

## CHECKLIST FOR READING A POEM

### ➤ CHECK THE DRAMATIC SITUATION

Who is the speaker?	What effect does this have on the poem?
To whom does s/he speak?	" " " " " " ?
Is there more than one speaker?	" " " " " " ?
Does the speaker tell a story ?	What is it? Where? When? Why?
describe something?	" " " "
contemplate?	" " " "
evoke a mood?	" " " "
or what?????	" " " "

### ➤ CHECK THE FORM OF THE POEM

Couplets? Quatrains? Sestets? Villanelle? Sonnet? Free verse? Or what?  
 Is there a progression of action or thought through the parts of the form?  
 Explain the steps.

### ➤ CHECK THE RHYTHM AND SOUND EFFECTS

Are the lines long or short? Made up of single or multiple -syllable words?  
 What does the combination do to the beat of the poem?  
 Does the beat stay the same or change in the course of the poem?  
 Is there a rhyme scheme? What is it? How does it affect the tone? the idea?  
 (Tone is the speaker's, or the author's, attitude toward the subject or idea)  
 Masculine rhyme or feminine? Effect or tone or meaning?  
 (Masculine: last syllables rhyme; feminine: two or more final syllables rhyme)  
 Do certain repeated sounds within the poem (alliteration, assonance of particular letters), or even internal rhyme of whole words contribute to the tone and idea of the poem?

### ➤ CHECK THE DICTION

In each stanza or section of the poem, look up unfamiliar words, end words for which common meaning seems unworkable in the context.  
 How do specific words contribute through denotation? connotation? sound? the developing tone, idea, or meaning?  
 Look for repeated words or key words in each stanza or section which might be linked by some common theme or motif; notice whether they help unify the poem, signal changes, etc.

### ➤ CHECK THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

In each section, look for metaphors, similes, symbols, images which enrich or illuminate tone and meaning. Notice whether they form a network of motifs which unify, signal changes, etc.  
 Consider carefully what they mean in the context of the poem and of the poet's work overall.  
 (not all of these apply equally to all poems)

### ➤ GO BACK OVER THE WHOLE POEM

Re-read it with all its ways of conveying meaning stored in memory. What does the poem finally say to you by all these means?

As John Unterecker says (discussing Yeats), "Somewhere between the great writer and the intelligent reader poetry is born."