

AP English Literature and Composition

Literary Analysis Steps

I. Annotation of Poem:

Follow each of these steps as you analyze the poem before writing your explication. Make notes about each step on the poem itself.

1. Notice the title. Make notes about your initial reactions at the top of the poem.
2. Locate the independent clauses in the poem, and read them individually. (They will often not end at the ends of the lines.) Notice any that are questions. For each independent clause, underline the subject once and verb twice.
3. Place boxes around vivid words whose meanings are complex or particularly apt. Look up words that you do not know; underline these words, and write synonyms above the words in the poem.
4. Look for figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification, symbol, allusion). Circle them and draw an arrow to the comparison—or explain the comparison if it is implied.
5. Identify the speaker in this poem. From what point of view is the poem written? What is the occasion? Is it spoken to someone in particular? Make some notes about your ideas.
6. Locate the shift(s) in the poem (in point of view, tone, and focus); draw a dividing line and briefly explain the change. Notice the "turning" words (but, so, yet, however); make an asterisk beside these.
7. Identify the tone of the poem (or tones if there is a shift). Write the tone word(s) in the margin and draw arrows to elements of the poem that support the tone. Use your tone chart for precise vocabulary.
8. Read the poem again, aloud, preferably to someone else. Then, complete this sentence at the bottom of the page: *The poem "[title]" by [poet] is about [abstract topic], and it reveals [observation about humanity or human condition].*

II. Annotation of Prose:

1. Identify the narrator in the passage. From what point of view is the passage narrated? How does narrative perspective relate to tone and attitude?
2. Classify characterization as direct or indirect. Note adjectives in the margin to describe the personality of character(s) as stated or suggested. How do characters' actions, words, and thoughts reveal their traits?
3. Place boxes around vivid words whose meanings are complex or particularly apt. Look up words that you do not know; underline these words, and write synonyms above the words in the passage.
4. Identify the tone(s) of the passage. Write the tone word(s) in the margin and draw arrows to elements of the text that support the tone. Use your tone chart for precise words.
5. Locate the shift(s) in the passage (in point of view, tone, and focus); draw a dividing line(s) and briefly explain the change.