The “figures and devices” most English teachers teach include most, if not all, of the following, listed roughly in descending order of frequency:

- simile
- metaphor
- onomatopoeia
- alliteration
- imagery
- tone
- metrics (iambic pentameter, blank verse, and the like)
- stanza
- forms (haiku, sonnet, cinquain, etc.)
- symbol
- irony
- paradox
- consonance and assonance

This excerpt is from “Teaching Form and Technique,” Chapter Nine of Teaching Poetry in High School, by Albert B. Somers (NCTE, 1999). For details on this and other poetry titles from NCTE, visit the Poetry area of the NCTE Store (www.ncte.org/store/books/poetry).

GUIDELINE ONE

Instead of definitions, begin with generalizations. Actually, begin with specifics—poems—that lead to generalizations—inductive teaching. Here’s an example: well into a unit on poetry (perhaps week two), we might dip our toes into form and structure by looking at the following poem, one we saw in the preceding chapter.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>0——Love</th>
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<td>Roger McGough</td>
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<td>middle couple</td>
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<tr>
<td>ten</td>
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This is a clever poem, easy to "get" and fun to talk about. It lacks any measure of intimidation at all, and so it provides a harmless entrance into the world of structure and design. Some of the questions I might ask are these:

- This poem is obviously about tennis. How does McGough show that?
- Why does the poet draw a vertical line down the middle?
- Why do you think he split the word tennis into two parts in line 5?
- Why do you think he chose to divide the word between between the last two lines?
- Why did he choose the title, "40-Love"?

Without picking the poem apart, without referring to terms themselves, we are getting at structure; we are talking about technique. What we are really talking about—what we should always talk about at the beginning—is the concept of choice. We are also working our way toward a broad generalization, the most important generalization of all to teach students about form and technique (trumpet fanfare, please). Poets make choices. (We could elaborate a little if we chose—poets make informed choices; they make choices for reasons; etc.—but most important, they choose.)

So begin here: poets make choices about everything. They choose words. They choose rhythms. They choose where to change the rhythm. They choose sounds. They choose rhymes—or they choose not to rhyme. They choose shapes. They choose to make comparisons. They choose a particular image; they choose to use a word as a symbol (a rose, a claw, a white dress). They choose line lengths and line breaks.

**Jump Cabling**

*Linda Pastan*

When our cars
When you lifted the hood
To see the intimate workings
When we were bound
By a pulse of pure
When my car like the

touched
of mine
underneath,
together
energy,
princess
In the tale woke with a start,
I thought why not ride the rest of the way together?

I'd read this wonderful multi-layered poem aloud a time or two, pausing significantly, dramatically, at the gaps. Then I'd ask, "Why did the poet choose to break up each of the first seven lines the way she did? And then—why did she change the last line? Students would see this clearly. The interruptions, and then the smooth unbroken flow of words in line 8, didn't just happen. Linda Pastan chose to do them that way. She wanted the first seven lines to lurch and hesitate like a balky engine, and then she smoothed out line 8 to convey the色调 waking "with a start" and purring sweetly. These were choices having to do with form and technique (in this case, sound and rhythm), and meaning.

So here we've shown a class two poems, and we've talked harmlessly about what poets do: they tinker with technique. But so far, no mention of technique by name. No reference to form. No terms, no definitions. We are concerned with the larger picture.

Some of you are surely saying, "Of course" or "Big deal; we do this"—and maybe some of us do. But most of us, I am convinced, overlook it. We teach the trees—"Define metaphor." "Find the similes." "Explain consonance."—while overlooking the much more important forest. Poets choose—words, rhythms, sounds, images, everything.