

4-Step Literary Analysis for AP Prose and Poetry Essay Prompts

Step 1 – Where does the text shift or transition?

Read the piece once, and **draw a horizontal line at each shift.**

(Doing this identifies the individual sections or parts of the piece.)

Step 2 – What is the focus of each section?

After your first reading, **label each section** with a word or phrase that identifies its focus.

Step 3 – In each section, what important language and details imply the author's attitude?

Read the piece a second time, and **underline the most important words, phrases, and details in each section**. Then in the margins, identify both (1) the effects created by these details and (2) the literary techniques involved.

Step 4 – What is the larger movement and “form” of the piece—i.e., the way every section and its important details fit in with the larger passage and help imply the author's attitude and thematic concerns?

Every great piece of literature possesses both **multiplicity** and **unity**.

Read the piece a third time; notice its **movement** and how all the parts and details work together. Do you notice any patterns, motifs, “echo-words,” or even contrasts that give the piece its multiplicity and unity, its “form” and impact? What is the author suggesting about both *character* and *theme*?