front of you when a character makes a specific gesture, or points to a particular prop, or interacts with the setting in an unusual way (Hamlet entering a grave, for example).

But symbols can also be intangible, found instead in the recurring ideas and preoccupations that characters express in their speeches and declamations. Consider the idea of "a pound of flesh" in Merchant of Venice -- this is certainly a

symbol of something, though it isn't ever shown to us physically. Symbols can often be related to themes -- the larger preoccupations of the work, whether it's the ruinous power of jealousy (Othello), the ruthless pursuit of power (Macbeth), or the general dissatisfaction with the status quo (A Doll's House). (In Lady Macbeth's famous "Out, Out, Damn Spot!" we see a symbol -- the blood that does not come out -- that comes to encapsulate the larger theme of the work).

So pay close attention to important speeches and recurring images and/or props. This will help you determine where the symbolism lies in the play.

Think you've got it? Practice your understanding of themes, symbols, and stage directions (all of which can be strongly linked to one another) here and here,.

Bridging the Gap between Poetry and Prose

Remember earlier in this outline, when we said that a dramatic passage is in essence the child of a prose passage and a piece of poetry? That's because often characters in plays speak in ways that perhaps contemporary people would not. The most common example of this can be found in Shakespeare, whose plays are often at least partially written in meter.

The interesting thing about Shakespeare, though, is that when his "noble" or highborn / important characters speak, their speeches are generally in rhymed iambic pentameter. His peasants, slaves, and other lowborn or unimportant characters, though, tend to speak in blank verse -- unrhymed iambic pentameter. Consider why Shakespeare would have made this decision. What choice is he making by illustrating a clear difference in how characters speak?

For example, consider the following question. Ask yourself: why would Shakespeare suddenly alter the structure and style of his characters' speeches? What purpose does this alteration serve? (Remember also that plays were meant to be performed, so if you're ever unsure about the meter or the cadence of a piece -- i.e., how something is supposed to sound -- just read it out loud to yourself under your breath to help you determine what it would have sounded like when spoken.)

In modern plays, think of the different dialects, accents, and slang that characters use. This too illustrates differences in race, gender, and class. Again, remember that the spoken word -- in fiction as well as real life -- is supposed to encapsulate

or describe how people really ARE. So when analyzing drama, think not only about *what* characters are saying, but *how*.

Think you've got it? Practice your skills here.

[Tone and Mood]

Before we talk about tone and mood, we'll refresh our understanding of those two terms.

Tone is how each character feels and talks about something.

Mood is the general atmosphere of the act, scene, or play.

Both of these can shift throughout the work. For example, characters *should* have shifts in tone, to indicate that they have complex feelings that are not just one-note. Like real people, they should be able to go from angry to happy to sad to confused to neutral. (Not all in the space of one scene or act, of course, but over the course of the play.)

Mood can also shift. Not every single scene needs to have the exact same atmosphere; this could potentially get oppressive. Think about plays like Hamlet, which are generally dark and somber but have moments of humor and passion. The mood during the play-within-a-play is quite different than the mood during one of Hamlet's fevered and intense soliloquies. In order to determine the mood, pick up on cues like stage directions Is any mention given to the physical location of the scene? Are the characters given verbal cues like "softly" or "angrily"?

Finally, when analyzing the mood of a scene, act, or play, consider what the characters *want* from each interaction. Do they mention plots? Grievances? Thwarted desires? Pay close attention to the words that the characters use, as well as the structure of their speeches. Is a character delivering a monologue or a soliloquy? There's a good chance that there is some passion -- whether fear, anger, love, or some other strong emotion -- behind it. Is the character telling us something that no other characters know -- a secret, in essence?

Think you've got a good handle on tone and mood? Practice some tone questions here.

Breaking the Fourth Wall

Similar to the concept of "authorial intrusion" in prose passages, the idea of "breaking the fourth wall" is a postmodern tactic that playwrights use to get the characters to engage directly with the audience. Plays are generally supposed to be self-contained, dramas that appear to go on whether or not anyone is watching. (The "fourth wall" refers to the idea that the characters are surrounded by walls on all sides -- the "fourth" is the one that separates them from the audience.)

When a playwright breaks the fourth wall, s/he acknowledges the inherent absurdity in pretending that the characters (actors) aren't aware that the audience is there -- that they do not in fact *rely* on the audience in some way.

When a character addresses the audience specifically, s/he is breaking the fourth wall.

There is some debate as to what constitutes breaking the fourth wall; many playwrights, including the ancient Greeks and Shakespeare, are noted for "pushing" the fourth wall: giving speeches to characters who are standing alone on the stage. These speeches serve little purpose other than to locate the character in space and time; they are unlike a soliloquy, whose purpose is to give the audience a privileged glimpse inside the character's head. (Soliloquies are often *internal;* the character is addressing him or herself, so they wouldn't count as "breaking the fourth wall.")

Shakespeare often "flirts" with breaking the fourth wall -- any time a character has an "aside," (which you will see in the stage notes) this could be considered a little whisper to the audience. But in some plays, such as A Midsummer Night's Dream, we see him truly "smash" the fourth wall when Puck directly addresses the audience ("dear friends.")

