

Poetry Analysis: An Eye for Words

Step 1: Title

Before you even begin reading the poem or trying to analyze it, speculate on what you think the poem *might* be about based upon its title. Oftentimes, a poet conceals meaning and gives clues in the title.

Step 2: Paraphrase or Summarize

Before analyzing a poem, it is imperative that you understand its literal meaning.

When you **paraphrase**, write in your own words exactly what happens in the poem. Look at the number of lines in the poem—your paraphrase should have exactly the same number.

When you **summarize**, write three or four sentences that sum up what is happening in the poem. Be sure to include all of the main points of the poem from its beginning, middle, and end.

Step 3: Speaker

Identify the poem's speaker.

Step 4: Diction

Denotation: the dictionary definition of a word

Connotation: a feeling or idea suggested by a word or phrase

Also, pay attention to variations in **font size** and the chosen **placement** for words.

Step 5: Imagery

Are there images that appeal to the following **senses**?

Visual (sight)
Auditory (sound)
Tactile (touch)
Olfactory (smell)
Gustatory (taste)

What **literal** images are there?

Figurative images?

Is **repetition** used for an effect?

Is there a **refrain**?



Step 6: Figures of Speech

Are the following figures of speech included in the poem?

Simile (comparison using *like* or *as*)

Metaphor (comparison without using *like* or *as*)

Personification (giving inanimate objects human qualities)

Hyperbole (an overstatement, an exaggeration)

Irony (a paradox, what the reader expects to happen does not happen)

Step 7: Sound and Musical Devices

Are the following sound devices included in the poem?

Alliteration (repetition of beginning consonants)

Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds with different consonants)

Consonance (repetition of consonant sounds at the middle or end of words)

Rhyme Scheme (rhyming pattern from the end of each line)

Onomatopoeia (words make their own sound)

Step 8: Rhythm and Meter

Is there a **set pattern** to the stressed (and unstressed) syllables?

Is it **free verse**?

Step 9: Structure

Number of **stanzas**?

Consistent **size or shape** of stanzas?

Use of **capitalization**?

Shaped poem?

Step 10: Additional aspects

Are there any **allusions** (references to other works of literature or historical events?)

Are there any **symbols**?