TP-DASSTT Instructions:

1. Read the poem aloud to yourself.
2. **T**ITLE: Examine the title before reading the poem, looking for clues about the content of the poem.
3. **P**ARAPHRASE the poem: Translate it into your own words, giving its literal meaning—its denotation. Resist the urge to jump straight into interpretation: poems have literal meanings, too, and often these are crucial to an overall understanding of the work. Remember to work from sentence to sentence rather than from line to line, and be certain to note the connection of the structure (stanzas, quatrains, sestets, etc., as well as enjambment vs. open ended lines) to the presentation of the idea/emotion.
4. **D**EVICES: Look for meaning beyond the literal. Pay particular attention to diction, imagery (especially metaphor, simile, personification, apostrophe) and to shifts in levels of meaning connected to a shift to a new structural segment in the poem. Also look for irony, paradox, understatement, and allusion (particularly Biblical).
5. **A**TTITUDE: Tone is important (see attached tone words). Look also for the speaker’s attitude toward self, toward other(s), and toward the subject.
6. **S**TRUCTURE: Look for particular poem types—especially sonnets—and also look for general structural devices such as stanzas, rhyme scheme, sets of lines, and length of lines. Use of punctuation fits in here, too, particularly as a clue to the meaning and to units of thought. Try to relate all these structural elements to the content and meaning of the poem.
7. **S**HIFTS: Note any shifts in speaker and/or shifts in attitude. Particularly look for words which indicate a shift—words such as *but, however, yet*, and such; also look for words which indicate an idea pattern.
8. **T**ITLE (again): Re-examine the title, this time on an interpretive level.
9. **T**HEME: First list what the poem is about (subjects). Then determine what the poet is saying about each of these subjects (theme). Explain and elaborate as necessary, and be certain your theme is in a complete sentence: don’t simply say “Love” or “It’s about Love.” Instead, it should be something like: “John Donne states that true love is not bound by the physical. Rather, it is a powerful force that despite separation, keeps lovers connected.” Make sure there is a full development of an idea with textual evidence.