Breaking the fourth wall is an interesting tactic that playwrights use to get around the obvious absurdity of pretending an audience does not in fact exist, or as a way to provide more information to the audience. It's worth knowing this term and having an arsenal of a few examples so that you can truly analyze all the tactics and structure inside a play.

Conclusion

Feeling comfortable with dramatic passages? Keep these three key takeaways in mind:

1. Dramatic passages are like a cross between poetry and prose. They are often structured along the lines of Freytag's pyramid (with exposition, inciting incidents, rising action, climax, and resolution), like prose, but can also often contain strict metrical structures that indicate themes, tones, and moods.

2. Like poetry and prose, dramatic passages contain symbols, imagery, figurative language, and themes that you can assess and analyze by noting their repetition and the words that characters use.

3. Unlike poetry and prose, dramatic passages contain stage directions that indicate what is happening in the play, and give both the actors and the audience clues as to how to most effectively convey emotions or actions within the world of the play.

Think you've got it? Practice more dramatic passages questions here, and remember: don't be intimidated by plays just because of their dialogue-heavy structure. If you understand prose and poetry, you'll do just fine when analyzing drama.

The Definitive Rhetorical Term Guide for AP English

General Overview

Whether you're prepping for the AP English Literature exam or the AP English Language exam, you're going to encounter questions about rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of persuasive writing. Rhetorical choices include figures of speech and other compositional techniques. Authors use these elements to bolster the effectiveness of their arguments.

The best way to study the components of rhetoric is to break it down into bite-sized chunks. Below you'll find the definition of some commonly tested rhetorical concepts, as well as some helpful examples of each.

Common Figures of Speech

Some questions about figures of speech will direct you to a specific line within a passage or poem and ask you to identify which literary device is being used. Other questions may ask you to explain the rhetorical function (i.e. the effect) of a certain figure of speech. In order to prepare for these questions, you should spend some time memorizing common figures of speech.

Don't try to memorize 50 terms one day before the exam. Instead, make flashcards and spend 30mins every day (at least two weeks before the exam) committing these terms to memory. That way, you won't waste time trying to recall the definition of terms during the exam, which will allow you to eliminate incorrect choices more quickly. Now, let's take a look at some common figures of speech:

Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant sounds of words.

Purpose: The purpose of alliteration is to create a consistent pattern that catches the mind's eye and focuses attention.

Example: "**S**he **s**ells **s**eashells." It is easiest to spot alliteration when you encounter a series of words beginning with the same letter (like in the example). However, the words in the phrase "kneading needles" do not start with the same letter, but it constitutes alliteration because the same consonant sound is being. Make sure you pay attention to consonant sound and not the letters at the start of words.

Allusion: An allusion is an indirect reference to something (e.g. a person, place, event or literary work).

Purpose: Allusions encourage the reader to associate the characteristics of one object/concept to another. The purpose of an allusion is to break down a complex idea by making a comparison.

Example: You may miss an allusion or fail to understand it if you don't know the underlying reference point. If something is alluded to that you don't understand, try to use context clues to relate it to what's directly being discussed in the text. For example, there are several allusions in Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus" (excerpt below). This excerpt makes a reference to Mount Olympus, which in Greek Mythology, was the home of the gods. If you did not know this, you could still piece together the clues (i.e. the underlined words) to figure out what is generally being referenced.

> "Learnèd Faustus, to find the secrets of astronomy
>
> Graven in the book of Jove's high firmament,
>
> Did mount him up to scale Olympus' top,
>
> Where, sitting in a chariot burning bright,
>
> Drawn by the strength of yokèd dragons' necks,
>
> He views the clouds, the planets, and the stars."

Anachronism: An anachronism is a chronological inconsistency. This is when an author describes a thing (e.g. object, event, person etc.) that does not exist in the time period within which their story takes place.

Purpose: Generally speaking, anachronisms occur because of oversight. However, sometimes films may purposefully make chronological incongruences for comedic effect (e.g. depicting Jesus on a skateboard).

Example: A famous example of an anachronism is in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In it, Cleopatra states that she wants to play billiards. This is purely anachronistic because the game was supposedly first invented almost 1500 years after the timeline of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Don't confuse anachronism and allusions. Anachronism is an incorrect use of events, words or object that historically cannot exist within the setting of the text. The word itself gives its definition away. The prefix "ana" means "against," and the beginning of the word chronology is embedded in the word. So anachronism means "against chronology." If you try to remember this tip, you won't forget the meaning of the word.

Anadiplosis: The repetition of the last word of a preceding clause. The word is used at the end of a sentence and then used again at the beginning of the next sentence.

Purpose: Repeats a word in quick succession in successive clauses in order to add emphasis to the main idea.

Example: "The mountains look on Marathon – And Marathon looks on the sea…" is an example of anadiplosis for Lord Byron's *The Isles of Greece*. By repeating the word "marathon," Byron emphasizes and draws attention to it.

Analogy: An analogy is a comparison between two things based on some shared feature.

