AP Lit poetry MCQ checklist

Use this checklist on any poem passage in an AP Lit progress check or practice set. The poems and questions in the guide are original, written for practice.

Before you read the questions

1. Read the title. It often names the situation or the object the poem turns on.
2. Read the whole poem once at a normal pace without annotating. Work out who is speaking, to whom, and what is happening.
3. Find the shift: "now," "but," "yet," "tonight," a change of tense, or a stanza break where the tone turns.
4. Write the speaker's attitude in one or two words before the shift and after it.
5. Circle comparisons ("like," "as," "is") and words that seem to carry two meanings.
6. For each question, reread the lines it names and predict the answer before you look at the options.

Timing: 55 questions in 60 minutes is just over a minute per question. A poem with 10 questions gets about 11 minutes, reading included.

Question types and what to check

Question type	Typical stem	What to check
Speaker	"The speaker's attitude is best described as"	Does the option fit the start and the end?
Structure	"The shift at line 8 marks"	Signal words and tense changes
Contrast	"Lines 9 to 10 contrast with"	The key word each side turns on
Comparison	"The simile in lines 3 to 4 suggests"	What the second thing adds to the first
Word choice	"The word 'still' most likely suggests"	Two meanings, and echoes elsewhere

Common traps in wrong options

- The literal reading: the option repeats what the image shows and misses what it means.
- The one-line reading: the option fits one line but not the whole poem.
- Outside information: the option adds an event or feeling the poem never mentions.
- The overstatement: "bitter," "furious" or "shut out" where the poem is gentler.

After the progress check

Missed skill	What it usually means	What to practice
Narrator or speaker	You judged the attitude from one line	Note the attitude before and after the shift
Plot and structure	You missed where the poem turns	Mark tense changes and words like "now"

Missed skill	What it usually means	What to practice
Word choice	You chose the dictionary meaning only	Write two meanings for key words
Comparison	You named the device, not its effect	Ask what the comparison adds
Character	You treated the speaker as the poet	Describe the speaker in one sentence

For every question you miss, write one line on why the option you picked looked right. Then practice that skill on a new poem within a few days.