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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Analysis Frameworks: TPCASTT, SIFT, DIDLS, SOAPSTone for Literature, **N-F-I**

Five reading tools for poems and prose. Each one is a checklist that keeps you from skipping something important. Learn the steps, watch one run on a short text, and then use the blank template in your own annotations.

How to choose a framework

FRAMEWORK	WHAT IT DOES	BEST FOR
TPCASTT	Walks you through a poem from title to theme	Poetry (FRQ 1, poetry MCQ)
SIFT	Sorts evidence into Symbol, Imagery, Figurative language, Tone/Theme	Quick, flexible close reading of any text
DIDLS	Examines diction, imagery, details, language, syntax	Prose style (FRQ 2)
SOAPSTone for literature	Names speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, tone	Getting oriented in a passage
N-F-I	Turns a noticing into a function and then an interpretation	Building paragraphs of analysis

Every framework serves one goal: moving from “what the text says” to “what the writer is doing and why it matters.” The AP rubric rewards the second, so finish every framework with an interpretation.

1. TPCASTT (for poetry)

Title, Paraphrase, Connotation, Attitude, Shifts, Title (again), Theme.

Step by step

1. **Title:** before reading, predict what the title promises.

2. **Paraphrase:** restate the poem in plain prose, line by line or sentence by sentence. This guards against misreading.
3. **Connotation:** look for imagery, figurative language, sound devices, and diction that carry associations beyond the literal.
4. **Attitude:** name the speaker's attitude toward the subject (and the poet's, if different) with a precise adjective.
5. **Shifts:** find the places where the poem turns (a change in tone, subject, time, or perspective). Check for signal words ("but," "yet," "now") and for changes in punctuation, rhyme, or line length.
6. **Title (again):** reread the title. What does it mean now?
7. **Theme:** state the poem's central idea as a full sentence.

Worked example: William Blake, "The Sick Rose" (1794)

O Rose, thou art sick! The invisible worm, That flies in the night In the howling storm,
Has found out thy bed Of crimson joy, And his dark secret love Does thy life destroy.

STEP	NOTES
Title	"Sick" and "Rose" together are jarring; a rose usually signals beauty and love, but "sick" promises decay.
Paraphrase	The speaker tells a rose that it is sick: an unseen worm that comes at night, in a storm, has found its bed and destroys it with a secret, dark love.
Connotation	The rose suggests beauty, love, and innocence ("crimson joy" suggests passion). The worm suggests corruption. "Invisible," "night," "dark," and "secret" all carry associations of concealment and danger. "Love" is paired with "destroy."
Attitude	Alarmed, grieving, and accusing.
Shifts	The poem moves from direct address ("O Rose") to description of the worm; the final line turns love into destruction.
Title (again)	The sickness is not a disease from outside but the effect of a "secret love," so the title points to a moral or emotional sickness.
Theme	Beauty and joy can be destroyed by hidden, corrupting forces that disguise themselves as love.

Blank template

STEP	YOUR NOTES
Title	

STEP	YOUR NOTES
Paraphrase	
Connotation	
Attitude	
Shifts	
Title (again)	
Theme	

2. SIFT (flexible close reading)

Symbol, Imagery, Figurative language, Tone and Theme. SIFT is useful when you have only a few minutes and need to find the strongest evidence quickly.

Step by step

1. **Symbol:** is there an object, color, or setting that seems to stand for something more?
2. **Imagery:** what sensory details appear, and what mood do they build?
3. **Figurative language:** what metaphors, similes, personification, or irony appear?
4. **Tone and Theme:** what is the attitude, and what larger idea does the passage suggest?
5. Connect: how do the first three create the fourth?

Worked example: Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (1894)

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

LETTER	NOTES
S	The open window and the sky suggest freedom and possibility; the clouds suggest the obstacles that have been cleared.
I	"Patches of blue sky" glimpsed through clouds is a visual image of hope emerging.
F	The clouds "piled one above the other" and the sky showing through personify the idea of grief giving way.
T/T	The tone is quiet and anticipatory; the theme is a sudden, unexpected sense of liberation.
Connect	The natural scene mirrors her inner change; the sky she looks at is the freedom she has not yet named.

Blank template

LETTER	YOUR NOTES
Symbol	
Imagery	
Figurative language	
Tone / Theme	
How they connect	

3. DIDLS (prose style)

Diction, Imagery, Details, Language, Syntax. DIDLS is the classic way to analyze the style of a prose passage. The danger is listing items without explaining effects, so write the effect beside every observation.