Purpose: Authors utilize analogies to explain or clarify complex ideas. You, as the reader, must appropriately interpret the meaning behind the comparison by using your outside knowledge and/or context clues.

Example: If an author stated that their subject was like "a fish out of water," you would have to surmise that the subject feels out-of-place in his/her surroundings. If you didn't already know what this phrase meant, then you should pay attention to the other descriptive phrases within the text to figure out the meaning behind the analogy.

Anaphora: The repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines, clauses or verses.

Purpose: Authors use anaphora to emphasize specific points within their argument. Anaphora also has an artistic effect—it draws readers' attention.

Example: In Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (excerpt below), he uses anaphora to enlighten the reader about the period of time in which the story takes place.

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

Now, let's make sure that you can identify when anaphora is being used. Try answering this practice question here. Read through the specified lines, and underline any words or phrases you see repeated. Remember, that the repetition will be at the beginning of successive sentences. Refer back to this definition to determine if anaphora is being used.

Anastrophe: Anastrophe is the inversion of conventional word order. For example, when the order of a noun and adjective within a sentence is exchanged.

Purpose: Anastrophe is used to emphasize a particular point or to change the focus of the readers from one particular point to another. In poetry, anastrophe is used to create rhythm, meter or rhyming scheme in the lines. It usually gives the text a more formal air.

Example: Edgar Allan Poe uses anastrophe in his poem "The Raven" (excerpt below) to emphasize the eeriness of the setting.

"Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing."

Anthimeria: When you use a word that is normally one part of speech in a situation that requires it to be understood as a different part of speech. It is the substitution of one part of speech for another. For example, using a noun as a verb.

Purpose: Anthimeria is usually employed for brevity's sake. The reader must infer what the author is trying to imply by converging the parts of speech.

Example: You can easily spot anthimeria when an author is using a noun as a verb. The most common example of this is the phrase "Googled." Google is the name of a company, so it is normally a noun. When you use it as a verb, your listeners have to transfer the qualities of the noun into an action. You know that the purpose of the company is to serve as a search engine, so you infer that if someone "Googled" something, then it means that they utilized a search engine.

Antimetabole: This is the repetition of words in successive clauses, but in reverse grammatical order.

Purpose: Authors use antimetabole as an appeal to reason. The statements are usually logical, brief, and easy to remember.

Example: An example of antimetabole is "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Antimetabole occurs when the words and grammatical structure (not just the meaning of the statement) are reversed. Think of it as using the same words, but in reverse.

Antithesis: A rhetorical device in which two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect.

Purpose: Authors use antithesis to draw parallels and to give the reader greater insight into a subject matter.

Example: We can find an example of antithesis in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (excerpt below). Here, the use of antithesis highlights the conflicting nature of the time period within which the story takes place.

> "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was theepoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

Antonomasia: This is the substitution of a proper name with a suitable epithet or a title.

Purpose: Authors sometimes use this rhetorical device to project certain characteristics of one person/idea/object unto another person/idea/object.

Example: For example, "Your Highness" refers to a king or queen. "Commander-in-Chief" refers to the president of the United States. Saying "Casanova" when referring to a love interest is also an example of antonomasia.

Aphorism: This is a statement or saying that is both brief and wise (similar to an adage).

Purpose: An author can provide further support for his/her argument by stating generally accepted truths.

Example: Sayings such as "a penny saved is a penny earned" is an example of aphorism. A more famous example can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Aposiopesis: A figure of speech wherein a sentence is deliberately broken off and left unfinished.

Purpose: The purpose is to critically engage the reader. You have to deduce the remainder of the statement in question by paying attention to the context clues.

Example: Think of this as an unfinished thought. Look at this example for Shakespeare's *King Lear* (excerpt below). The character's statement is left unfinished—he only says that he will do "things." You, as the reader, must use your imagination and deductive reasoning skills to infer more about the threat.

> I will have such revenges on you both
> That all the world shall--**I will do things**--
> What they are yet, I know not; but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth!

Apostrophe: A rhetorical term for breaking off discourse to address some absent person or thing.

Purpose: Authors use apostrophe to express emotion or create a vivid image.

Example: In John Donne's poem "Death Be Not Proud," (excerpt below) he addresses death as a person. This takes away from the abstract nature of the

topic, and allows the speaker to confront death and express his feelings toward it. Remember that the subject being addressed must be either abstract (e.g. a larger concept like death or love), or absent from the text (i.e. it is not dialogue between two characters).

> "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;/For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow/Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me."

Assonance: This is the repetition of vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds. The vowels are repeated in words close to each other.

Purpose: Assonance is primarily used to create a sonorous effect (e.g. a full, deep sound).

Example: In Robert Frosts' "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" he uses assonance to evoke an uneasy atmosphere: "He g**i**ves h**i**s harn**e**ss b**e**lls a shake."

Asyndeton: The omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses (opposite of polysyndeton).

Purpose: Using asyndeton makes writing more dramatic because it speeds up the rhythm, which gives off a hurried effect.

