

# English Literature and Composition

## Focus Sheet

### Prompt Analysis: AP Questions 1 and 2

How can you properly prepare to answer questions 1 and 2 on the AP English Literature and Composition Exam? Of course, practicing your close reading techniques and refining your essay-writing skills will take you a long way. However, there are a few twists to questions 1 and 2 you should know about.

First, it's helpful to begin thinking of questions 1 and 2 as **style analysis questions**, since they ask you to analyze the style of a passage. In these questions, you'll encounter a prompt directing you to analyze a poem (or pair of poems), and another prompt directing you to analyze a prose passage (or pair of passages).

Below you'll find information on the following:

1. Sample style analysis prompts with brief commentaries
2. Common verbs used in style analysis prompts

#### **Sample Style Analysis Prompts**

Here's a sample style analysis question you might be asked about poetry:

**Below is a pair of poems by writers from different cultures. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay comparing the views of war expressed in the poems. You should consider rhythm, tone, and any poetic devices that are important to the poems.**

#### *Commentary*

- The prompt sets out two main tasks: compare views and show how each view emerges through literary techniques.
- You're directed to use certain literary elements and others of your choosing.
- When asked to "compare," you need to discuss similarities and differences in a balanced way. That is, don't ignore one poem or write disproportionately about one and not the other.
- In sum, your job is to make frequent reference to specific literary techniques used in the poems that help you show similarities and differences between the two views of war expressed.

Here's a sample style analysis question you might be asked about a prose passage:

**Read the following passage from a contemporary novel carefully. In a well-organized essay, define the narrator's attitude toward love and analyze the literary techniques used to convey this attitude. Support your analysis with specific references to the passage.**

#### *Commentary*

- The prompt sets out two main tasks: define an attitude and analyze how that attitude is conveyed.
- No literary techniques are specified; you're free to choose significant ones yourself (but you must write about literary technique).

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- The prompt's final sentence is a warning to avoid unsupported generalizations about the passage or love.
- In sum, your job is to make frequent reference to specific literary techniques in the passage that help you prove a specific thesis about the narrator's attitude toward love.

**Common Verbs Used in Style Analysis Prompts**

A number of verbs recur in style analysis questions (and also in question 3, the open response prompt). Here are some of the most common verbs and their meanings.

**State, Define, Describe**—express an opinion or judgment.

- The use of these verbs usually signifies the first of two tasks contained in a style analysis prompt.
- *State* or *Define* may be implied. If a prompt asks you to "analyze how the poem reveals the speaker's attitude toward ...," you must state or define the speaker's attitude as part of your answer.
- *State, Define, or Describe* is usually paired with a more-complex verb, such as *Analyze*, and its associated task.

**Explain, Analyze, Show, Illustrate**—offer evidence to support an opinion or judgment.

- The use of these verbs usually signifies the most important and complex part of a prompt.
- When the adverb *how* is used in connection with these or other verbs—which it almost always is—you're being asked to use literary techniques (for example, tone or figurative language) as the evidence to support your thesis.

**Compare, Contrast**—distinguish between two things by stating them both and explaining differences and similarities.

- Avoid a simple list of similarities and differences when asked to compare or contrast.
- Instead, when asked to compare, focus on similarities. For example, *discuss similarities* means you need to provide evidence of the similarities, explain the significance of those similarities, and perhaps relate those similarities to something else such as theme.
- When asked to contrast, focus on differences.
- Whether comparing or contrasting, strive for balance—don't ignore one poem if you're comparing two poems; don't shortchange one prose passage when contrasting two pieces of prose.
- Integrate the two works you're asked to compare or contrast by writing a thesis that will force you to continually discuss both works.

**Add, Contribute, Express**—discuss the theme (when used in conjunction with phrases such as *the value of the work*, as in "adds to the value of the work").

- These or similar phrases most often appear in the open prompt, question 3.
- Such phrases direct you to connect the other elements in the core idea of the prompt with a discussion of the theme.

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- Examples of how these words may be used include: "adds value to the work as a whole," "adds to the value of the work as a whole," "contributes to the meaning of the work," and "expresses the meaning of the work."

Focus Sheet

Tips on Reading Poetry

**TP-CASTT** and **PDIDLS** are schematics that help you critically read and analyze poetry. Each letter in the acronym reminds you to analyze a particular aspect of the poem. You'll want to remember this format so that when you read a poem, you can apply this analysis automatically. This will take some practice, but in time, you'll see how helpful these schematics can be.

