



SCHOLAR COACH, INC.

AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

The Poetry Essay (Q1) Step by Step

This guide walks you through the AP English Literature poetry analysis essay from the first read of the poem to the final sentence of a scored essay. Read Parts 1-5 to learn the method, study the full worked example in Part 6 (poem, annotation, plan, a 6-point essay, and a 3-point essay with diagnosis), then write the three practice essays in Part 7 under timed conditions and score them with the rubric in Part 3.

Part 1: What Q1 asks, and how it is scored

The task

Question 1 gives you a poem of roughly 100-300 words, with the poet's name and a publication date, and a one-sentence situation. The prompt has been stable since 2019:

"In the following poem by [poet], published in [year], the speaker [situation]. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how [poet] uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex [attitude / experience / response / portrayal]."

Below the prompt are four bullets: respond with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation; select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning; explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning; use appropriate grammar and punctuation. You have a suggested 40 minutes. The three essays together are 55 percent of your exam score; each is worth 6 points.

The 6-point rubric

The official rubric has three rows.

ROW	POINTS	WHAT EARNS THE POINT(S)
A. Thesis	0-1	A defensible interpretation of the poem that responds to the prompt. Not a restatement of the prompt, not a list of devices, not a summary.

ROW	POINTS	WHAT EARNS THE POINT(S)
B. Evidence and Commentary	0-4	1: general evidence, summary. 2: some specific evidence and some explanation, but no line of reasoning or a faulty one. 3: specific evidence for all claims; commentary explains how some evidence supports the line of reasoning; explains how at least one technique contributes to meaning. 4: consistent commentary explaining how evidence supports the line of reasoning; explains how multiple techniques contribute to meaning.
C. Sophistication	0-1	Sustained complexity: explores tensions, situates the reading in a broader context, accounts for alternative interpretations, or writes in a consistently vivid and persuasive style.

Two facts from the Chief Reader reports shape this whole guide. First, almost everyone earns the thesis point, but most theses are “too general” to set up a line of reasoning. Second, Row B is where essays are won and lost: the typical 2 becomes a 4 by explaining *how* specific language produces an effect, not by finding more devices. Sophistication was earned by fewer than one essay in fourteen in recent years; it is a byproduct of a complex thesis and close word-level work, not a separate trick.

Part 2: Reading the prompt

The word “complex”

Every post-2019 Q1 prompt asks about a “complex” attitude, experience, or portrayal. The word is an instruction: **the speaker feels at least two things at once, or the poem changes the speaker’s feeling, or the poem holds a tension the speaker cannot resolve.** An essay that says “the speaker is sad” has not answered the prompt. An essay that says “the speaker’s sorrow is tempered by tenderness and sharpened by foreknowledge” has.

Test: can you complete the sentence “The speaker feels ____ and also ____ about ____”? If you can fill both blanks with different or opposing feelings, you have found the complexity.

The other words in the prompt

Underline these:

- **The speaker’s situation** (what the prompt gives you). It is usually the key to the first stanza.
- **The target** (“attitude toward the child’s grief,” “response to returning home”). Everything you write should be about the target.
- **“Literary elements and techniques.”** You choose which. You are never required to name a particular device.

Part 3: The method: three reads, then N-F-I

The 3-read method

READ	TIME	JOB	YOU WRITE
1	2 min	The literal read: who speaks, to whom, what happens, where the emotion goes	Three or four words: speaker, situation, start feeling, end feeling
2	2 min	The prompt-guided read: hunt for the target (the child's grief, the return home) and mark every phrase that touches it	Underlines and one-word notes in the margin
3	2-3 min	Patterns and the turn: repetition, contrast, punctuation, sound, the shift	A bracket around the turn; two or three pattern notes

Use the title. Titles often give genre, setting, addressee, or even a tonal clue. Hopkins's title below, "Spring and Fall," announces two seasons and, as you will see, a pun.

Finding the turn

The turn is where the poem pivots. Hunt for it with this checklist:

SIGNAL	EXAMPLE
Conjunction	"But," "Yet," "And yet," "Still," "Now"
Stanza break or white space	the gap between stanzas
Tense change	past to present, present to future
Addressee change	from "you" to "God," from child to reader
Mode change	image to statement, description to command
A sudden short line	a line much shorter than the others

Once you find the turn, summarize the before and after in a phrase each. That summary is the backbone of most strong theses: "The poem moves from ___ to ___."