Example: In Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, he uses asyndeton to mark the unstable nature of the character: "He was a bag of bones, a floppy doll, a broken stick, a maniac."

Let's try out a question to see if you can accurately identify the use of asyndeton. Try answering this question. Circle any conjunctions that appear in the specified lines, then refer back to this definition and the example above to help you determine if asyndeton is being utilized.

Chiasmus: A rhetorical inversion of the second of two parallel structures.

Purpose: Chiasmus emphasizes the second part of the statement because it is opposite in structure. This draws the reader's attention and forces him/her to consider the larger implications of the author(s)' assertions.

Example: Here is a simple example of chiasmus: "He led bravely, and we bravely followed." Examples of chiasmus can also be found in old Greek sages. For example, Socrates is known for saying "Bad men live that they may eat and drink, whereas good men eat and drink that they may live." You can see how these two statements are also logical inverses of each other.

This concept is closely related to antimetabole, but don't get confused between the two! Quick rule of thumb: All antimetaboles are chiasmus, but not all instances of chiasmus are antimetaboles. In an instance of antimetabole, the words and grammatical structure, must be reversed, not just the meaning.

Make sure that you can identify chiasmus by answering this practice question. Is this an example of chiasmus, antimetabole or some other rhetorical device we've reviewed? To figure out if chiasmus is at play, pay attention to what is happening before and after the comma. Is the second half of the statement saying the inverse of the first half? If yes, this may be an instance of chiasmus.

Consonance: This is the repetition of the final consonant sounds of accented syllables.

Purpose: When used in poetry, the repeated consonant is always on the stressed syllable, which emphasizes the sound and draws the reader's attention.

Example: In George Wither's poem "Shall I Wasting in Despair," he uses consonance to aid in the rhyme scheme of the poem. Each line has consonance within it, and at the end.

> Great, or goo**d**, or kin**d**, or fair,
> I will ne'er the more despair;
> If she lo***ve*** me, this belie***ve***,
> I wi**ll** die ere she *sha***ll** grie**ve**;

Diction: Diction refers to the author's choice of words.

Purpose: Word choice contributes to tone, style and message. Therefore, the author's diction influences persuasive effect.

Example: Diction is simply word choice, so any piece of prose or poetry would be an example. An author that uses "thou," is intending to be very formal, and

perhaps a bit old fashioned. On the other hand, if an author uses a lot of contractions, s/he is intending to take on a more conversational, and perhaps approachable tone.

AP English exams often ask you to analyze diction by interpreting the effect of certain word or phrase. Try answering this practice question here. Read through the passage, and circle any words the author uses to describe himself and the people he is addressing. Also take note of the rhetorical questions being employed. What rhetorical effect do they have?

Ellipses: Ellipses is when one or more words are omitted from a sentence. The omitted words, if added, would serve to complete or clarify the sentence.

Purpose: Authors often employ ellipses to avoid redundancy. It also forces the reader to use context clues to determine the meaning behind a statement.

Example: Authors can omit either nouns or verbs in elliptical constructions. For example: "I went fishing, and Sam went to." You must infer that Sam also went fishing, though the verb is omitted from the second half of the sentence.

Of course, in complex prose, ellipses won't look as simple. Test your understanding of this concept here. To determine if ellipses is occurring, ask yourself these questions in order: "Is there a word missing from this sentence?" "Does that word appear in another part of the same sentence?" "If I added that missing word into the sentence, would it make sense?" If you answer "yes" to all three questions, then it is most likely an instance of ellipses.

Epiphora: The repetition of a word or phrase at the end of several clauses. (Also known as *epistrophe*.) Epiphora is the counterpart to anaphora.

Purpose: Just like anaphora, authors use epiphora to emphasize a particular point.

Example: A famous example of epiphora can be found in Shakespeare's *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth* (excerpt below). Note the italicized words—they are all the same. This draws your attention, and forces you to consider the larger implications of the "crown."

> I'll make my heaven to dream upon *the crown*;
> And, whiles I live, to account this world but hell,

Until my mis-shap'd trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious *crown*.
And yet I know not how to get the *crown*,
For many lives stand between me and home.

Ethos: The distinguishing characteristics or guiding beliefs of a culture, era, community, or person.

Purpose: Ethos is an appeal to ethics, and it is a means of convincing readers of the credibility of the author. Therefore, authors aim to establish credibility in order to be more persuasive.

Example: Readers evaluate ethos based on the author's choice of words, and the structure of their argument. When authors use facts, statistics, or a formal writing style, they appear more convincing. For example, if the author is speaking from the first person point of view, and mentions their education or years of work experience, this elevates their credibility in readers' minds.

Extended metaphor: A comparison between two unlike things that continues throughout a series of sentences in a paragraph or lines in a poem.

Purpose: Extended metaphors are used to draw larger comparisons between two things; and to make the shared characteristics more obvious.

Example: Let's walk through this example of extended metaphor in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (excerpt below). Romeo refers to Juliet as the sun through several lines in order to project the characteristics of the sun unto her. By extending the metaphor, Shakespeare makes Romeo's thoughts about Juliet's beauty quite transparent.