To interpret poetry, you must become skilled at identifying poetic devices. Even more importantly, you have to be able to show how these poetic devices convey effect and meaning.

<b>TP-CASTT</b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>What it reminds you to do:</b>
T for Title	Question what the title means.
P for Paraphrase	Rephrase what the poem is saying using colloquial language.
C for Connotation	Identify figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism), diction, point of view, sound devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhythm, and rhyme), allusion, antithesis, apostrophe, synecdoche, metonymy, and meiosis.
A for Attitude or Tone	Identify the speaker's attitude and the poet's tone. See PDIDLS for tone analysis.
S for Shifts	Note any shifts in the speaker or in attitude.
T for Title	Examine the title again on an interpretive level.
T for Theme	Determine what the poet is saying.

<b>PDIDLS to further analyze Attitude &amp; Tone</b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>What it reminds you to do:</b>
P for Point of View	Identify the perspective of the speaker.
D for Diction	Understand the connotation of the word choice.
I for Images	Examine vivid appeals to understanding through the senses and use of figurative language.
D for Details	Note any acts included, or omitted, based on the speaker's perspective.
L for Language	Describe the <b>overall</b> use of language such as formal, clinical, jargon, and emotional. These words describe force or quality of diction, images, and details. They qualify <b>how</b> the work is written.
S for Sentence Structure	Determine how structure affects the reader's attitude about what the poet is saying.

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**Tips on Reading Poetry**

Read the following poem by Tennyson and try your hand at filling out the TP-CASTT and PDIDLS charts. Then, examine the example TP-CASTT and PDIDLS charts, comparing them to your own analysis of the poem.

**Crossing the Bar**

By Alfred Lord Tennyson

- 1 Sunset and evening star,
- 2 And one clear call for me!
- 3 And may there be no moaning of the bar,
- 4 When I put out to sea,
- 5 But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
- 6 Too full for sound and foam,
- 7 When that which drew from out the boundless deep
- 8 Turns again home.
- 9 Twilight and evening bell,
- 10 And after that the dark!
- 11 And may there be no sadness of farewell,
- 12 When I embark;
- 13 For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
- 14 The flood may bear me far,
- 15 I hope to see my Pilot face to face
- 16 When I have crost the bar.

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**Tips on Reading Poetry**

<b>TP-CASTT</b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
T for Title	
P for Paraphrase	
C for Connotation	
A for Attitude or Tone	
S for Shifts	
T for Title	
T for Theme	

<b>PDIDLS to further analyze Attitude &amp; Tone</b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
P for Point of View	
D for Diction	
I for Images	
D for Details	
L for Language	
S for Sentence Structure	

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<b>Sample TP-CASTT for <i>Crossing the Bar</i></b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
T for Title	"Crossing the Bar" means navigating a difficult spot, such as trying to leave a harbor without going aground on a sand bar.
P for Paraphrase	At evening, the speaker is called inevitably to sea; he hopes no one will mourn his departure, but that he'll see his Pilot when he crosses the bar.
C for Connotation	Figurative language used: many nautical terms (bar, sea, foam, pilot, bell, flood). Many of these words, often associated with the sea, also apply to death (such as a bell tolls for the dead; boundless deep can refer to death, sleep, or the sea). Assonance: repetition of long "o" sound adds sonorous "abab" rhyme pattern.
A for Attitude or Tone	Anticipation, hope, determined direction.
S for Shifts	Third and eleventh line admonish against sadness.
T for Title	Crossing the bar refers to a passage at a time in life, crossing a boundary.
T for Theme	Tennyson asked at the end of his life that "Crossing the Bar" be included in every collection of his poetry published. Many critics revile the poem's simplistic beauty, but Tennyson's poem describes the life voyage we all must take. His speaker complacently approaches the bar of life, hoping that all will find the acceptance he does on "crossing the bar."

<b>Sample PDIDLS for <i>Crossing the Bar</i></b>	
<b>Acronym Letter</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
P for Point of View	Speaker taking <i>sea</i> journey—or voyage of some type.
D for Diction	Simplistic words, nautical, religious, soothing.
I for Images	Apostrophe—call of sea, flood or waves bearing him far.
D for Details	Sound and foam of sea.
L for Language	Regular iambic trimeter with one line of iambic pentameter.
S for Sentence Structure	Four stanzas, two sentences. The iambic pentameter, the longest line in the stanza varies location in each stanza.

