

Who:	Who Is the Author?	Who Is the Audience?	Who Are the Major Characters/ Poem's Speaker? <small>If poem, leave rest of column blank</small>
What?	Subject Main Point	Interpretation of Theme Images in Poetry	Conflict Climax Resolution
When?	When wrote Relevance	Relevance to audience	When occurred Effect on Main Character
Where?	Where wrote Relevance	Relevance to audience	Where occurred Effect on Main Character
Why?	Intention POV	Desired Thoughts or Actions	Motivation
How?	Genre Tone Diction Syntax Devices (types and examples)	Audience's response to... Tone Diction Syntax Devices	Characters' reactions Characters' changes

Literary and Poetry Analysis and Evaluation Guidelines, Considerations, and Questions

When you must write a literary or poetry analysis essay, you are actually writing an analysis and *evaluation* essay. You first break down the selection (analysis) to see how each part works. Then you judge (evaluate) how well the author pulled it all together (synthesis) to achieve his/her intention. Therefore, your evaluation must determine how *effectively* the author creates his/her story, play, or poem. When you analyze what an author does, you must answer, “so what?” In other words, don’t just tell us *what* the author does; tell us *why* he/she does it and *how* effectively he/she does it.

Keep in mind that you must keep an *open mind*:

Reading literature provides us an experience, something new, something important. Expanding our repertoires, literature broadens our associations and helps us understand our own and others’ lives. It allows us to travel, to feel the past, to try the impossible, to imagine the possibilities, and to know and do more than our own lives’ constraints permit. Literature, especially poetry, intends to evoke our emotions, so while we must tune in to those emotions, we must also avoid letting those emotions dictate our analysis. Move beyond *like* and *dislike* to *appreciate* and *question*. Because readers bring their individual repertoires to their reading of a literary piece, each reader’s interaction with literature is unique and special, and those reactions make discussing literature an enjoyable, educational, and even intimate activity.

Return to the text:

- ☞ How does the writer develop theme, plot, and characters?
- ☞ In short stories and poetry, every word matters. Which words help create the overall effect or message?
- ☞ Find proof. Literary analysis mostly requires quotation support, but paraphrasing may suffice for some evaluations.

Starting Questions and Considerations:

Who — (Substitute “speaker” for character when appropriate.)

- ☞ How does the author’s life influence this work?
- ☞ How do characters interact and why are those interactions significant?
- ☞ What emotions does the poem’s speaker possess?
- ☞ Does the author use stereotypes to create conscious or unconscious cultural assumptions that gender, age, ethnicity, national identification, occupation, marital status, etc. are predictable and accompanied by certain character traits, actions, even values? How so?
- ☞ Does a character actually change, or did you change your view of that character? Why?
- ☞ Does the author play on our moral beliefs when identifying characters? Why? How?
- ☞ How does the audience react to the characters?

What —

- ☞ What is the poem’s structure? Impact of this?
- ☞ How do the events connect to each other, and do those connections make a strong story?
- ☞ Is the main conflict relevant to the audience?
- ☞ Do minor conflicts affect the audience? More or less than the main conflict?
- ☞ Does your interpretation of theme differ from other readers’? How so? Reasons?
- ☞ How do the main character’s change and the resolution create the theme?
- ☞ Does the theme reinforce or challenge your values?
- ☞ What images in poetry create the overall effect?

When and Where —

- ☞ Does the setting create or contribute to the conflict? How does this process occur?
- ☞ Does the setting create irony or satire?
- ☞ Is the setting relevant to the author? Audience?

Why —

- ☞ What is your experience with the piece? Why?
- ☞ Did the author achieve the desired thoughts/actions from you? Others?
- ☞ Is the theme a cliché (consider publication date), or does the author express an idea originally, even if it is a variation on a theme expressed before?
- ☞ When cultural values are prevalent, what do you think the author’s purpose is? Effect?
- ☞ Does the author present the motivation convincingly? Or is it forced, unbelievable?
- ☞ Why did the author choose the POV? Does this choice effectively achieve the intention?

How —

- ☞ What helps you determine the tone?
- ☞ Is the tone effective, engaging?
- ☞ What is your reaction to the writer’s words? Images? Organization? Techniques? Style?
- ☞ What diction and syntax stands out?
- ☞ What dominates? Effectively?
- ☞ Is something repeated? Effectively?
- ☞ Does a device help develop meaning?
- ☞ What concretes help develop the theme?
- ☞ How does POV affect our perception of a character? Does the author use this perception effectively, cleverly, and consistently?

