

Writing a Poetry Essay – Step By Step

Step 1: Analyse the question.

- Underline task words and topic words. Make sure you are clear exactly what the question is asking and how you could answer it.

Step 2: Read the poems.

- Check the meanings of any unfamiliar words or phrases.
- Make sure you feel confident about the meaning/message of the poem – you may look up online analysis of the themes if you still feel unsure
- Go through the poems in detail, searching for techniques that might indicate the author's attitude toward death.
 - sound devices (rhyme, rhythm, onomatopoeia)
 - figurative language (metaphor, simile, symbol, hyperbole)
 - word connotations & emotive language
 - ambiguous, surprising, or contradictory meanings e.g. oxymorons, juxtaposition, enjambment, use of contrast
- Reflect on the poem's tone (author attitude) and mood (feeling created)

Step 3: Plan your essay

- Decide on an overall thesis – the main point of your essay – what you are trying to say in answer to the question. You will keep linking back to this point. Some suggestions could be:
 - The authors of these three poems all express the same ideas about death
 - Although the authors all have different ideas about death, they use the same techniques to express these ideas
 - Some of the authors use techniques to reflect a generally positive attitude toward death, while others reflect a negative attitude
- Decide on at least three main points of comparison or contrast
 - Choose the quotes you will use as evidence for each point. Don't limit it to one.
- Write a rough outline of your essay structure – think about which order your main points should go in.
- Write down dot points of what you will actually say in each paragraph – use PEEL as a guide

Step 4: Write your essay

- Remember to use formal academic language
- Use connectives and comparative language

Step 5: Proofread & polish

- Check for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and academic language
 - Use Grammarly/word suggestions
 - Get a friend to edit
- See if you can make any of your paragraphs denser and more concise. Nominalise verbs, condense noun groups, remove repetition and waffle.

Essay Structure

INTRODUCTION:

- Hook (get the reader's attention)
- Background information about the topic generally
- Thesis statement – your answer to the question
- Brief summary your main points

BODY PARAGRAPHS:

- **POINT** – one similarity or difference
- **EVIDENCE** – example 1, with quote
- **ELABORATE** – what this means, compare/contrast
- **EVIDENCE** – example 2, with quote
- **ELABORATE** – what this means, compare/contrast
- **(Optional) example 3 with quote, elaborate**
- **LINK** – back to your overall thesis

CONCLUSION:

- Re-state your thesis – how you have answered the question
- Restate your main points of comparison
- Finish with a takeaway message or opinion about the topic as a whole.

Using Quotations

- When quoting a poem, instead of a page number you list a line number in brackets after a quotation: "But someone still was yelling out and stumbling / And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime" (l. 11–12).
- Use quotation marks around quoted sections, e.g. "To be or not to be."
- Use the EXACT words, spelling, and punctuation from the original – e.g. "flound'ring" not "floundering".
- Indicate line breaks in poetry with a slash: "Do not go gentle into that good night / Rage, rage against the dying of the light."
- Use an ellipsis (3 dots) to indicate sections left out of a quotation: "But someone still was... flound'ring like a man in fire or lime" (l. 11-12)
- Try and work quotations smoothly into your sentences. Example: Owen compares the scene through the "misty panes and thick green light" (l.13) of his gas mask to being underwater, watching the soldier "guttering, choking, drowning" (l. 16).