**Focus Sheet****How to Write About Poetry**

Writing about literature requires that you reveal something new to another reader. Your goal is not to be purely descriptive or summative, but to be analytical and interpretive. You're exploring and discussing what is beyond the self-evident surface of the work, trying to help someone understand not simply *what* a text means, but also *how* it means it.

Writing about poetry follows the same rules as writing in other subjects. Think before you write. Spend at least 1/4 of your time planning your essay. Actively read the poem and the prompt. Isolate points and items that relate to the topic. Write a working thesis. Find support for the thesis. Refine the thesis if necessary when drafting the essay. Proof the essay, re-reading the poem again to provide more support.

To write about poetry, you must first fully understand it. Consider that when you're writing about the poem you're actually *explaining* your reading of it. It's not uncommon to write two pages, or more, about a sonnet that's only 14 lines. Here are some additional pointers.

**1. Work small**

To avoid falling into merely paraphrasing a poem, focus on small details of the poem for most of your interpretive work. The primary *evidence* you'll need to support your interpretation lies in the details of language and sound you notice at work in the poem.

**2. Quote, quote, quote!**

Work with the text! If you can write an entire paragraph without quoting from the poem, it's likely you're falling into simply narrating the poem. Don't summarize or paraphrase the poem; analyze what and how the poem is communicating. A good rule to remember: illustrate, don't just narrate. Use the poet's exact words, in quotation marks, to prove your points.

**3. Quotation Sandwich**

When you quote the poem, make a quotation sandwich. That is, don't just quote a line or two and expect the lines to speak for themselves. Remember, you're the interpreter. When you quote a word, line, or several lines, first make some signal that you're about to quote from the work (for example, "In line 7, we see that ..."). Follow the quotation with your own commentary and interpretation. Don't leave it to your reader to decide what to make of the passage you quoted. Make it clear to them.

**4. Unpack (patiently)**

The main job of reading, interpreting, and writing about poetry is first noticing where meaning must be specifically addressed, and then asking questions and unpacking—decompressing—all that the language and sound are creating. This gets easier the more you do it, but it's never a quick process. Poetry yields itself slowly to those who take time with it. Work slowly and question every word or detail, especially of shorter poems. Every element counts in such a distilled form as a poem.



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**5. Consider**

A good essay results from a thorough understanding of a poem. Actively read the poem, paying close attention to the title, diction, details, tone, attitude, shifts, form, speaker, rhyme, meter, and language. Often the poems you will write about are complicated. Poets frequently hide their message in irony.

**6. Organize**

Always express your ideas in logical order. Although many organizational patterns exist, the easiest approach is to start with the first line of the poem and work through it line by line. Remember you're not restating or paraphrasing the poem, but ""unpacking" it—analyzing and explaining it line by line.

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### Writing Comparison and Contrast Essays

Three ways exist to construct comparison and contrast essays: parallel order, point-by-point, and by showing similarities and differences. Let's take a closer look at each of these methods.

#### **Parallel Order—all A, all B**

In a parallel order structure, the writer first says everything about A and then says everything about B.

If the parts of A and B are substantially different in type, this can be an effective structure. For example, a comparison of the themes of two books with different plots, different characters, and different settings might be best compared in this manner. Be aware, however, that this structure generally produces the least interesting results.

#### **Point-by-Point—ab ab ab ab ab**

In a point-by-point structure, the writer chooses one point and discusses that point as it applies to both A and B. The writer then moves on to the next point.

A point-by-point comparison is especially effective when the points under discussion are complicated or technical. For example, this type of structure would be effective for the comparison of statistical averages of two cities. The point-by-point pattern keeps complex points of comparison together, making it easier for the reader to understand. Although this pattern is somewhat more difficult for the writer, it generally produces the most interesting effects.

#### **Similarities and Differences**

In a similarities and differences structure, the writer first discusses the *similarities* between A and B and then turns to a discussion of the *differences* between A and B.

The similarities and differences pattern is the least common type of comparison and contrast. It's typically used as a portion of a paper rather than as a structure for the entire paper. This pattern is most effective when the writer is interested in either the similarities or differences, but not both.