N-F-I: Notice, Focus, Interpret

This is the Chief Reader's three-step cycle and it is the heart of the method.

1. **Notice.** Make a wide list of observations about the whole poem: words, images, sounds, punctuation, line lengths, repetition, anything odd. Cast the net wide. Do not interpret yet.
2. **Focus.** Select the observations that cluster around the prompt's target. Group them into two or three families.

3. **Interpret.** For each family ask: *how* does this feature create an effect, and *why* does that effect matter to the speaker's complex attitude? Build sentences.

Analysis is recursive. If your interpretation does not fit a detail, go back to Notice.

What the three steps look like in a margin

STEP	MARGIN NOTE
Notice	"unleaving: invented word"
Focus	belongs to a family: language of dying and aging
Interpret	the odd word makes falling leaves feel like a loss of leaves from a living thing

Part 4: Writing the thesis

The defensible "although/yet" thesis

A thesis that earns the point makes a claim about meaning that a reasonable reader could dispute, and it names the complexity. The most reliable structure is concessive:

Although [surface feeling or apparent meaning], [poet] uses [key choices] to reveal [deeper or opposing feeling], suggesting [interpretation].

Four other frames work:

FRAME	TEMPLATE
Movement	"The speaker moves from ___ to , and the poem's [shift/structure] reveals . "
Not simply / but	"The speaker's response is not simply ___ but ___."
Both / and	"The speaker is both ___ and , and the poem holds the two feelings together by . "
Redefinition	"For this speaker, [prompt's key word] means ___."

Weak and strong theses (all about the same poem)

THESIS	VERDICT
"The speaker has a complex attitude toward the child's grief."	Restates the prompt. No point.
"Hopkins uses imagery, repetition, and diction to show the speaker's attitude."	Device list. No claim. No point.
"The speaker tells the child that autumn is sad."	Summary. No point.

THESIS	VERDICT
"The speaker is sympathetic toward the child's grief."	A claim, but too general and only one-sided; likely earns the point but sets up no line of reasoning.
"Although the speaker begins by gently teasing the child's grief over leaves, the poem turns to reveal that the speaker knows the child is already mourning her own mortality, so that tenderness and weariness are inseparable."	Defensible, complex, and sets up a line of reasoning. Point.

Two questions that strengthen a thesis

From the 2025 Chief Reader report: (1) What do my key terms mean in *this* poem? (2) Where does the poem not fit my claim, and how do I adjust? If your thesis uses the word "grief," ask what grief means for this speaker and child. If a line contradicts you, build the contradiction into the thesis; it is probably the complexity.

Part 5: Building the body

Organize by idea, not by device

The single most common structural error is the device-by-device essay: one paragraph on imagery, one on diction, one on syntax. That structure forces you to repeat the same claim three times. Instead, organize by **the poem's ideas or movements**: what the poem is doing in its first part, how it changes, and where it lands. Each paragraph then draws on whichever techniques build that idea.

DEVICE ORGANIZATION (AVOID)	IDEA ORGANIZATION (USE)
Paragraph 1: imagery	Paragraph 1: the speaker's gentle, affectionate surface
Paragraph 2: syntax	Paragraph 2: the prophecy that complicates it
Paragraph 3: sound	Paragraph 3: the final revelation that reframes everything

The paragraph template

Each body paragraph does four things in this order:

1. **Topic sentence with a claim and an analytical verb** that reuses a key term from the thesis and adds a new one.
2. **Evidence**: one to three short quotations (two to seven words each), integrated into your own sentence, with line numbers for poetry.
3. **Commentary**: at least twice as many sentences as quotation sentences. Explain *how* the language works (connotation, sound, structure, syntax), then *why* it matters to the speaker's complex attitude.
4. **A link** that points to the next idea or back to the thesis.

Commentary that explains how

Weak commentary names a device ("This is a metaphor") or restates the quote ("This shows that the speaker is sad"). Strong commentary does three things: it **points to the specific word or feature**, it **explains the mechanism** (what the word connotes, how the sound or structure behaves), and it **ties the effect to the thesis**.

