

Literatura Española Avanzada
El Análisis de la Poesía

(How to attack the poetry essay question of the AP Spanish Literature Exam)

STRATEGY:

1. Read the question and quickly see what the focus of your answer should be: el desarrollo del tema, la voz poética, el uso de la naturaleza, etc.
2. Take a solid ten minutes to read the poem carefully, marking all the elements you plan to mention. **MAKE AN OUTLINE** that you will follow in your essay.
3. Write for the remaining 20-30 minutes, **carefully making specific references to the poem**, always staying with the topic and aiming to arrive at a strong conclusion.

FORMULA FOR STRUCTURING YOUR ANALYSIS:

1. **Make an opening statement:** ¿De qué se trata el poema? ¿Qué nos dice el poeta? ¿Cuál es su tema central?
2. **Consider the poetic voice/point of view:** ¿Quién habla? ¿A quién se dirige?
3. **Comment on the poet's tone/attitude.** ¿Es su tratamiento del tema personal o impersonal? ¿Es positivo, negativo o ambiguo? **This is the place where you focus on the poet's use of language: what specific images, metaphors, similes, symbols, and descriptive language make the tone clear to us?** Does the poet use first person and second person to make it more intimate? Does he use commands or exclamations to emphasize or questions to suggest?
4. **Comment on the poem's structure:** Is it a recognizable poetic form, like a sonnet, with a regular rhyme scheme and metric pattern? Is it free verse? Is there any use of assonance? Are the lines short or long? **Most of all, make a connection between these techniques and the poem's message.** Does the poem move quickly and powerfully to a big conclusion to underscore the poet's assertions or strong feelings? Does it start in one place and end up somewhere else? That is, is there a change in the tone or the development of a theme? Are lines or images repeated for emphasis? How does it make us feel?

Conclude with a final statement on the poem's message (or whatever element the question focuses on), emphasizing the final connection between the poet's message and the poem's structure.

Señora Williamson's Foolproof Guide to Poetry Analysis

(A summary of our analysis & discussion of Neruda's poem "El viento en la isla." The poem was used on the 2000 exam and is available on AP Central:

http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/repository/spanish_lit_00.pdf)

- I. OPENING: Focus on the question and let the reader know the direction that you will take in your answer.** You can restate the question, but don't just repeat it. The most important thing is to take a stand! It's OK to mention some techniques that you plan to discuss, letting the reader know right away what your focus will be.

Ejemplo: En este poema de amor, el poeta quiere comunicar su lucha interna, haciendo un contraste entre la fuerza de los elementos naturales y la fuerza de su amor. Por su uso de las metáforas, la personificación y el apóstrofe, el narrador describe el poder de la tormenta y el poder de su pasión, y nos deja comprender la atracción de las dos.

- II. BODY: Analyze the language and structure of the poem. Start with the poet's language.** If there are very **obvious poetic devices** that stand out, go ahead and present them next (for example, the extended metaphor of the wind as a horse). This is where you must mention specific language that conveys the poet's ideas, sets the tone, and reinforces the theme. (For example, you might discuss his desire to find refuge from the storm: "Escóndeme en tus brazos... por esta noche sola descansaré, amor mío" or the powerful appeal of the outside world: "el viento me llama galopando para llevarme lejos", in contrast with the powerful attraction of his love: "atados nuestros cuerpos al amor que nos quema".) **Early on describe the poet's tone.** To whom or about whom is the poet speaking? How does the poet feel about what he is saying? Is it abstract, philosophical, objective or very personal, introspective, intimate? Don't just say, "The poet's tone is melancholy, angry, or critical, but rather tell **HOW** you know that, with specific examples. Is he celebrating, condemning, questioning, or merely describing? Mention whether the tone is consistent throughout the poem, or if it changes. If it changes, say when and how.

Everything you mention should be connected to your initial focus on the question: how does the poet's language convey/reinforce the message? Beware of merely listing poetic devices with no comment on their effect or purpose!

Be sure to comment on the structure of the poem. Describe the stanza and the length of lines. Is the poem's structure regular or irregular? Is there rhyme? If so, what kind? What connection is there between the poet's message and the poem's form? What is the effect of a fixed verse form such as a sonnet as opposed to free verse, of regular rhyme as opposed to no rhyme, of the more powerful consonance as opposed to

assonance, of short lines as opposed to long lines, of rhetorical questions, of exclamations, of the use of first person? Tie what you say in with the poet's purpose.

III. CONCLUSION: The best way to end your essay is by focusing on the overall effect of the poem. You have already told how the language and the form of the poem serve the poet's purpose. Now tell how it affects the reader. Close with a reference to your original thesis, making it clear that you have arrived at your goal! (You can reiterate the poem's message and its impact, confirming how the poet achieved it.)

Ejemplo: Neruda nos deja con una fuerte sensación de sus sentimientos divididos. Hemos oído el viento y sentido la lluvia, pero, como él, hemos encontrado un refugio momentáneo en el amor.

Tip: Questions for Poetry Analysis

To teach poetry, I use questions like the following. Note that what's important is not just pointing out the techniques but trying to justify their expressive function, that is, how they contribute to express the topic or meaning of the poem and what they contribute to the tone.

Análisis (ejemplos):

1. ¿Cuántas voces hay en el poema? ¿A quiénes pertenecen? ¿Quién habla? ¿Quiénes hablan? Si hay solamente una voz, ¿presta el poeta su voz a algún personaje del poema?
 2. ¿Se burla el poeta de algo o de alguien para criticarlo? ¿Qué adjetivos se pueden aplicar al tono?
 3. ¿Es el poema una recitación? ¿un diálogo? ¿un monólogo? ¿una mezcla de éstos?
 4. ¿Se puede dividir el poema en muchas partes?
 5. Entre el principio del poema y su conclusión, ¿tienes la impresión de haber viajado un círculo completo?
 6. ¿Pasa el poema de una idea general a una idea específica? (Explícala.) ¿Pasa el poema de una idea específica a una idea general? (Explícala.)
 7. Tema: ¿Por qué se escribió el poema?
 - ¿para ilustrar una lección o moraleja?
 - ¿para emocionar al lector?
 - ¿para emocionar a una persona en particular?
 - ¿para librarse de un pensamiento que lo obsesiona?
 - ¿para expresar cierta visión de la vida?
 - ¿para expresar un estado del alma?
 - ¿para divertirse?
 - ¿para vengarse?
- Charlotte Gutiérrez, Xavier College Preparatory, Phoenix, Arizona

Checklist:

1. ___ El contenido de tu respuesta se refiere concretamente al tema.
2. ___ Planteas una idea en la introducción.
3. ___ Las ideas fluyen de una manera lógica a lo largo del trabajo.
4. ___ Hay evidencia de una transición gradual de una idea a otra.
5. ___ Analizas el lenguaje poético y das ejemplos.
6. ___ Analizas los recursos técnicos y das ejemplos.
7. ___ Incluyes ejemplos concretos para sustentar tus ideas.
8. ___ Es evidente que el desarrollo permite llegar a una conclusión lógica.
9. ___ Mantienes el enfoque en la pregunta; no hay digresiones.
10. ___ Contestas **toda** la pregunta.