

PRACTICAL CRITICISM - THE ESSAY STRUCTURE

- 1. Subject or theme:** What is the text about? What other information do you have, e.g. the poet's name or a date?
- 2. Speaker/ situation:** Whose voice do you hear in the text? Which person-narration?
- 3. Form:** What is the overall structure of the piece? Is it in a recognizable poetic form? Are there any obvious ways in which it could be divided into sections (by its layout, meaning, or by changes in the way language is presented at different points?)
- 4. Ideas and messages:** Look for ideas embedded "below the surface" of the text. Think about aims and purposes. Any signs of irony or satire?
- 5. Tone and atmosphere:** What tone of the voice? Is there an atmosphere that pervades the poem? If so, what is it that creates this effect?
- 6. Imagery:** What kinds of visual images does the text present? How does the writer use metaphors and similes? Comment both on individual examples and on patterns of images, analyse their contribution to the meaning.
- 7. Vocabulary:** What do you notice about chosen words and phrases? Any that seem unexpected, "out of place"? What effect do they create?
- 8. Rhyme, rhythm, sound effects:** Has the text got a rhyme scheme and what is its effect? Are there lines flowing or short and "jerky"? Does the rhythm change at key points?
- 9. Conclusion:** Return to the overview of the text. Sum up how the effects and details of style you have analysed come together to create a "whole". What has your reading of it contributed to your understanding of the subject it deals with? If the question invites you to give a personal response to the text, this is the place for it.

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