

GCSE English Literature Poetry (One hour=**40%** of your GCSE)

1. Time is very tight in this section. Know how to phrase your points before the exam. Test yourself on paper with specific points – not whole essays. Do not wait until the exam!
2. You will have studied at least **twelve** Literature poems (the poems which may be “named” in the exam. questions). You could in theory revise **ten** thoroughly and still be guaranteed at least one question (from 3) to answer.
3. Definitely revise all four of the “named” pre-1914 poems.
4. You are likely to have a choice from **three** questions – don’t dawdle – but weigh up which question best suits your knowledge.
5. You will need to refer to **four** poems in your essay. Even if you are weaker on one particular poem and your essay is an uneven response, it is still possible to achieve up to A*, depending on the quality of your response. But you **must** deal with all **four** poems, not just three.
6. Underline any **key words** in the question and any associated bullet prompts.
7. Decide on your general approach to essay structure before the examination. **A question split into two parts** asking you to deal with four poems as two separate pairs will be easier to structure than a single task comparing all four poems together- but it may set you two completely different tasks on each pair of poems. For this two-part type question, keep an even closer eye on the time and do not neglect one part or the other.
8. Once you have chosen your poems, fold the top corners at the appropriate pages in your Anthology. Or else, write the page numbers and (abbreviated) titles of the poems on the top of your answer booklet – so that you can quickly locate the poems each time you need them.

9. Use about 5 minutes to **annotate the four anthology poems** with letters or numbers which will help you with the sequence for your essay and which will help you to make comparisons between specific aspects of the poems in terms of similarities and differences.
10. Keep relating your points to **key words** from the question and mention those words or a synonym for those words e.g. “relationships” = relating to others, establishing bonds, communicating with others, family ties, etc.
11. Remember to use **contrast and comparison** phrases regularly to analyse parallels and differences between the poems - e.g. “similarly...”, “in contrast...”, “...whereas...”, “this is also...”, “it is slightly/completely/somewhat/rather different than...”, “this mirrors/echoes/reminds me of/is similar to...”, etc.
12. Are you going to use:

Embedded quotations
OR
Non-embedded quotations

So,
 Jonson describes his son as, “his best piece of poeetrie” which is an effective metaphor linking the creation of his son to the creative act of writing a poem. It is also ironic because Jonson is recreating his son now by writing about him **IN** a poem.

OR
 Jonson uses an effective metaphor to describe his son: “his best piece of poeetrie”.
 This links the beauty of his son’s creation with the creative act of writing a poem, etc).
13. If time, a quick **conclusion**, linked back to the question.
14. Quick **proof-reading** for any glaring errors.

DUFFY

Anne Hathaway

Before You Were Mine

Havisham

Education for Leisure

Pre-1914

Sonnet 130

My Last Duchess

The Laboratory

On my first Sonne

ARMITAGE

Mother, any distance.....

Homecoming

Kid

Hitcher

Comparing/Contrasting 4 Poems – Essay Structure

Do not simply deal with one poem, then another, etc. One possibility is to group your knowledge into **aspects** such as:

- **LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES**
- **RHYME**
- **STRUCTURE**

(Some reference to all of these aspects should be relevant to answering most poetry questions).

- **LANGUAGE**

Compare/contrast language features and the effect on ideas, feelings, mood and the poet's tone.

Explore the poet's techniques: simile, metaphor, imagery, symbolism, personification, onomatopoeia, repetition, irony, pun, oxymoron, contrast, alliteration, assonance, the use of pronouns/adjectives/verb types/adverbs for effect, the use of language which is formal/colloquial/emotive and (more generally) the positive/negative connotations of language.

- **RHYME**

Compare/contrast rhyme and the effect on feelings and mood and the link to the poet's ideas and intentions. Rhyme may be used to emphasise key words, significant to an emotion or idea (or both) in the poem. Remember to comment on lack of rhyme, occasional rhyme, half rhyme, internal rhyme, breaks/changes in the rhyme scheme (pattern).

▪ **STRUCTURE**

Compare/contrast structure and the effect on ideas and feelings.

Comment on the sequence/arrangement of ideas in a poem.

The ideas at the **start** or **end** of a poem are often particularly meaningful. Remember the poet **chooses** the structure for a reason.

Sonnet form or adaptations of a sonnet?

Free verse?

Identical or different stanza lengths or a mixture?

Exceptionally short stanzas?

Matching or different line lengths?

Enjambement/lack of **punctuation**?

No punctuation?

Unusual use of punctuation?

The effect on rhythm (tempo/flow)?

The link to feelings and ideas?

Punctuation: e.g. do you know the difference between a **dash** and a **hyphen** and the different effect or significance of the two?

What about: ? ! “ ” – () ; : ’ . / ...

With all of the three aspects (**language**, **rhyme** and **structure**), you are not **just** describing or mentioning a feature. You are making a **point** about the poet's aims and the effect on our thoughts (ideas) and emotions (feelings).

DON'T PANIC! – you only need to refer to **some** examples of **some** of these features.

Choosing your 4 poems.