Step by step

1. **Diction:** note word choices, especially clusters of connotation.
2. **Imagery:** note sensory details.
3. **Details:** note what the author selects (and leaves out).
4. **Language:** note figurative devices and shifts in register.
5. **Syntax:** note sentence length, structure, and punctuation.
6. For each, write the **effect** and tie it to character, mood, or meaning.

Worked example: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), opening

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

LETTER	OBSERVATION	EFFECT
D	"truth universally acknowledged" is a lofty phrase for a social assumption	The grand diction mocks the idea by overstating its certainty
D	"possession," "fortune," "want" are language of property and need	Marriage is framed as an economic transaction
L	The sentence is a generalization offered as fact (irony)	The narrator invites the reader to doubt it
S	One long, balanced sentence with a delayed main clause ("must be in want of a wife")	The delay builds a mock-serious tone and lands the joke at the end

Blank template

LETTER	OBSERVATION	EFFECT
Diction		
Imagery		
Details		
Language		
Syntax		

4. SOAPSTone for literature

Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone. In a literary text, use SOAPSTone to orient yourself before analyzing.

Step by step

1. **Speaker:** who is speaking (narrator, character, poetic speaker)? Is the speaker reliable?
2. **Occasion:** what moment or situation prompts this speech or narration?
3. **Audience:** to whom is the speaker addressing the words (a listener, the reader, the self)?
4. **Purpose:** what does the speaker want or reveal?
5. **Subject:** what is the passage about?
6. **Tone:** what is the speaker's attitude, and does it shift?

Worked example: Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask" (1896)

We wear the mask that grins and lies, It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,— This debt we pay to human guile; With torn and bleeding hearts we smile, And mouth with myriad subtleties.

BOX	NOTES
Speaker	A collective "we," speaking for a community of people who must conceal their pain
Occasion	The ongoing need to hide suffering in the face of oppression
Audience	A general audience that does not see the pain behind the smile; possibly also the community itself
Purpose	To reveal the hidden suffering and the cost of concealment
Subject	The mask as a protective but painful disguise
Tone	Resigned, quietly bitter, and sorrowful

Blank template

BOX	YOUR NOTES
Speaker	
Occasion	
Audience	
Purpose	
Subject	
Tone	

5. N-F-I: Noticing, Function, Interpretation

N-F-I is the engine of a good body paragraph. It prevents a list of observations and builds each one into an interpretation.

Step by step

1. **Noticing (N)**: identify a specific detail, word, or technique. Quote it.
2. **Function (F)**: explain what the detail does in the passage (creates contrast, builds tension, reveals a character's state).
3. **Interpretation (I)**: explain what that function suggests about the larger meaning or the character. This is where the argument lives.

Worked example: Frost, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" (1923)

Nature's first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold.

PART	NOTES
N	The speaker calls nature's first green "gold" and the "hardest hue to hold."
F	The color "gold" connects early spring to something precious, and "hardest to hold" suggests that it slips away.
I	The poem suggests that the most beautiful stage of any life is also the most fleeting, which is the poem's central tragedy and what gives its quiet tone its sadness.

A paragraph built from the N-F-I: "Frost opens by calling nature's first green 'gold,' a color that is also 'her hardest hue to hold.' The paradox of a precious color that cannot be kept establishes the poem's central tension: the beauty of early life depends on its brevity. By treating spring as treasure that slips through the fingers, Frost suggests that loss is not an interruption of beauty but part of its definition."

Blank template

NOTICING (QUOTE)	FUNCTION (WHAT IT DOES HERE)	INTERPRETATION (WHAT IT SUGGESTS)

Practice

1. Run **TPCASTT** on Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" (use the lines above). State the shift and the theme.
2. Run **N-F-I** on the phrase "invisible worm" in Blake's "The Sick Rose."
3. Choose one sentence from any prose passage and run **DIDLS** with an effect for each item.

Answer Key

1. **TPCASTT (Dunbar)**. The poem shifts from describing the mask to addressing the speaker's plea for the world to see the suffering beneath. A strong theme statement: *People who are forced to conceal their pain pay a hidden price for their own protection.*
2. **N-F-I (Blake)**. *Noticing*: the worm is "invisible." *Function*: the word makes the threat impossible to see or defend against. *Interpretation*: the poem suggests that the most dangerous forces are the ones hidden within what seems beautiful, so the rose is destroyed from inside, not from outside.
3. **DIDLS**. Check that each item names a specific word or structure and that each effect says what the reader understands or feels. "Shows imagery" is a label; "makes the setting feel oppressive" is an effect.

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