

Poetry II

AP English Literature and Composition

The Function of Structure in a Text

Unit 5 is the second poetry unit, and it does two things: it names the **forms** a poem can take, and it completes the figurative toolkit.

- **Closed forms** 格律诗体 include **predictable patterns** in lines, stanzas, metre, and rhyme.
- **Open forms** 自由诗体 may not follow expected or predictable patterns.
- **Structures combine in texts to emphasise certain ideas.**

The examinable question is never “which form is this?” but **what the form does**. In a closed form, the interesting moment is the departure - the line that runs long, the rhyme that fails to arrive. In an open form, the interesting moment is the imposition - the sudden regularity in a poem that has refused it.

Literal and Figurative Meaning

Words with multiple meanings or connotations add nuance or complexity that can contribute to interpretation.

In poetry, a word that could mean two things frequently means both. Resist choosing.

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

- **Descriptive words** qualify or modify what they describe **and affect** how the reader perceives it.
- **Hyperbole** 夸张 exaggerates while **understatement** 低调陈述 minimises. Exaggerating or minimising an aspect of a thing has an effect on how it is understood.

Understatement is the more powerful of the pair and the more often missed by second-language readers. A poem that describes a catastrophe as *inconvenient* is not being calm; the gap between the event and the word is the poem’s whole comment on it.

The Function of an Image or Imagery

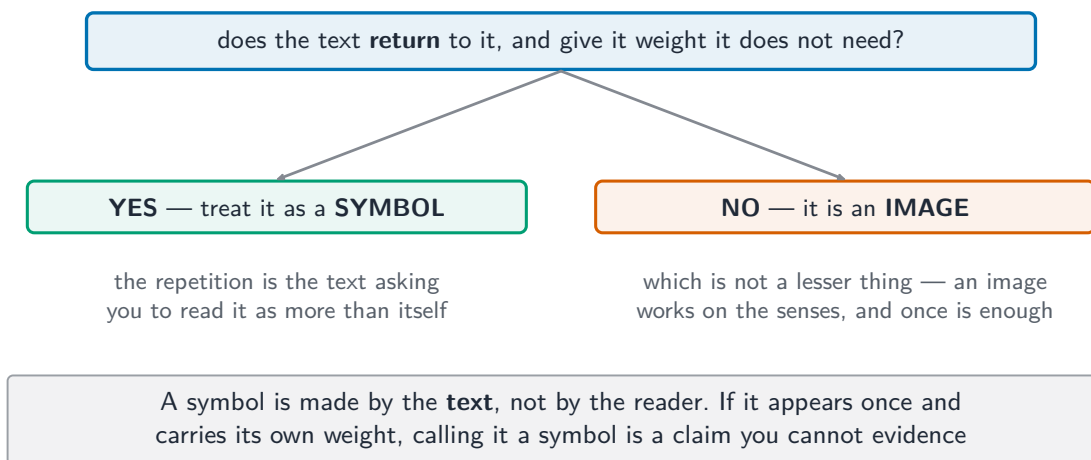
	What it is	What it DOES to the reader
Hyperbole	exaggerates	the gap between the thing and the word is the speaker's judgement of it
Understatement	minimises	calling a catastrophe "inconvenient" is not calm - it is comment
Imagery	a PATTERN of sensory images	a claim the poem makes without ever stating it
Extended metaphor	one comparison, sustained	if its terms CHANGE as it runs, that change is the argument
Personification	grants a human trait to a nonhuman thing	ask what granting it agency does - a wind that DECIDES is a claim
Allusion	imports meaning the poem never wrote	efficient, and risky: it works only for readers who recognise it

One device traced through a poem beats four devices named. The right-hand column is the half that scores.

Naming a device earns nothing. Saying what it does to the reader is the analysis

- Descriptive words **contribute to sensory imagery** 感官意象.
- An **image** can be **literal**, or a form of comparison representing something through another thing.
- A **collection of images - imagery** - may **emphasise ideas** in parts of, or throughout, a text.

The plural matters. A single image is a detail; a *pattern* of images running through a poem is a claim the poem is making without stating it.



The Function of a Metaphor

- Metaphorical comparisons **do not focus solely on the objects compared**; they focus on the **particular qualities** the comparison brings out.
- Comparisons communicate **literal meaning** and may also convey **figurative meaning**.
- An **extended metaphor** 延伸隐喻 is created when the comparison of a main subject and comparison subject **persists across a passage or a whole text**.
- Interpretation of an extended metaphor **may depend on the context of its use**.

An extended metaphor is the most rewarding thing to find in an unseen poem, because it gives you structure and meaning at once: you can trace how the comparison develops, and a comparison that *changes* as it extends is the poem’s argument in motion.

The Function of Personification

Personification 拟人 is a type of comparison that **assigns a human trait or quality to a nonhuman object, animal, or idea**.

Treat it as a comparison with the same parts as any other: the main subject is the nonhuman thing, the comparison subject is a person, and the transferred quality is the human trait. Then ask the useful question - **what does granting this thing agency do?** A wind that *decides* is not the same claim as a wind that blows.

WHAT IT DOES	HOW IT DOES IT	WHAT TO SAY ABOUT IT
gives a thing INTENTION	it now acts, rather than merely happening	who or what is being blamed
makes a setting FEEL	the landscape carries the mood a character withholds	whose feeling this actually is
makes an abstraction ACT	time, death or fear becomes something you could meet	what the abstraction is made to want
sets the scale	a small thing given a will can dominate a passage	what has been made large, and what small

“It brings the object to life” is the **definition**. The third column is the commentary, and it is different every time

The Function of an Allusion

Allusions 典故 may reference **literary works including myths and sacred texts, other works of art, and historical events.**

An allusion imports meaning the poem has not written. That is its efficiency and its risk: it works only for readers who recognise it. When you meet one you do not know, say what the poem does with it structurally - where it is placed, what it interrupts - rather than pretending to a recognition you lack.



An allusion also **costs** something: it only works on a reader who knows the source, and choosing it says who the text expects to be read by

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Unchanged: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence, which **may** preview the line of reasoning.

Developing Commentary

A **line of reasoning** is the logical sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary** explaining the relationship between evidence and claim.

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Evidence used **strategically**, **effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, and interpretation as a **recursive** process.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

Transitional elements - words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs - **assist in creating coherence.**

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the poet's use of figurative language conveys the speaker's attitude. A weak answer catalogues: *"The poet uses personification, imagery, and a metaphor."* A scoring answer traces one device developing: *"The extended comparison of the tide to a creditor runs the length of the poem, but the terms change: in the first stanza it 'asks', by the third it 'takes what was always owed'. The comparison subject stays constant while the speaker's account of the relationship hardens - so the attitude the poem conveys is not fear of loss but the recognition that the loss was never hers to prevent."* One device, traced, with the attitude it produces.

Exam tips

- Never ask "which form is this?" Ask **what the form does** - and look for the departure or the imposition.
- A word with **two meanings often means both**. Do not choose prematurely.
- **Understatement** is the more powerful half of the pair, and the more often missed. The gap is the comment.
- A **pattern of images** is a claim the poem makes without stating it. A single image is only a detail.
- An **extended metaphor** that changes as it extends is the poem's argument in motion. Trace it.
- Cataloguing devices earns nothing. **One device traced** beats four devices named.