Use these commentary frames:

- "The word ___ carries the connotation of , **which** ."
- "By placing ___ beside , **Hopkins makes the reader feel** ."
- "The shift from ___ to ___ enacts ___."
- "The absence of ___ here mirrors ___."
- "The rhyme of ___ with ___ binds ___ to ___."
- "Rather than , **the speaker** , which reveals ___."

Strong analytical verbs

characterizes, dramatizes, juxtaposes, mirrors, undercuts, complicates, destabilizes, evokes, renders, enacts, exposes, reconciles, oscillates, culminates, reframes, gently corrects, resists, concedes.

Introduction and conclusion

Keep the introduction to two or three sentences: author, title, the situation in a clause, and the thesis. Do not write biography or define terms. The conclusion should be one or two sentences that extend the meaning (what the poem finally suggests about grief, memory, or time) rather than repeating the thesis. If time is short, skip the conclusion and write a fourth body paragraph; readers award points for analysis, not for closing flourishes.

Sophistication: four pathways

PATHWAY	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
1. Complexities or tensions	Sustained attention to paradox, double meaning, irony, inner versus outer conflict; a thesis that holds "X, yet Y." The most common route.
2. Broader context	A context that illuminates the poem, such as the long human habit of reading nature as a mirror of the self. Not a sweeping generalization.
3. Alternative interpretations	Entertaining a competing reading and then explaining why your reading accounts for the poem better. Merely hinting does not count.
4. Vivid, persuasive style	Precise verbs, embedded quotations, controlled sentence variety, sustained throughout the essay.

What does **not** earn it: a single "deep" sentence in the conclusion; ornate vocabulary; sweeping claims like "Throughout history, mankind has..."; ignoring details that contradict your thesis. Build Row B first. A strong Row B with no sophistication point is a 5; a flashy attempt at sophistication on a thin Row B is a 3.

Pacing the 40 minutes

MINUTES	TASK
0-3	Read 1, margin notes
3-6	Read 2 and 3, bracket the turn

MINUTES	TASK
6-9	N-F-I list, thesis, three topic sentences
9-35	Write: intro (3 min), three body paragraphs (7 min each), short conclusion (1 min)
35-40	Reread; fix grammar; add a missing word-level comment

Part 6: The full worked example

The prompt

In the following poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, written in 1880, the speaker addresses a young girl who is grieving. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Hopkins uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex attitude toward the child's grief.

The poem (public domain)

SPRING AND FALL

To a Young Child

Margaret, are you grieving 1
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?
 Leaves, like the things of man, you
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
 Ah! as the heart grows older 5
 It will come to such sights colder
 By and by, nor spare a sigh
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
 And yet you will weep and know why.
 Now no matter, child, the name: 10
 Sorrow's springs are the same.
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
 What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
 It is the blight man was born for,
 It is Margaret you mourn for. 15

Step 1: Read 1 (literal)

An adult speaker asks a young girl, Margaret, whether she is crying about the falling of the leaves in "Goldengrove." The speaker says that as she grows older she will see such sights without sighing, even though she will still weep and "know why." The speaker then says the name of the sorrow does not matter, that all sorrow has the same source, that this sorrow cannot be expressed in words, and that the girl is really mourning for herself.

Notes: Speaker = adult. Addressee = Margaret. Situation = child weeping over autumn leaves. Start = gentle, questioning. End = grave, certain.

Step 2: Read 2 (target: the speaker's attitude toward the grief)

Underline every phrase that shows how the speaker talks about the child's grief: - "are you grieving / Over Goldengrove unleaving?" (a question; gentle but slightly teasing) - "With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?" (a question; "fresh" suggests innocence) - "as the heart grows older / It will come to such sights colder" (prophecy of numbness) - "And yet you will weep and know why" (the grief will return with understanding) - "Now no matter, child, the name" (soothing, a gentle hush) - "Sorrow's springs are the same" (a general truth) - "It is the blight man was born for" (an absolute) - "It is Margaret you mourn for" (a revelation, the last line)

Step 3: Read 3 (patterns and the turn)

