

In the two poems below, Keats and Longfellow reflect on similar concerns. Read the poems carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems, analyzing the poetic techniques each writer uses to explore his particular situation.

“Mezzo Cammin”¹

“When I Have Fears”

**Written at Boppard on the Rhine August 25, 1842,
Just Before Leaving for Home**

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
5 When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
10 That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love; —then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

1818 — **John Keats (1795-1821)**

Half of my life is gone, and I have let
 The years slip from me and have not fulfilled
 The aspiration of my youth, to build
 Some tower of song with lofty parapet.
5 Not indolence, nor pleasure, nor the fret
 Of restless passions that would not be stilled,
 But sorrow, and a care that almost killed,
 Kept me from what I may accomplish yet;
Though, half-way up the hill, I see the Past
10 Lying beneath me with its sounds and sights,—
 A city in the twilight dim and vast,
With smoking roofs, soft bells, and gleaming lights,—
 And hear above me on the autumnal blast
The cataract² of Death far thundering from the heights.

1842 — **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)**

¹ The title is from the first line of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" (Midway upon the journey of our life").

² A large waterfall

AP[®] English Literature and Composition – Poetry Essay Scoring Guidelines

The score reflects the quality of the essay as a whole – its content, its style, its mechanics. Students are rewarded for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly-written essay be scored higher than a 3.

9-8	These essays offer a persuasive analysis of the ways in which the poet uses literary elements to establish meaning in the poem. Although these essays offer a range of interpretations and choose to emphasize different elements of poetry, they are convincing in establishing the relationship between technique and meaning. They demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the analysis of poetry. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, these essays are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear, effective and sophisticated , and in the case of a 9 essay, especially persuasive .
7-6	These competent essays offer a reasonable analysis of the ways in which the author uses elements of poetry to convey meaning in the poem. They are less thorough or less precise in their interpretations and in their discussion of elements of poetry, and they establish the relationship between technique and meaning less clearly, than essays in the 9–8 score range. These essays demonstrate the ability to express ideas clearly with references to the text, although they do not exhibit the same level of effective writing as the 9–8 papers. While essays scored 7–6 are generally well written, those scored a 7 demonstrate more sophistication in both substance and style.
5	These essays may respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the poem, but they may be superficial in analysis of meaning and technique. They often rely on paraphrase, but paraphrase that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis of the ways in which the author uses elements of poetry may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported by references to the text. There may be minor misinterpretations. These essays demonstrate control of language, but the writing may be marred by surface errors. These essays are not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as 7–6 essays. A 5 paper is best described as workmanlike in thought and quality.
4-3	These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the ways in which the author uses elements of poetry to establish meaning in the poem. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant. Evidence from the poem may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The writing often demonstrates a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreadings and/or demonstrate inept writing.
2-1	These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4–3 range. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, the assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the poem. The essays may contain serious errors in grammar and mechanics. They may offer a complete misreading or be unacceptably brief. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the poem.
0	These essays respond with no more than a reference to the task, contain completely off-topic responses, or are blank.

Determining the Task on Poetry Questions

There is one kind of question about a poem that appears occasionally and that is unlikely to be used with a prose passage. The student is asked to discuss how one part of a poem is related to another part. For example, the question may require an explanation of how the first four stanzas of a poem prepare, or do not prepare, the reader for the attitudes expressed in the fifth stanza. Or a student may have to contrast the first half and last half of a poem or relate the images of one section to the images of another section. Another difference is that students may be presented with two poems and asked to compare and contrast them.

But most of the poetry questions resemble the prose questions. There is, in fact, an archetype, a paradigm, a framework for all AP prose and poetry questions. This is it:

Read the following (prose passage or poem) carefully. Then write an essay in which you discuss the author's (or the speaker's, or whoever's) attitudes toward thus-&-such and also discuss the devices the author uses to convey these views.

Notice that the question has two parts. The first calls for a reading of the passage's meaning, an interpretation of what it conveys. The question may ask for the attitude, or views, or response, or feelings of the author, or the speaker, or a character, or two characters who appear in the poem or the passage.

The second part of the question is about style. It calls for a discussion of devices, or literary devices, or techniques, or language or resources of language, or stylistic devices, or style. Sometimes the devices will be unspecified; sometimes the question will contain a list of two or more. The most commonly specified techniques are diction, imagery, figurative language, choice of details, tone, and syntax. Less often, the list may include organization, devices of sound, allusion, and point of view.

Remember, the question may ask for one or more attitudes or states of mind; do not simply limit your response. Also be sure to deal with more than one technique. If the question suggests a discussion of terms "such as diction, imagery, tone, and syntax," you could safely skip one of the four, but if the question directly states, "discuss diction, imagery, tone, and syntax," deal with all four. However, expect that if you are given direct requirements like this, you will likely be asked for three techniques, not more.

Before beginning to write your essay on the poem, you should go through the same analytical processes that you used on the poetry in the multiple-choice section of the exam. And you must be sure you've defined clearly all the parts that must be included in your essay.

Practice defining the tasks by using the three following poetry questions:

1. Both of the following short poems are sonnets spoken by a man to the woman he loves. Write a well-organized essay about their similarities and differences. Deal with both theme and style.

If you highlight, you should hit the words “similarities,” “differences,” “theme,” and “style.” What you have is four tasks: similarities of theme, similarities of style, differences of theme, and differences of style. The question allows you to choose what devices of style you want to discuss. High-scoring essays talk about several, such as diction, figurative language, and any other relevant devices. With questions like this, you can skip the areas in which you feel insecure (syntax or metrics, perhaps?), but if you’re good at analyzing metrics (not merely identifying the meter), you could demonstrate your knowledge in your section on style.

2. Read the following poem carefully, and write an essay in which you discuss how the author’s diction and syntax reveal his attitudes toward the city and the country in time of war.

Notice that “attitudes” here is plural, though even if it were singular, the question may still require more than one (his attitude to the city and his attitude to the country). And remember, this attitude may be complex (for example, he likes the friendliness of the country but objects to its excessive curiosity). Here you have no choice in stylistic devices; you must write on diction, and you must write on syntax. There are four main tasks: diction and city, syntax and city, diction and country, and syntax and country. This question is an example of the archetypal AP question.

3. Read the following poem carefully. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how the imagery of the last three stanzas is related to and different from the imagery of the first three stanzas. Explain how this difference determines the tone and meaning of the poem as a whole.

To explain how the images of the first three stanzas are like and unlike those of the last three, you must first understand what the images are (the literal sensory objects as well as the figures of speech such as simile or metaphor that evoke sensations). Then you must determine how the images of the beginning of the poem are (1) like and (2) unlike those of the end. Having done this (with specific examples, of course), you can go on to explain how the differences in imagery determine the (3) tone (which you must clarify, probably in several words, not just one). Finally, you must articulate (4) a thematic meaning or several meanings of the poem as a whole (that life is transient, that the imagination consoles us for the loss of loved ones, or some such notions) and relate what you’ve said about the differences in imagery to this meaning. Note, however, that a question with as many demands as this one would not likely be used on the exam. A real exam question would be more likely to ask only how the imagery of the last three stanzas is related to and different from that of the first three. Or it might ask only how the difference in the images at the beginning and end of the poem determine its tone and meaning.