Naturally, where you have some choice, select:

- your strongest poems
- poems suited to the question
- poems best suited to comparison/contrast with the named poem(s) in the question

There will be differences in ideas, tone and style (language, structure, etc.) but there is little point in selecting **completely** different poems. “Education for Leisure” does not compare very well with “Mother, any distance...”, for example.

Think, **before** the examination, which poems are best grouped together from Armitage, Duffy and pre-1914. Why? Which 4 would you choose for each of the following?

POEMS BASED ON/USING CHARACTERS FROM OTHER STORIES – Salome, Havisham, Anne Hathaway, Kid, Before You were Mine, Ulysses, etc. (Sonnet 130 satirises the “Blazons” of the time – so it is **based on** them).

AND BASED ON HISTORICAL EVENTS? – The Laboratory, On my first Sonne

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES
TROUBLED/ODD PERSONALITIES
DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE
ATTITUDES TO DEATH/VIOLENCE
IRONY/DARK HUMOUR
PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS
HUMAN CONFLICT
PRESERVING MEMORIES/THOUGHTS OF THE PAST
PEOPLE WHO MATTER
MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS
METHODS TO CREATE 1ST PERSON PERSONA
METAPHOR/IMAGERY FOR EFFECT
RHYME/STRUCTURE FOR EFFECT

I've dark green pebbles for eyes (metaphor)

The thought of me doesn't occur

my loud, possessive yell

We were the same age

She thanked men – good! (punctuation for effect)

jealousy/anger

I dreamed he'd written me, the bed/a page beneath his
writer's hand. Romance...(metaphors)

thou child of my right hand (pun ("write") and
"Benjamin"(in Hebrew)= child of the right hand)

his best piece of poetry (alliteration and metaphor)

metaphors which link people/love to the creative
process of writing, **light irony** (because the (dead)
people have now become pieces of writing –
immortalised as poems!)

I've scotched that "he was like a father to me" rumour
(mocking clichéd ideas)

a father figure waits there (alliteration and cliché)

your Ma stands at the close (colloquial, warm)

Mother, any distance (metaphor=physical and
emotional "distance")

parents and children

I'm ten years away from the corner...

Because it's sixteen years or so before we'll meet

I stink and remember

And now your ghost clatters towards me

There she stands / As if alive

Memories, flashback, deliberate temporal confusion
(the first two examples only).

Say here doth lye / Ben. Jonson... (= emphasis on his son's name (why?) plus puts his son's name "close" to the poet's own name – but "separated" – why?)

The poet is being playful with the words; he is playing on the idea that they are both named "Ben Jonson". His shortening of "Benjamin" to "Ben" is a sign of his affection. (punctuation and unusual line division to emphasise a key word)

Spinster. (connotations of the word itself and the symbolism of the word, being **isolated** in the line)

This grew; I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together. (formal syntax = unemotional, logical, callous)

I pour the goldfish down the bog (slang). I pull the chain. / I see that it is good. (biblical connotation – plus slang = irony = humour. Repeats the pronoun "I"; Why?)

Love's / hate (across stanzas) (oxymoronic phrase)

Line and sentence structuring and use of punctuation for emphasis, to affect rhythm and to mirror the protagonists' thought patterns and feelings.

My living (how?) laughing love – (no punctuation in the phrase = smooth flow (and allit. of liquid sounds = romantically lyrical, “flowing”)

in the gutter – **well**, I turned the corner (conversational)

in the face – and didn’t even swerve

A heart - how shall I say? – too soon...

Quick – is it finished?

who did this / to me? (across stanzas and enjambement = emphasis on “me”, so...?)

was the best one, eh? (**conversational feature**)

punctuation to imitate natural speech, especially **dashes** for pauses; **rhetorical questions** = more realistic personas created; pauses may reflect a logical (and, therefore, a more frightening) mind

Beloved sweetheart bastard (oxymoron/alliteration of plosive sounds)

You seeing red. Blue murder. Bed. (alliteration of plosive sounds; internal rhyme; common clichés; punctuation to symbolise “divisions”)

a red balloon bursting / in my face. (symbolic, and alliteration of plosive sounds)

Brand, burn up, bite...(rhythmic list of three, allit.)

Pound at thy powder (alliteration of plosive sounds)

punching the palm of your hand

his best piece of poetry

plosive sounds (b and p) often convey a feeling of power or temper or anger or strength or energy, etc.(or simply emphasise key words)

and I choose / Never to stoop (assonance of a long vowel sound draws the line out and emphasises his slow, calculating mind plus the line is about his arrogance – a central theme)

I am a genius

and didn't even swerve

Batman big shot

She's not **little** (a bitchy pun?), no minion like me! (exclamation mark – for anger – but also for sarcasm – her rival is not only “bigger” than her (i.e. of higher status), she is also “bigger” = fatter!)

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity (perhaps symbolic – certainly bragging)

arrogance, self-obsession, self-centredness, egocentricity

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head

the breath that from my mistress reeks (emotive insult = humour. But there is **irony** at the end of the poem as he **does** love her – beyond “compare” – so he refuses to compare her with all the **clichéd** romantic ideas like the sun, roses and snow)

He is sure to remember her dying face! (an ironic mocking of a romantic cliché – she means it in its most grotesque sense! – thus the poet's exclamation mark, for sarcasm).