- **Title.** "Spring and Fall": two seasons, but "Fall" is also the Fall of humanity. The title puns on the seasons (youth, age) and on the biblical fall into mortality. The subtitle "To a Young Child" fixes the addressee.
- **The turn.** Line 9, "And yet you will weep and know why." The word "yet" reverses the prophecy of coldness in lines 5-8. Then line 10 ("Now no matter, child, the name") pivots again from prediction to explanation. So there are really two movements: lines 1-9 (a gentle question and a prophecy) and lines 10-15 (a revelation).
- **Syntax.** The poem opens with two questions (lines 1-4) in a short, almost singsong line. The last six lines are declaratives with no questions; they become absolute.
- **Invented and compound words.** "Goldengrove," "unleaving," "wanwood," "leafmeal." The speaker makes up language to describe loss, which implies that ordinary words fall short.
- **Sound.** Couplet rhyme. The last couplet rhymes "for" with "for" ("born for / mourn for"), which is the same word rhymed with itself in a pair of identical endings, a closing that clicks shut. "Weep" and "know," "wanwood," "worlds" use repeated w sounds that sound like wailing or wind.
- **Pronouns.** "You" throughout, but the poem ends with "Margaret" by name. The poem begins and ends on her name.
- **Lines 12-13.** "Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed / What heart heard of, ghost guessed." The grief is something the mouth and mind never said, which the heart "heard" and the "ghost" (spirit) "guessed": knowledge older than language.

Step 4: N-F-I

Notice (wide list): questions; "Goldengrove"; "unleaving"; "fresh"; "colder"; "nor spare a sigh"; "wanwood leafmeal"; "And yet"; "no matter, child"; "springs"; "blight"; "ghost"; the last line names her; couplets; short lines; no punctuation in some places; the title pun.

Focus (three families): 1. *Tender questions and the child's innocence*: lines 1-4 (questions, "fresh thoughts," the speaker's gentle address). 2. *Prophecy of change*: lines 5-9 (coldness, aging, but "And yet you will weep and know why"). 3. *Revelation*: lines 10-15 (name does not matter; sorrow is universal; the heart, not the mind, knows; "It is Margaret you mourn for").

Interpret: The speaker begins with affectionate near-teasing, treating the grief as childish. But the speaker is not dismissive: the later lines show the speaker takes the grief with great gravity because the child is actually mourning her own mortality. The complexity: tenderness toward the child's innocence, weariness at what age brings, and solemn recognition that the child's tears are not mistaken but earlier than they should be.

Step 5: Thesis

Although Hopkins's speaker begins by gently questioning a child's tears over falling leaves, the poem's turn at "And yet" and its final revelation transform that tenderness into solemn recognition, so that the speaker's attitude joins affectionate protectiveness with a weary acceptance that the child is already grieving for her own mortality.

Step 6: Plan

PART	IDEA	EVIDENCE	TECHNIQUE
Intro	Context + thesis		
Body 1	Tender, slightly teasing surface (lines 1-4)	"are you grieving," "Goldengrove unleaving," "fresh thoughts"	Questions, invented word "unleaving," connotation of "fresh"
Body 2	Prophecy that complicates (lines 5-9)	"colder," "nor spare a sigh," "wanwood leafmeal," "And yet"	Syntax of prediction, compound words, the turn
Body 3	Revelation (lines 10-15)	"Sorrow's springs," "ghost guessed," "blight," "Margaret you mourn for"	Declarative syntax, rhyme, final naming
Conclusion	Extend: grief as the first knowledge of mortality		

The 6-point essay, with margin commentary

Text in [brackets] is a margin note explaining why the sentence earns credit.

In "Spring and Fall," Gerard Manley Hopkins gives his speaker an affectionate task: to comfort a child who weeps over the falling of autumn leaves. Although the speaker begins by gently questioning the child's tears, the poem's turn at "And yet" and its final revelation transform that tenderness into solemn recognition, so that the speaker's attitude joins affectionate protectiveness with a weary acceptance that the child is already grieving for her own mortality. [Thesis: defensible, names the complexity, sets up a line of reasoning from tender to solemn. Row A.]

The poem's opening lines establish a tone of loving gentleness that borders on teasing. The speaker asks, "are you grieving / Over Goldengrove unleaving?" and the questions treat the grief as something small enough to be asked about. [Topic sentence claims a tone and reuses thesis term "gentleness."] The invented word "unleaving," with its prefix un-, makes the falling of leaves feel like the undoing of something alive, yet the soft, repeated "-ing" endings keep the line lilting and light, so the child's sorrow is both acknowledged and cradled. [Commentary explains how: prefix, sound, and the double effect. Row B.] The phrase "fresh thoughts" (line 4) deepens the tenderness: "fresh" connotes both newness and unspoiled feeling, and the speaker's second question, "can you?", is rhetorical, implying that a child's mind cannot yet grasp what the leaves stand for.