But soft! What **light** through yonder window breaks?

It is the East, and Juliet is the **sun**!

Arise, fair sun, **and kill the envious moon**,

Who is already sick and pale with grief."

Hyperbaton: An inversion of the normal order of words, especially for the sake of emphasis.

Purpose: The purpose of hyperbaton is the same as anastrophe. Hyperbaton is used to emphasize a particular point or to change the focus of the readers from one particular point to another.

Example: Edgar Allan Poe uses hyperbaton in his short story *The Tell-Tale Heart:* "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man." If he used conventional word order, then this would read "The was no object. There was no passion." By changing word order he emphasizes the lack of object, and passion respectively.

Hyperbaton is often used synonymously with anastrophe, but some consider anastrophe to be a more specific instance of hyperbaton because only one word is in non-conventional order. Generally, it is okay to use these two interchangeably. However, if you are faced with a question on the exam where both hyperbaton and anastrophe are answer options, determine if the word order seems overly exaggerated (Think: Yoda) because then it is probably hyperbaton.

Hyperbole: An instance of extreme exaggeration.

Purpose: Hyperbole is generally used for emphasis, but sometimes it is used to create a humorous effect. Hyperbole is often used to conjure an image in the reader's head.

Example: How do you know when an author is using hyperbole? If the statement does not seem realistic or plausible, then it is probably hyperbole. Take a look at the example from W.H Auden's poem "As I Walked One Evening" (excerpt below). You can infer that it is not plausible that China and Africa will meet, or that salmon will "sing in the street." It is your job to understand that the exaggeration is used to express the extent of the speaker's love.

> I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
>
> Till China and Africa meet,
>
> And the river jumps over the mountain
>
> And the salmon sing in the street,
>
> I'll love you till the ocean

Is folded and hung up to dry

Imagery: Imagery is figurative language that appeals to the five senses.

Purpose: Authors use imagery to conjure mental pictures in their reader's mind. This makes their writing clear and makes the subject matter more relatable.

Example: You can say that imagery is evoked in the way that authors choose to describe things. For example, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* the bolded phrases/descriptions conjure vivid images in the reader's head.

> "Two of the **brightest stars in the whole sky** had to go away on business, and they're **asking her eyes to twinkle in their places until they return**. What if her **eyes were in the sky and the stars were in her head**?"

Irony: Irony has a few forms—there is dramatic, situational, and verbal irony. Dramatic irony is when the reader or audience knows something a character does not. Situational irony is when there is a discrepancy between what was expected and what actually occurs. Verbal irony is when the speaker says one thing but means the opposite.

Purpose: Authors use irony to engage readers and to encourage them to unpack the text to get at true meaning. When authors use indirect language, it forces the readers to examine the text more closely.

Examples:

- Dramatic irony: A good example of dramatic irony is in *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare: Romeo finds Juliet drugged and assumes she is dead, so he kills himself. The audience knows that Juliet is not actually dead, so this constitutes dramatic irony.
- Situational irony: The same scene in *Romeo and Juliet* is also a good depiction of situational irony from the viewpoint of the characters. Romeo assumed one outcome to be true when he saw Juliet's motionless body, but the reality was different.
- Verbal irony: A simple example of verbal irony is this statement: "The food was as delicious as dirt." You must infer that the speaker actually means the opposite of what they are literally stating.

Make sure you are comfortable with this concept by taking on this practice question. Is there an instance of irony in this passage? Remember that irony implies opposition (either something you didn't expect happened, or you're implying the opposite of what you've actually said). Look for contrast within the text to figure out if irony exists (in any of its forms).

Isocolon: A succession of phrases of approximately equal length and corresponding grammatical structure.

Purpose: Isocolon brings rhythm and balance to sentences, which gives a smooth flow to the ideas expressed in a piece.

Example: A good example of isocolon can be found in John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you; Ask what you can do for your country."

Jargon: The specialized language of a professional, occupational or interest group. The terms used inside these fields are often meaningless to outsiders.

Purpose: Using jargon can help an author appear more knowledgeable about the subject matter, and thus more credible. This produces a persuasive effect. Conversely, some authors overuse jargon to mask their ignorance about a topic.

Example: Police radio codes, legalese, and Internet shorthand (e.g. LOL) are all examples of jargon. Remember that jargon refers to terms that are intrinsic to a certain group, and that people outside that group would not necessarily know the definition.

Litotes: This is an ironical understatement in which the affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite.

Purpose: Authors are able to evoke strong feelings in a moderate way because downplaying the delivery intensifies the sentiment.

Example: Though the definition seems complicated, litotes is actually a simple figure of speech. For example, saying "you won't be sorry" means that you will be glad. Or, saying "it's not bad" means that it is good.

Metaphor: This is an implied comparison between unrelated objects.

Purpose: Metaphors are used to conjure imagery and to explain something (e.g. an idea or emotion) in greater and more telling depth.

Example: Remember for metaphors, you're saying that something *is* something else. For example, "She *is* a desert." A good hint is to pay attention to the use of the verb "to be." If on either side of the verb two seemingly unrelated things are being contrasted, then it is most likely an example of metaphor.