#### **Writing a Comparison and Contrast Essay**

When writing a comparison and contrast paper, consider the purpose before selecting an organizational form. Once a form is selected, pre-write by brainstorming all the aspects you want to discuss. The selected form will influence the outline of your essay and the organization of your ideas.

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**Writing Comparison and Contrast Essays**

<b>Parallel Order</b>	<b>Point-by-Point</b>	<b>Similarities/Differences</b>
Thesis 1. "A" A. Point 1 B. Point 2 C. Point 3 2. "B" A. Point 1 B. Point 2 C. Point 3 Conclusion	Thesis 1. Point 1 A. "A" B. "B" 2. Point 2 A. "A" B. "B" 3. Point 3 A. "A" B. "B" Conclusion	Thesis 1. Similarities of "A" and "B" 2. Differences of "A" and "B" Conclusion

Here are some guidelines for editing and proofing a comparison and contrast paper. Make sure your paper:

- Maintains a clear focus on the topic and has ample supporting details
- Provides logical organization (as shown in the three examples above)
- Uses transitions to connect ideas effectively
- Is in active voice using third person present tense
- Avoids linking verbs ("to be" verbs)
- Avoids stating the obvious (words like "I think")
- Uses engaging language that's appropriate for the intended audience and purpose
- Uses fluent sentences of varied length and structure
- Is expressive and interesting
- Contains complete sentences and shows paragraphs clearly
- Uses words, capitalization, and punctuation correctly
- Has grammatically correct sentences
- Has correctly spelled words

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### Close Reading

Close reading is a technique that helps you interpret and write about literature. The idea behind close reading is that any small section of a text, when analyzed closely, will also reveal a richer, more accurate interpretation of the whole text.

Close reading helps you discover nuances of meaning that usually remain undetected when you read simply to get a basic idea of what's going on in a text. Let's discuss how to initiate a close reading.

After you've read the entire text, return to a passage that strikes you as interesting, challenging, or confusing. Selecting a section that really confuses or challenges you will give you more to interpret. This, in turn, will give you more to write about when it comes time to put your ideas and interpretations down on paper.

Another option is to pick a section that stimulated a strong emotional response in you. Often, the more emotionally involved you become, the more passionately you'll want to pursue the analysis. And that passion makes for exciting and interesting interpretations.

Start your close reading by noting the language being used. Pay attention to the author's choice of words and their meanings. Look up words even if you think you know their meanings. You might be surprised to find they mean other, unexpected things.

If the passage you've selected to close read is confusing, do your best to paraphrase, or restate in your own words, what's being referred to, or denoted, by the language. Language refers to or denotes specific people, places, things, or actions happening in the real world, and also other ideas existing only in abstract terms.

Next, try to answer some basic questions about the passage you've selected.

- = Who is speaking? Who is being spoken to? Who or what is being spoken about?
- = What is being described or referred to?
- = Where is the speaker or subject of the text located?
- = When do the described actions or events occur?

As an example, let's look at the first sentences of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*:

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom.

After reading the first chapter, you'll know that 124 is the number of the house occupied by the main characters. If you look up the word *spiteful*, you'll see it has many meanings:

- = petty ill will or hatred
- = the disposition to annoy or irritate
- = malice

Ask yourself:

- = How can a house have emotions, and why is this one spiteful?
- = Why would the house itself be spiteful and not the people in it?

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Close Reading

Now examine the words *baby's venom*. What exactly is venom? Although it's usually a word we use for the poison secreted by snakes, it's also a word for ill will and malevolence. If we can agree that babies are seldom venomous, why does Morrison choose this particular image?

You might come to the conclusion that it's an unexpected pairing of imagery. From there, you might also conclude that from the beginning of this book, our usual, and more comfortable, expectations are turned upside down.

Pay attention to word choice. If we were to change the word *venom* to *anger*, how would the meaning change? Morrison isn't talking about a snake, but we can see in this close reading that *venom* is a much more powerful word in this context because of its depth of meaning. Also pay attention to what is **not** being said. What might Morrison be leaving out? There is some sort of pre-existing condition that's giving this baby its venom. When you do a close reading, always ask yourself what the pre-existing conditions might be.

As you can see, the process of close reading involves paying close attention to the words in the text, as well as the words left out. A series of close readings of selected passages helps you develop a storehouse of ideas and interpretations. You can use these ideas and interpretations to get started on drafting a formal argumentative essay on the literary work as a whole.