



# Advanced Principles:

READING THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE PASSAGES

# Reading the Passages

Read in the most efficient way possible.

You'll want to use a slightly different approach to prose than you would to poetry, but there are some things to keep in mind for both:

- Reading to answer questions.
- You can come back to the passage anytime you want
- You *should* go back to the passage to answer the questions.

It will probably be something specifically chosen by the test writers because you probably didn't cover them in class.

**Good News:** No body else taking the test has probably read it.

**Bad News:** It's an open book test. (You don't have time to study the passage!)

# Reading Prose Passages

Read to assimilate information quickly and efficiently.

**You are NOT reading for pleasure.**

## 0. PREVIEW THE QUESTIONS (OPTIONAL)

- A quick read of the questions provides context. Find a strategy and stick with it!
- Read the questions and not the answers. Don't try to memorize them. Just get a sense of what they are asking about (IE: questions about literary devices or a certain character).
- ❖ This can provide clues that will make your reading more active.

## 1. SKIM THE PASSAGE

- Take no more than a minute.
- Read the first sentence of paragraphs or stanzas carefully, then glance over the rest to see if it's what you thought.
- Read the last sentence or line of the poem.
- Let the skimming be slightly uncomfortable – that means you are doing it right.
- Aids efficient comprehension.

## 2. READ THE PASSAGE

- ✓ Plain old-fashioned reading. *Don't fixate on details. Don't get stuck or go blank.*
- ✓ When you hit a sentence you don't understand, don't panic.
- ✓ Read for the main idea. If you hit a tricky sentence, keep going.
  - ✓ It may be explained later in the text or the missing pieces will fall into place later in the reading.
- ✓ Missing one thing isn't going to prevent you from understanding the piece or getting an overall picture.

# Get the Main Idea

Visualize what you are reading. Think of it as a short movie clip.

## WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

**MAIN IDEA = the general point.**

AP test writers are sophisticated – they often don't use any obvious clues like topic sentences.

*In poetry, looking for the topic sentence  
is a waste of time.*

# Summary

Reading an AP Multiple-Choice prose passage

- **Preview the questions (optional)**
- **Skim**
- **Read for the main idea**

# Reading Poetry Passages

Must read efficiently and keep your mind open.

Narrative vs. Verse – What’s the difference?

*Narrative*: unfolds and builds on itself. Understanding comes early and is deepened and changed by further reading. Makes sense as it flows. Meant to be understood “on the run”.

*Verse*: Understanding can take time. Poem is like a sculpture – it is meant to be wandered around, looked at from different sides and angles, and finally, taken in as a whole.

Always read poetry TWICE

**FIRST** – just take it in. Read it through from top to bottom. Don’t stop to try and analyze or figure it out. If it makes sense, great. If it doesn’t, don’t worry about it.

**SECOND** – Go phrase by phrase. Focus on understanding. Look for the main idea.

# Panic & Obsession

If you still don't have the main idea – don't panic.

Don't skip the passage, go on to the questions.

- the questions can help you understand the poem
- the vocabulary terms used in the questions will be familiar
- may help you use POE to crack a series of question on a poem.

Don't obsess over a difficult poem.

REMEMBER, if a poem gives you tons of trouble, chances are it's giving everyone trouble.

## Go to the questions!



# Problem with Poetry

Good poetry:

- makes conscious use of all language's resources
- pushes the limits of language
- typically creates a heightened awareness of language in the reader

If a poet is successful, the poem:

- speaks to the reader
- is intensely meaningful
- suggestive of new ideas and connections
- surprisingly exact.

Poets use:

- difficult vocabulary,
- odd figures of speech
- unusual combinations of words in strange orders.

**Given that this is a timed situation, you may not be able to be in the mindset to allow a meaningful experience.**

Poets play with time and stretch the connections we ordinarily expect to see between ideas.

Many are also deliberately open to a number of valid interpretations.

# No Problem at All!

Kinds of poems you will see:

- Complex, challenging language
- Good old-fashioned, straightforward meaning

Take a close look at:

- Diction (individual words) that the poet has chosen to use
- Word choice = HUGE clue to tone
- Tone = poets attitude to subject

IE: Poet uses *morose* instead of *sad*

Subject is depressed and not just disappointed

Don't forget the title!

Quickly glance at:

1. Diction
2. Last few lines
3. Title

You are on your way to understanding!

# Pros Read Poetry for Prose

The secret to understanding AP poetry passages quickly and fully?

**Ignore the “Poetry Parts”!**

- ❖ Rhythm
- ❖ Music of the language
  - ❖ Form
  - ❖ Line breaks
- ❖ Read in sentences, not in lines. Emphasize punctuation!
  - ❖ Ignore rhyme scheme
- ❖ Prepare for LONG thoughts (ideas that develop over several lines)

Many tend to:

- Emphasize lines
  - line breaks
  - and ignore punctuation
- DON'T DO THIS!**

If the line breaks are natural pauses –  
OK

It will be easier to read and understand  
– but don't expect this!

# Easier Poetry

Look at these lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

The landscape fades.

The air is still.

The beetle wheels and drones.

The tinklings lull the folds

Lines build, one upon the next, shaping a picture, forming a complex sentence. There are complete thoughts with each line – no loose ends.

\*Tinklings are of bells on livestock and folds are enclosures where sheep graze, or the flocks of sheep themselves.

# Challenging Poetry

This is more like the kind of poetry you will see.

*Most students  
struggle with this  
type of poetry!*

My Last Duchess  
By Robert Browning

FERRARA

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

*Line* Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

(5) Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depths and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by

(10) The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they could ask me, if they durst,  
how such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus...

My Last Duchess  
By Robert Browning

FERRARA

Narrator is the Duke

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depths and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they could ask me, if they durst,  
how such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus...

Points to a painting, remarks on its lifelike quality, mentions the artist, and invites the listener to sit and contemplate the portrait for a moment

One long sentence. Strangers never see the portrait (or its expression of depth and passion) without the Duke moving the curtain (letting them see it) and turning towards the Duke as if to ask, "if they durst (dare)", "How did that expression get there?"


Read the poem as prose and honor the punctuation. Ignore the line breaks. If this is difficult, put brackets around the sentences. Pay attention to sentence structure.

# Summary

## Basics of Reading Passages

- ❖ You are reading in order to answer the questions – that’s the whole point.
- ❖ Reading for a test is different from normal reading. You have limited time, and you have to approach the passages in a way that takes that into account.
- ❖ You can reread the passage, or parts of it, anytime you want, and you should go back to the passage in order to answer the questions.

## Reading Prose Passages

- ✓ Preview the question if it helps you.
  - ✓ First, skim the passage.
  - ✓ Skimming should never take more than a minute.
  - ✓ Read for the main idea.
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## Reading Poetry Passages

- Preview the questions if it helps you.
- Read a poem twice before you answer the questions.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Read: Get all the words in your head.
  - Get the basic sense of what is going on.
  - Don't get a fixed impression of the poem before you finish it.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Read: Phrase by phrase.
  - Focus on understanding what you read in the simplest way.
  - Don't worry about symbols or deep meaning.
  - Visualize what you read as you follow the narration.
- You will need to go back and read parts of the poem, maybe the entire thing, but only do what is necessary.



## Poetry into Prose

- Find the spine – the prose meaning – of the poem.
  - ✓ Ignore line breaks
  - ✓ Emphasize punctuation. Read in sentences, not in lines.
  - ✓ Be prepared for “long” thoughts – ideas that develop over several lines.
- Before you read it as poetry – read it as prose!

# WORKS CITED

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