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated.

Purpose: Using metonymy helps to avoid redundancy by referring to the same thing in different ways.

Example: An example of metonymy is saying, "I have respect for the *crown*," instead of "I have respect for the King/Queen."

Onomatopoeia: The use of a word whose sound imitates its meaning.

Purpose: Using this figure of speech helps to conjure imagery in the readers head and makes the writing more vivid.

Example: Words like "beep," "purr," and "moo" constitute onomatopoeia because saying these words aloud imitate the intended sounds.

Oxymoron: A phrase that consists of two words that are contradictory.

Purpose: Authors can avoid using generic/direct descriptors by inserting oxymoronic phrases into their writing. Authors add greater complexity to their writing by describing something use two contrasting ideas,

Example: A common example of an oxymoron is the phrase "living dead" or "cold fire."

Paradox: This is a statement that appears to contradict itself.

Purpose: Using a paradox may conjure a humorous effect, but the main purpose is to reveal some latent truth in an innovative way.

Example: In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the title character states, "I must be cruel to be kind." This statement appears incongruent because it suggests that there is kindness in cruel actions. However, we know that Hamlet wants to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius, the person who murdered him. Claudius also happens to be married to Hamlet's mother. Hamlet knows that killing Claudius will devastate his mother, but he believes in the ultimate benevolence of his actions.

Parallelism: This is when a series of related words, phrases or clauses have a similar grammatical structure.

Purpose: Parallelism adds symmetry, flow and balance to writing.

Example: "I enjoy reading books, listening to music, and watching TV shows" is an example of parallelism because the verb conjugations in each successive phrase are the same.

Though they are similar, make sure not to confuse this concept with anaphora. In parallelism, exact words are not *necessarily* repeated (though they can be), but words or phrases identical in meaning, or similar in structure or sound are used. With anaphora, the exact same word or phrase will be repeated at the beginning of successive clauses.

A quick way to figure out if a phrase or clause is parallel is to try and substitute one for the other and see if the sentence still "flows" the same. Let's use the example given above. The phrase "reading books" is parallel to the phrase "listening to music" because the grammatical construction is the same. You could substitute the phrase "listening to music" for "reading books" and the whole sentence would flow the same way. You could not substitute "I swim" for "reading books" because the sentence would not flow the same.

Test your understanding of this concept here. Use the substitution tip described above to answer the question.

Pathos: The means of persuasion that appeals to the audience's emotions.

Purpose: Authors can make their writing more relatable by forming an emotional connection with the audience.

Example: In Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Cage Bird Sings" she encourages the audience to feel pity toward the caged bird by utilizing imagery that signifies the hardships and struggle of those in captivity. The bolded phrases indicate such imagery.

> "But a caged bird stands on the **grave of dreams**
>
> His shadow shouts on a **nightmare scream**
>
> His **wings are clipped** and his **feet are tied**
>
> So he opens his throat to sing."

Personification: This is when non-human things are given human characteristics.

Purpose: Using personification helps readers understand, sympathize with, or react emotionally to non-human characters.

Example: Here is an example of personification from Henry David Thoreau's

Walden: "These are the lips of the lake, on which no beard grows. It licks its chops from time to time." Here he compares the lake to a human mouth to create more vivid imagery in the reader's head.

Polyptoton: The stylistic scheme in which words derived from the same root are repeated

Purpose: It is used to create rhetorical effect by utilizing the cognate of the words.

Example: "The signora at every grimace and at every **bow smiled** a little **smile** and **bowed** a little **bow**…" is an example of polyptoton from *Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope. Note that by use different parts of speech of bow and smile, the author draws attention to those actions.

Simile: This is a direct comparison of dissimilar objects, usually using the signalers "like" or "as."

Purpose: By making comparisons between two seemingly unlike objects, authors can add insight into one or both things that might be difficult using literal language alone.

Example: Here is an example of a simile from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*: "Elderly American ladies leaning on their canes listed toward me like towers of Pisa." Instead of just saying the old ladies leaned on their canes, comparing them to the leaning Tower of Pisa conjures a more vivid image in the reader's mind.

Syllogism: This is a form of deductive reasoning that consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.

Purpose: By using general truths, authors attempt to persuade their audience into also believing more specific conclusions drawn from those truths.

Example: You need a major premise and minor premise before you can draw a specific conclusion. For example, "All cats are felines" is a major premise. "My pet is a cat" is a minor premise. The conclusion you can draw from these reference points is that your pet is a feline.

Beware of syllogism fallacies! Here's an example of a syllogism fallacy: all crows are black (the major premise). Your pet bird is black (minor premise). Your pet bird must be a crow (conclusion). You know this is not true because there are other birds that could also be black. As a reader, you should be able to spot instances of syllogism fallacies using your common sense reasoning and outside knowledge.

Symbol/symbolism: A thing that represents or stands for something else (especially a material object representing something abstract).

Purpose: Authors use symbolism to go beyond the literal and to encourage readers to use the text to draw broader conclusions about the way the world works. Symbolism can also project certain characteristics unto the subject.

