

### The "Lucky Seven" Guide to Annotation

Directions: After you've read the poem over a couple times (and at least once aloud) to gain a first impression, take pencil/pen/highlighter/marker in hand and follow this process carefully.

1. **Reflect on the poem's title.** Circle the title and draw a quick "web" of denotations and connotations. The title is our first way into the poem. How does the writer use it?
2. Using a variation of the journalist's "code," and your own skills at "close reading," summarize the basic "sense of the poem" Who is speaking, to whom, about what, for what purpose, when and/or where (if relevant), and how (tone)? In the upper right corner, print *BS:*, and then give your one or two sentence summary.
3. **Paraphrase any problematic lines or sentences.** A "problematic line" for you would be any line which you can't immediately and readily paraphrase with precision and accuracy. Some poems written in a modern idiom don't need much paraphrasing. Other poems - especially those that are centuries old - may require a complete paraphrase. An important part of this process might very well involve **defining any unknown and otherwise significant words.** (Use a dictionary if you're preparing this poem outside of exam conditions.) Keep in mind that even simple words can function on a variety of levels. Verbs typically serve as "hinges" of meaning, and poets sweat bullets over choosing the right ones - so scrutinize them carefully. Print necessary or helpful phrases to the right of the line(s).
4. **Note the poem's use of language.** Remember that the basic building blocks are words. How would you assess the poem's diction, overall? Is the poem's language formal or casual? filled with jargon or slang? more concrete or abstract? precise or ambiguous? How does tone appear as a function of diction? Are there key words anywhere? How does the poet manipulate syntax?
5. **Map the poem's tensions and contrasts.** Many oppositions and dichotomies are possible here, and many poems use contrasts of various sorts as levels with which they "move" the poem's meaning. A former, well-loved and smart, IB English teacher once said, poetry is "moment, movement, and meaning" - by which she meant, a poem establishes a *moment*, or an occasion, an issue, an image, a dilemma, a voice, etc.; then the poem *moves* somehow from this initial state; and the overall effect of that movement on the reader indicates or otherwise suggests the poem's meaning. Tensions and oppositions may come in the form of contrasts between: speaker and situation; our view and the speaker's view; sides of a dilemma or problem; sets of images; past and present; levels of diction, etc.; even between form and content. Typically, irony is present, therefore, in some form or another. The "mapping" process itself can take whatever form you feel comfortable with: coloured pencils, highlighters, circling, underlining and joining key elements of the contrasts, etc.
6. Using the signs/symbols you've been taught and a sharp pencil, **scan the poem and determine the rhyme scheme.** Note substitutions or other critical rhythmic features. (For longer poems, you may not need to scan single syllable - if your ear is good enough to recognize substitutions and other changes.) Note any rhymes that are not exact (e.g., slant, etc.). Identify traditional patterns ("fixed" forms such as sonnet, ballad, etc.) that are defined in part by rhyme. Note also any stanzaic patterns, even if not fixed. Remember, poets writing in a closed form craft their own structures that they then adhere to. Write *EF:* (to stand for "effect of form") in the upper left hand corner and write a sentence or two that asserts how form functions in this poem.
7. **Assert an interpretation.** In its broadest sense, this step doesn't merely call for a statement of the poem's theme, but rather an integrated view of what the poem is doing and how. Try to bring the various elements together in a coherent fashion. Look over what you've written for your "BS" and "EF." Write your *Interpretation* on the bottom of the page. (Note: If you do a thoughtful job with this step, you'll notice that your *Interpretation* will almost certainly serve as an introduction to a Commentary you might then develop.)