

Poetry Analysis Directions

Poetry is based around the most concise language; every word included is included for a reason. Whether it be to make the poem sound a certain way and develop a mood/tone, or it be to draw upon emotions, the words (diction) are important. That being said, analysis of poetry is a skill. We can develop this skill with our learned knowledge of rhetorical devices and language.

On a separate sheet of paper, complete the following for your poem:

1. **Background Study:** Read more about the source of the poet's inspiration. If you can discover what's in the poet's soul, heart, and mind, you can unearth his or her motivation for putting pen to paper. Learning more about a specific poet's life, interests, home, circles of friends, and his or her social and cultural setting gives you hints so you can more clearly interpret the work. For instance, a study of Walt Whitman's life indicates that he lived at the onset of the Industrial Age, he was an ardent naturalist and a lover of America, he believed in individual freedom of expression at all costs, and he suffered from blindness as an older man – all of which come out in the keen inner observation, wonderful tomes on nature, and alternating periods of conflict and co-existence between nature and industry in his poems.

2. **Read each line aloud.** See if you can feel the energy and emotion as each word forms upon and releases from your lips. Pause accordingly at each punctuation mark. Take another breath. Sense the musical rhythm. Imagine the poet reading the work through your voice.

3. **Study the movement.** (see "Movement")

1. What is the meter?
2. How are punctuation marks used – if they're used at all?
3. How do syllables and meter work together? This movement defines the inner experience of the poem.

4. **Consider a poet's word choices.** (see "Word Choice")

1. Picture the nouns and try to envision yourself in that place or holding that thing.
2. Feel the verbs and look at how they move the poem forward.
3. Interpret how and why the poet matched nouns and verbs in such a specific way.
4. Look for similes/metaphors? What is being compared? Why?
5. Look for imagery (tip: look for adjectives). Why might the poetry be described in that detail?
6. Is there any alliteration or assonance used? Does this affect the tone/mood of the poem?

4. **Study the structure.** (see "Structure")

Chances are, there's a specific reason why a poet chooses a particular form to write a particular poem. If you can learn more about the form, it may be easier to interpret a poem written in that form. For example, a poem written in free verse conveys a more open relationship between a poet's voice and the experience than a poem written in tightly rhyming quatrains. Then ask...

1. Why did the poet choose that form?
2. How does that form bring out the subject or mood of the poem?

5. **Explore additional layers.**

Poems are the world's greatest extended metaphors. For countless centuries, poets were vital information links to citizens in repressed societies. If a poet didn't write metaphorically, he or she faced the wrath of the ruling regime. Since poems draw from the souls of their authors, they usually transmit the experience at different physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual levels, creating an exciting atmosphere of discovery for the reader. When scanning a line of poetry, see how it feels.

1. Does the line relate to your core truths and beliefs? If you feel happier or sadder – or any other emotion – after you've read it, you're probably uncovering the poem's deeper layers.
2. Using steps 1-4, what might this deep meaning be?