Example: In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the letter "A" symbolized adultery. Interpreting symbols can be tricky, but authors usually give clues to the reader to help them unpack the symbols. These clues include analogies, and overall diction. Authors may sometimes invoke well-known symbols (e.g. a bible, a flag etc.), and these are easier to interpret because you can use your outside

knowledge to unpack the meaning. Just remember that symbols often stand for some larger idea, and use the clues the author gives you to figure out what those ideas are.

Synecdoche: When you refer to something by the name of one of its parts.

Purpose: Authors use synecdoche to inject creativity into their writing, but also for brevity. Synecdoche can also have symbolic implications.

Example: A common example of synecdoche is "all hands on deck." Here, "hands" actually refers to people. An example from literature is in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Friends, Romans, countrymen: lend me your ears." Again, ""ears actually refers to people, specifically their attention. If a word or phrase is describing only a part of a whole, then it is synecdoche.

Don't confuse this concept with metonymy. With metonymy, the word used to describe another thing is closely linked to that particular thing, but is not necessarily a part of it.

Understatement: A figure of speech in which a writer deliberately makes a situation seem less important or serious than it is.

Purpose: Authors use understatement to bring attention to a point. Understatement is actually quite complex because it downplays the seriousness of something in order to heighten it. This sometimes produces a comedic effect.

Example: In Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, the main character says, "I have to have this operation. It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain." The reader's attention is drawn to the bluntness of the statement, which causes him/her to respond emotionally to the character.

Zeugma: The use of a word to modify or govern two or more words although its use may be grammatically or logically correct with only one.

Purpose: Zeugma is often used for dramatic effect. It causes momentary confusion, and therefore emphasizes the point being made.

Example: A few examples of zeugma include, "He lost his coat and his temper," and "He fished for compliments and for trout." In both examples the verb is being

applied to two direct objects, but in a way that forces the reader to draw two different conclusions.

Forms of Writing/Modes of Discourse

Being able to identify different forms of writing is helpful, because it gives you a framework for how to interpret the author's writing. For example, a eulogy has a different intended effect from a satirical piece. Understanding this will help you pick up on theme and tone, and will help you analyze the rational behind the author's diction. Let's explore a few of the most common forms of writing that appear on the AP English exam:

Allegory: An allegory is a story or poem in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for larger ideas about human life, politics, morals or history.

Purpose: The goal of an allegory is usually educational. The author wants to impart some idea or principle to the reader.

Example: A well-known example of an allegory is Plato's "Allegory of the Cave." In this parable, Plato describes a group of people who are chained to the wall of a cave facing a blank wall. Their only perception of reality is the shadows of people moving about outside of the cave. In this story, the prisoner symbolizes philosophers who are not able to perceive beyond their immediate surroundings, and are therefore unable to process or understand true reality or meaning.

Encomium: A tribute or eulogy in prose or verse glorifying people, objects, ideas, or events.

Purpose: The purpose of this form of writing is to impart high praise. It is usually quite formal.

Example: People usually deliver encomiums at ceremonies. For example, you will most likely hear encomiums at an award ceremony, or at an inauguration, or even someone's retirement party. It is just a speech saying nothing but good things about its subject.

Eulogy: Almost identical to encomium, eulogies are written tributes that praise a person or thing, especially someone/something who has died.

Purpose: This is just laudatory writing, meant to celebrate the life and/or accomplishments of a person who has passed away. Eulogies are intended to stir an emotional response from readers/listeners.

Example: Eulogies are what you hear a funeral services. For example, take Ted Kennedy's eulogy for his brother Robert (excerpt below). This piece of writing is clearly meant to evoke both sadness for and appreciation of the deceased.

> "My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; to be remembered simply as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it; saw suffering and tried to heal it, saw war and tried to stop it."

Exposition: An exposition is a comprehensive description and explanation of an idea or theory.

Purpose: Expositions are lengthy written explanations that are meant to break down complex subject matter into more understandable terms.

Example: Some expositions describe a process, while some are just meant to define or describe an idea. "How To" manuals, essays, or even just someone's life story are all examples of an exposition.

Narrative: This is a story or an account of events and experiences. The recounted events can be true or fictitious.

Purpose: The purpose of narrative is simply to tell a story (from any point of view).

Example: There are countless examples of narratives because most books, plays and movies follow a narrative format. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *King Lear*,*Harry Potter*—these texts are all examples of narratives. If the work is retelling a series of events in a connected order (does not necessarily have to be chronological), then it is following narrative structure. The elements of narrative usually include: characters, a plot, conflict, resolution and setting.

Parody: A body of work that imitates the style of someone or something else in an amusing way.

Purpose: Parodies exaggerate the features of an original body of work to create a comical effect. In writing, those features can include syntax, diction, tone or other rhetorical elements. Sometimes parodies are created to highlight some latent meaning that was missed or downplayed in the original work (still for comedic effect).

Example: Shakespeare's "Sonnet 13" is a parody of traditional love poems common in his day. He exaggerates his comparisons, which is a feature of the more conventional sonnets. See excerpt below.