[Second technique: connotation plus rhetorical question. "Implying" explains the effect.] Here the speaker is protective, not scornful, but the protection already rests on a knowledge the child lacks. [Link: sets up the complication.]

That knowledge breaks into the poem in the prophecy of lines 5-9, which complicates the earlier warmth. The speaker predicts that "as the heart grows older / It will come to such sights colder / By and by, nor spare a sigh," and the sentence slows its own progress with "By and by," a phrase that softens the blow even as it delivers it. [Evidence is specific and the commentary identifies how the phrase's rhythm softens.] The compound "wanwood leafmeal" is the poem's coldest image: "wan" suggests the pallor of illness, "wood" a stripped forest, and "meal" the grinding of leaves into dust, so that the world's decay is rendered as something ground down and pale. [Analyzes word parts; gives specific connotations.] Yet the speaker does not simply lament this future numbness. The turn at line 9, "And yet you will weep and know why," reverses the prophecy: the colder heart will still weep, but with understanding. [Explicit turn; uses the word "yet" as evidence and explains the reversal.] The line's plain monosyllables and its confident future tense replace the lilt of the opening with a weighty certainty, and the speaker's tenderness now carries weary foresight: the child will lose the innocence of her tears, and the adult will not be spared either. [Technique: syntax and rhythm; interprets the shift in the speaker's attitude.]

The final six lines reframe the whole poem by revealing what the grief is really about. The speaker hushes the child with "Now no matter, child, the name," dismissing the leaves, the particular cause, as only a name, and states in a declarative that "Sorrow's springs are the same." [Quotation integrated; "dismissing" explains function.] The wordplay on "springs" (sources of water, and the season of the title) folds the poem's opening season into its end, so that all grief wells from one source. [Links to the title: a pun the essay explains.] The speaker adds that this sorrow is something "Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed / What heart heard of, ghost guessed," a double negative sequence that denies language and reason any role and gives knowledge to the heart and the "ghost," or spirit. [Syntax and diction; shows the speaker's recognition of grief as prelinguistic.] The speaker's attitude is now solemn rather than playful, because the child is not mistaken at all: "It is the blight man was born for, / It is Margaret you mourn for." The identical rhyme of "for" with "for" closes the poem like a latch, and the naming of Margaret in the final line turns the speaker's general truth into a personal verdict. [Sound plus structure; explains the effect on the speaker's stance.] The speaker's tenderness remains in the use of her name, but it is the tenderness of someone who must tell a child what she already knows. [Complexity sustained; this is a sophistication move.]

By ending on the child's own name, Hopkins suggests that grief at the fall of the leaves is the first form of the human recognition that all living things, including ourselves, are subject to the Fall the title evokes. [Extends the meaning without cliché; the Fall pun is tied back to the poem.] The speaker's complex attitude is therefore less a response to Margaret's tears than an acknowledgment that her tears have come early to a truth the speaker has long carried. [Closing line holds the tension of the thesis.]

Scoring: 6/6.

ROW	SCORE	WHY
A. Thesis	1	Defensible and complex; responds to the prompt with an interpretation that holds two feelings.

ROW	SCORE	WHY
B. Evidence and Commentary	4	Specific, short quotations from across the poem; each paragraph explains <i>how</i> the language works (invented words, connotation, syntax, sound, the pun on “springs”) and <i>why</i> it matters to the thesis; multiple techniques are shown working together; the topic sentences build a line of reasoning from tenderness to solemn recognition.
C. Sophistication	1	The essay sustains a tension (tenderness joined to weary acceptance) across all paragraphs, uses the title’s pun to situate the poem in its larger frame, and writes with controlled, precise verbs throughout.

The 3-point essay, with diagnosis

Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem “Spring and Fall” is about a young girl named Margaret who is sad about the leaves falling in autumn. The speaker uses imagery, diction, and rhyme to show his complex attitude about the girl’s sadness. [No defensible claim: restates the prompt (“complex attitude”) and lists devices. Thesis point lost.]