He'd said he liked the breeze / to run its fingers / through his hair (irony – why?)

Holy roll-me-over-in-the-clover (mocking Batman's catchphrase (Holy...Holy...etc.).

Plus what is being described (illicit sex) is **not** "holy"! Also, it is using a euphemism (a polite way of phrasing) about "sex" to make fun of the embarrassing situation.

It is also using a jocular rhythm as the hyphens turn the six words effectively into one – again mocking Batman's quick speech patterns.

("Roll Me Over in The Clover" is a fun song that was often chanted on day trips on a coach or train – so it ironically has connotations of childhood innocence and **kids**)

The very model of a model of a mother. This sounds sarcastic because the repetition of "model" is hyperbolic (exaggerated). (Is she only a "model" (an inferior imitation) of a "model mother"?)

Questions / in the house (ironic, sarcastic, pun on a common media phrase: "there will be questions in the House" (i.e. questions asked by MPs in the HOUSE of Commons))

"Hitcher", "Stitch that", "sick-note" (these could all be humorous puns: the poem is **not** called "**The** Hitcher" but "Hitcher" – which enables the pun to work – "Hitcha – hit ya –hit you".

"Stitch that" is slang for "forget that!!" – but he has just injured the man – who will need "stitches" – if alive!! The warning from his boss about his "**sick-note**" for absence might actually be about **sick** notes which the man has been writing to colleagues – which would link with his sick mind in the rest of the poem.

if she let herself be **lessoned** so (the Duke is complaining that she allowed herself to be corrected when speaking and taught (“lessoned”) by others. The pun is that he arrogantly thinks that “**lessons**” from others “**lessen**” a person – make you inferior – this reveals his own superiority complex. The Duke’s use of the pun is either deliberate (he thinks he is witty!) or unintentional – either way, Browning uses it to reveal the Duke’s snobbery.

But to light a pastile, and Elise with her head / and her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead! Firstly assonance to slow the first line (long “i” vowel sound).

Also the lyrical “i” sound and the romantic name of “Elise” (note, Pauline, in the previous line).

Then the speed of the punch-line achieved by a totally monosyllabic line, the odd repetition of “and”, then the comma to pause us on the three short-vowelled: “should drop dead” (also alliteration of “d”).

The poet has used **bathos** (note: **not pathos** (= sadness, poignancy)) to “drop us” suddenly from romance to ugly emotions and ugly language: “drop dead”(=slang).

This ironic contrast creates humour.

Also, the whole idea of using rhyme in a poem about death is darkly ironic.

The emphasis on “breast”, “arms” and “eyes” is also ironic as these are the things that attract men – and therefore the “reasons” why she will now die – due to the protagonist’s jealousy!!

stewing over/chicken giblets (bathos – as above). The “bigshot” Batman has been reduced to this; it makes him sound silly.

Also, “stewing over” is a pun, linked to “cooking” and “thinking over”.

There is an ironic contrast between the glamour of Batman and the bathos of his final destination “thinking deeply” amongst the “chicken giblets” (an especially “lowly” and “unglamorous” food, I would suggest!)

to let him out...bouncing off the kerb.

The first phrase is humorous as it is a euphemism: he is actually throwing a body out of the car!

The second phrase makes the incident seem like a cartoon event to me (“bounce”?) and the way the driver calmly watches through his mirror adds to the reader’s sense of detachment and prevents pity from stifling the dark humour.

Humour, irony, insults, bathos, hyperbole, puns, euphemistic phrases

Marilyn (symbolic)

That glamorous love lasts / where you sparkle and waltz and laugh (alliteration and assonance)

“gold oozings”, “death in an earring”, “exquisite blue”

I have seen roses damasked, red and white

with just a toothbrush and the good earth for a bed (clichés and ironic bathos to follow – he will end up on the “good earth” in a minute!)

to wander / leeward, freely through the wild blue yonder / as you liked to say, or ditched me (clichés followed by the mocking reality of the contrasting slang “ditched me” = bathos)

the prairies of the floors (romantic metaphor)

the pavements glitter suddenly (glamour and death
ironically linked)

Romance/and drama played by touch, by scent, by
taste (sensual metaphor linking her love-making with
Shakespeare, to the creative act of his writing plays.

male corpse for a long slow honeymoon (a
debauched/perverted idea of “love” (-making?).

The first two underlinings are assonance.

All four underlinings are long vowel sounds to lengthen
the line and mirror the idea of a lengthy time in bed
together.

You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!

The alliteration links her, the man and her mouth in a
sensual way.

The punctuation helps to emphasise the ***debauched***
idea of her kissing an “old” man. She wants a full-
blooded kiss on the mouth – not a peck on the cheek!
The final exclamation mark could indicate her
enthusiasm for the kiss or else that this is just another
side to her mischievous and darkly immoral sense of
humour.

Sensuality, romance, ***mocking romance***, beauty,
death seen as glamorous
