

The TPS-FASTT (“Types Fast”) Method Poetry Analysis Technique

When faced with the sometimes daunting task of analyzing a poem, you will need to keep all of the following points in mind or risk a significant misreading:

Title: Examine the title before reading the poem. Sometimes the title will give you a clue about the content of the poem. In some cases the title will give you crucial information that will help you understand a major idea within the poem. For example, in Anne Bradstreet’s poem “An Author to Her Book,” the title helps you understand the controlling metaphor.

Paraphrase: Paraphrase the literal action within the poem. At this point, resist the urge to jump to interpretation. A failure to understand what happens literally inevitably leads to misunderstanding. For example, John Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” is about a man who is leaving for a long trip, but if it is read as a poem about a man dying, then a misreading of the poem as a whole is inevitable.

Speaker: Who is the speaker in this poem? Remember to always distinguish the speaker from the poet. In some cases the speaker and poet might be the same, as in an autobiographical poem, but often the speaker and the poet are entirely different. For example, in “Not My Best Side” by Fanthorpe, the speaker changes from a dragon, to a damsel, to a knight – none of these are Fanthorpe.

Figurative Language: Examine the poem for language that is not used literally. This would include, but is certainly not limited to, literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, metaphor, litotes, allusion, the effect of sound devices (alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, rhyme), and any other devices used in a non-literal manner.

Attitude (Tone): Tone, meaning the speaker’s attitude towards the subject of the poem. Of course, this means you must discern the subject of the poem. In some cases it will be narrow, and in others it will be broad. Also, keep in mind the speaker’s attitude toward self, other characters, and the subject, as well as attitudes of characters other than the speaker.

Shifts: Note shifts in speaker and attitude. Shifts can be indicated in a number of ways including the occasion of poem (time and place), key turn words (but, yet), punctuation (dashes, periods, colons, etc.), stanza divisions, changes in line or stanza length, and anything else that indicates something has changed or a question is being answered.

Title: Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

Theme: First list what the poem is about (subject) and then determine what the poet is saying about each of those subjects (theme). Theme must be expressed as a complete sentence.

TPS-FASTT Poetry Work

Poem: _____

Author: _____

Title	
Paraphrase	
Speaker	
Figurative Language	
Attitude	
Shifts	
Title	
Theme	