In the first part of the poem the speaker asks Margaret why she is grieving. He says “Margaret, are you grieving over Goldengrove unleaving?” which shows that the speaker is kind. The speaker uses a lot of imagery of fall to describe the leaves like “wanwood leafmeal.” This imagery shows that the poem is about fall and sadness. [Quotation is accurate and specific, but the commentary only says “shows that the speaker is kind” and restates that fall is about sadness. Names imagery without explaining how any word works.]

In the second part the speaker tells her that when she is older she will not be sad about the leaves, but that she will still cry. This shows the speaker is kind but also knows that life is hard. The speaker uses diction like “colder” and “blight” to show that life is hard. [This is paraphrase plus a device label. The diction is named, but not analyzed: what does “colder” connote? Why “blight”? The turn at “And yet” is paraphrased, not analyzed.]

At the end the speaker says that Margaret is really crying for herself. The rhyme at the end “for” and “for” shows that the poem is ending. In conclusion, the poem shows that the speaker has a complex attitude because he is both kind and sad about life. [The final observation is a good insight (Margaret is mourning herself) but is delivered as summary, and the conclusion restates the prompt. The rhyme observation names a device and offers only “shows the poem is ending.”]

Scoring: 3/6.

ROW	SCORE	WHY
A. Thesis	0	"Complex attitude" is the prompt restated; "imagery, diction, and rhyme" is a device list; no interpretation. (A generous reader might award this point for the last sentence of the essay, "both kind and sad," but the essay's opening thesis does not.)
B. Evidence and Commentary	3	Specific evidence from the beginning, middle, and end; one genuine claim about a technique (the reversal to "she will still cry"), and the last paragraph's recognition that Margaret mourns herself; however, commentary is mostly summary or general ("shows that the speaker is kind"). This reaches 3 rather than 2 because the evidence is uniformly specific and at least one technique is tied to meaning. It is capped at 3 because the commentary does not consistently explain how.
C. Sophistication	0	No tension is sustained; the essay settles for "kind but also sad."

How to revise the 3 toward a 5:

1. Rewrite the thesis with "although/yet" and a specific complexity.
2. Choose three words ("unleaving," "wanwood leafmeal," "blight") and write two sentences on each about connotation and effect.
3. Replace "shows that" with "enacts," "reverses," "softens," and attach a *how*.
4. Treat the turn at "And yet" as the hinge of the essay, not as a paraphrased event.
5. Cut the conclusion that restates the prompt and add a fourth sentence of commentary instead.

Part 7: Three practice prompts

Time yourself: 40 minutes each. Write the thesis and plan first, then the essay. Score with the rubric in Part 1. Planning notes for each are in the Answer Key.

Practice 1: John Keats, "When I Have Fears" (written 1818)

In the following poem, the speaker contemplates the possibility of dying young. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Keats uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex response to his fears.

When I have fears that I may cease to be 1
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
 Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
 When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face, 5
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more, 10
 Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love;--then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
 Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink. 14

Practice 2: Robert Frost, "Acquainted with the Night" (1928)

In the following poem, the speaker describes a series of nighttime walks through a city. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Frost uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex relationship to the night.

I have been one acquainted with the night. 1
 I have walked out in rain--and back in rain.
 I have outwalked the furthest city light.

 I have looked down the saddest city lane.
 I have passed by the watchman on his beat 5
 And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

 I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
 When far away an interrupted cry
 Came over houses from another street,

 But not to call me back or say good-bye; 10
 And further still at an unearthly height,
 One luminary clock against the sky

 Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
 I have been one acquainted with the night. 14

Practice 3: William Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (1807)

In the following poem, the speaker addresses the dead poet John Milton. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Wordsworth uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex attitude toward his country and toward Milton.

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: 1
 England hath need of thee: she is a fen
 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower 5
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
 Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea: 10
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
 So didst thou travel on life's common way,
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay. 14

Self-scoring checklist

Before you check the Answer Key, score your essay:

QUESTION	YES/NO
Does my thesis make a claim about meaning, not just devices?	
Does it name a complexity (two feelings, a change, a tension)?	
Is each body paragraph organized around an idea?	
Does every quotation get at least two sentences of commentary?	
Did I explain <i>how</i> at least three specific words or features work?	
Did I address the turn?	
Did I use at least two different techniques inside one paragraph?	
Is there a sustained tension, not just a final sentence?	