> "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;"

Prose: Written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure.

Purpose: A writer may choose to employ prose over poetry to improve the ease of overall readability, and/or to add freedom to their writing structure. Generally speaking, writers have an easier time expressing themselves in prose versus poetry.

Example: Prose can appear in plays, speeches or novels. For example, the sentence "Call me Ishmael" from *Moby Dick* is an example of prose because it is stated in a relaxed, non-metrical manner.

Satire: The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

Purpose: A satire is a literary work that tries to arouse the reader's disapproval by ridiculing a belief, concept, or object. Unlike parodies, satires are not created solely for comedic effect. The author of a satire aims to get readers to scrutinize some aspect of an institution, or humanity as a whole.

Example: Famous literary examples of satire include George Orwell's *Animal Farm,* which ridicules the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia; and Voltaire's *Candide,* which attacks the philosophy of optimism.

Soliloquy: a dramatic device in which a character is alone and speaks his or her thoughts aloud.

Purpose: Within a play, soliloquies are used to communicate a character's inner thoughts to the audience. This helps make the character more relatable, and may contribute to dramatic irony.

Example: A number of soliloquies can be found in many of Shakespeare's plays. The most quoted being Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Hamlet sparks an internal theoretical deliberation on the advantages and disadvantages of existence, and whether it is one's right to end his or her own life.

Important Concepts in Literature

Mood: The emotion evoked by a text.

Purpose: The purpose of some writing is to evoke a certain emotion or feeling from the audience. Mood does this through a combination of elements such as setting, voice, tone and theme.

Example: Charles Dickens creates a peaceful mood in his novel *Pickwick* Papers: "The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on."

Point of view: The narrator's position in relation to the story being told.

Purpose: In the first person point of view in the narrative style, the narrator may not have knowledge of all the events unfolding in the story. Authors may choose this narrative style if they want readers to only know certain information at certain points in the story; or if the purpose of the piece is to get the reader to relate to the narrator. The third person point of view is usually omniscient. Third person gives writers greater freedom of expression.

Examples: Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice* is told from the third person point of view, which gives readers a bird's-eye view into the lives of the

characters. This allows the readers to (somewhat objectively) judge the characters as they judge themselves and each other.

Theme: The underlying main idea of a literary work.

Purpose: The theme of a written work is usually a larger, more abstract idea. Theme differs from the subject of a literary work in that it involves a statement or opinion about the subject.

Example: Examples of theme includes alienation, death, love, ambition, coming of age, betrayal etc. You can work through the theme of a poem or story by underlining any vivid descriptions of nouns, and noting any metaphors or allusions being made.

Tone: This is the author's attitude toward the subject of a work.

Purpose: The tone that a writer uses will lead the reader to gather an impression about the characters and the plot. The tone of a character in a narrative gives insight into a character's personality and disposition.

Example: In *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly (excerpt below), the author's diction gives the story a fearful, horrifying tone. The bolded words contribute to this tone.

"Oh! No mortal could support the **horror of that countenance**. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so **hideous** as that **wretch**. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was **ugly** then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived."

Key Takeaways

We've reviewed quite a bit! Let's take a minute to review the core takeaways of this article:

- Really make an effort to memorize the common figures of speech. Make flashcards to memorize the terms. You don't want to waste time during the exam struggling to recall definitions.

- Know the forms of parallelism (i.e. zeugma, epistrophe, antithesis, and antimetabole); know the different types of repetition (e.g. anaphora, epiphora, anadiplosis)

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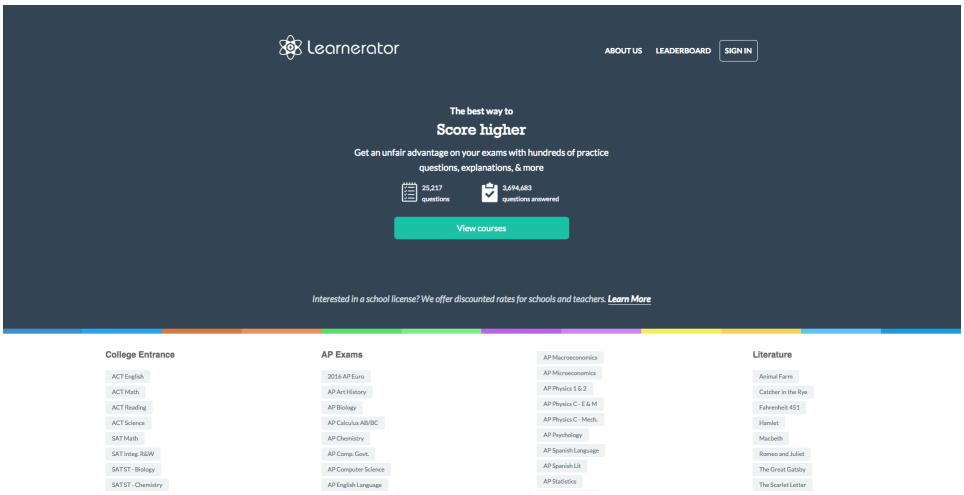

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