

Poetry III

AP English Literature and Composition

The Function of Structure in a Text

Unit 8 is the last poetry unit and it handles the hardest material in the course: the family of devices built on **contradiction**.

- Ideas and images in a poem may extend beyond a single line or stanza.
- Punctuation is often crucial to understanding a text.
- When structural patterns are created, any interruption in the pattern creates a point of emphasis.

That third statement is the most efficient reading tool in the course. Establish what the poem has been doing, then find the moment it stops doing it. That moment is where the poem points.

Punctuation deserves the emphasis it gets. In a poem, a semicolon and a full stop are different claims about how tightly two statements are joined, and a poem without punctuation has made a decision about how you must read it.

A CONJUNCTION — *but, yet, and still*, at the head of a line

A CHANGE OF TENSE — the poem moves in time

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS — it starts speaking to someone

A CHANGE OF SCALE — the particular becomes general, or the reverse

The turn is where the poem stops doing one thing and starts another. Find it from the **signal**, and the structure question answers itself

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

What happens to the contradiction? That is the separating question

ANTITHESIS	IRONY	PARADOX
two opposites placed side by side	a mismatch between what is expected and what is	a contradiction that survives inspection
both remain true in their own terms	someone is aware of the gap	the contradiction IS the truth, not an error

"the harvest, and the emptied village"

"a generous year" - after we have seen the cost

"the fuller the barn, the fewer to eat from it"

Calling all three "irony" is the commonest lost mark in this unit.

Antithesis sets opposites side by side. Irony is a mismatch. A paradox contradicts and is still true

- Juxtaposition may create or demonstrate an antithesis.
- Situational or verbal irony 情境反讽与言语反讽 is created when events or statements are **inconsistent with what is expected**.
- Paradox 悖论 occurs when **seemingly contradictory elements are juxtaposed, but the contradiction - which may be at odds with ordinary logic - reveals a deeper truth**.

The distinction matters and students routinely collapse it. An **antithesis** places two opposed things together, and both remain true in their own terms. An **irony** is a gap between the expected and the actual - and someone, the writer or the reader, is aware of the gap. A **paradox** looks like a contradiction and survives inspection: the contradiction is the point, not an error.

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

Ambiguity allows for different readings and understandings of a text by different readers.

In this course, ambiguity is a resource. An essay that identifies a genuinely ambiguous element, explores both readings, and then argues for one is doing exactly what the sophistication point rewards - far more than an essay that pretends the text is simpler than it is.

AMBIGUITY — in the text

two readings, and the text supports both
you can quote for each
the tension between them is the point

VAGUENESS — in the reading

one reading, not yet worked out
“this could symbolise many things”
no quotation would settle it either way

Claiming ambiguity is a **commitment** to show both readings.
Without the two quotations it reads as the essay declining to decide

The Function of a Symbol

Symbols in a text, and the way they are used, may imply that a narrator, character, or speaker has a particular perspective.

A symbol is not free-floating. Someone in the text is treating that object as meaningful, and asking *who* attaches this meaning is often more productive than asking what the meaning is.

The Function of a Metaphor

- A **conceit** 奇喻 is a form of **extended metaphor**, common in poetry, developing **complex comparisons**.
- Conceits are often used to make **complex comparisons between the natural world and an individual**.
- **Multiple comparisons, representations, or associations may combine to affect one another** in complex ways.

A conceit is an extended metaphor that has been pushed further than seems reasonable, and the strain is deliberate. When analysing one, follow how far the poet takes the comparison and where it starts to resist - the resistance is usually the poem's real subject.

the **VEHICLE** is established

later terms are **DRAWN FROM IT**, not from anywhere else

the frame does work the plain statement could not

the writer **BREAKS** it — and that is the moment to analyse

→ a reader now expects that world to continue

→ consistency is what makes it feel inevitable

→ a break is never an accident in a text this controlled

The **break** is the examinable moment. A metaphor sustained for twelve lines and abandoned in the thirteenth has told you where the difficulty is

The Function of an Allusion

Because of **shared knowledge about a reference**, allusions create **emotional or intellectual associations** in readers who recognise them.

Note the condition: *shared knowledge*. An allusion is a bet on the reader's memory, and a poem that alludes heavily has chosen its audience.

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- A thesis expresses an **interpretation** requiring textual defence.
- **More sophisticated literary arguments explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation** - the sophistication point, stated by the CED.
- Evidence: **strategic, effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, developed **recursively**.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

Writers must acknowledge the words, ideas, images, texts, and intellectual property of others through attribution and citation.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the poet's use of contrast conveys a complex attitude. A weak answer calls everything

irony. A scoring answer separates the devices: *“The poem places the harvest against the emptied village - an antithesis, in which both are simply true. But the speaker calls the year ‘generous’, and the surrounding stanzas have shown what the generosity cost; that mismatch is verbal irony. The final line is neither: ‘the fuller the barn, the fewer to eat from it’ is a paradox, and it is the only statement the poem does not undercut - the contradiction is exactly the truth the speaker has arrived at.”* Three devices, correctly distinguished, and an interpretation that needs all three.

Exam tips

- **Establish the pattern, then find the interruption.** The interruption is where the poem points.
- **Punctuation is a claim** about how tightly statements are joined. A poem without it has made a decision too.
- **Antithesis, irony, paradox are not synonyms.** Learn the three definitions precisely; conflating them costs marks.
- **Ambiguity is a resource.** Explore both readings, then argue for one. That is the sophistication point.
- Ask **who attaches the meaning** to a symbol. It is usually more productive than asking what it means.
- A **conceit** is a comparison pushed past comfort. Follow it to where it resists - that is the subject.