Answer Key

Practice 1: "When I Have Fears" (Keats)

Situation and arc. A speaker, possibly Keats himself, lists three fears: dying before his writing is complete (lines 1-4), dying before he can trace the "symbols of a high romance" he sees in the night sky (5-8), and losing love (9-12). All three are "when" clauses, a long suspended sentence that does not resolve until line 12.

The turn. “then on the shore / Of the wide world I stand alone” (lines 12-13). The grammar finally lands, and the speaker reaches an image of solitude. The last line, “Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink,” resolves the sentence by letting both love and fame sink; the poem ends in diminishment, not in consolation.

Complexity. Ambition and love both sink; the speaker is intensely ambitious yet finally reduced to quiet solitude. The fear is not only of dying but of being unfinished. Notice that “fair creature of an hour” (line 9) makes the beloved as ephemeral as the speaker.

Evidence to notice. The harvest metaphor (pen gleaned the “teeming brain,” books like “rich garner” of “full ripen’d grain”); “huge cloudy symbols” (ambiguity, mystery, the unfinished); the prolonged syntax; the sonnet form (three quatrains and a couplet) used to hold fears that dissolve in the couplet; “unreflecting love” (love without thought, but also love that cannot be reflected on).

Sample thesis. “Although Keats’s speaker catalogs fears of unfinished work and lost love with the abundance of a harvest, the sonnet’s single suspended sentence collapses into a solitary image on the shore, suggesting that his ambition and his tenderness are equally vulnerable to the same unresolved silence.”

Sample organization. (1) Harvest and abundance of the first quatrain; (2) the night sky and incomplete vision; (3) the turn from love to isolation and the sinking couplet.

Practice 2: “Acquainted with the Night” (Frost)

Situation and arc. The speaker recites repeated actions (“I have walked,” “I have outwalked,” “I have looked,” “I have passed,” “I have stood still”). The repeated “I have” builds a catalog, which is a kind of confession. The speaker is neither threatened nor welcomed by the night; he is “acquainted,” a word that suggests familiarity without intimacy.

The turn. Lines 7-10: a distant “interrupted cry” is “not to call me back or say good-bye”: the speaker expects to be called or dismissed but gets neither. The poem moves from the speaker’s active walking to passive listening to an indifferent universe, and finally to the clock “neither wrong nor right” (line 13).

Complexity. The speaker appears self-reliant yet isolated; the night is both a companion (acquainted) and a void (nothing speaks to him). The refusal to “explain” to the watchman shows shame or privacy. The poem’s terza rima (interlocking rhyme: light/right/night, lane/explain, feet/street) ties each stanza to the next while the speaker remains disconnected from other people. The first and last lines are identical, so the poem circles back to where it began.

Sample thesis. “Although Frost’s speaker presents his familiarity with the night as a record of resilient wandering, the poem’s repeating syntax, its indifferent clock, and its circular final line reveal that his acquaintance is a form of isolation that no human voice answers.”

Practice 3: “London, 1802” (Wordsworth)

Situation and arc. The speaker addresses the dead Milton and asks him to return to a degenerate England. The octave (lines 1-8) diagnoses England as a “fen of stagnant waters” and ends with a request. The sestet (lines 9-14) turns to praise of Milton.

The turn. Line 9, “Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart.” The turn from lament to praise is also a turn from the plural “we” to the singular “thou,” and from the present to the past.

Complexity. The speaker is both furious at national decay and reverent toward Milton. He praises Milton's lofty distance (star, sea, heavens) while insisting that Milton also performed "the lowliest duties," so the greatness he asks for is at once exalted and humble. The last line, "The lowliest duties on herself did lay," complicates the picture of the star who "dwelt apart." The speaker's own imperative commands ("raise us up," "give us manners") reveal both desperation and faith in the poet's moral power.

Evidence to notice. The metaphor of the fen; the abstract list "altar, sword, and pen, / Fireside"; the similes (star, sea, heavens); the apostrophe; the sonnet structure.

Sample thesis. "Although Wordsworth's speaker laments England's moral stagnation, the sonnet's turn from the plural 'we' to the singular, exalted Milton reveals that his anger is built on reverence, and that the poem's final humility ('lowliest duties') redefines greatness as service."

Want a plan built around **your** student?

BOOK NOW →