

AP LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION TERMS

LITERARY & RHETORICAL TERMS & DEVICES

Adage – a familiar proverb or wise saying

Allusion – short reference supposedly familiar to the audience

Alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds

Assonance – repetition of internal vowel sounds

Consonance – repetition of internal consonant sounds

Ambiguity – intentionally vague details

Anachronism – a person, object, or occurrence placed in a time period in which it does not belong

Anadiplosis – a rhetorical device where a word or words at the end of one clause or sentence is repeated at the beginning of the next clause or sentence

Analogy – a comparison of two things based on a shared characteristic or feature

Anaphora – a rhetorical device where a series of words are repeated at the beginning of successive phrases (opposite of **epistrophe**)

Anastrophe – the inversion of the usual order of words or clauses (see **inversion**)

Anecdote – a brief story or tale told by a character to illustrate a point or serve as an example

Antecedent action – events that occur before a play or story begins

Anthropomorphism – attributing human-like qualities to non-human objects or creatures; extended, not to be confused with **personification**

Antimetabole – the repetition of a clause in reverse order, using the same words and grammatical structure (not to be confused with **chiasmus**)

Apostrophe – address to something not human or someone not present

Aphorism – a pithy observation that reveals or highlights a particular truth

Atmosphere – general mood or feeling of a literary work, passage, or scene (see **mood**)

Asyndeton – the intentional omission of conjunctions between words or phrases in a series using commas

Balanced Sentence – a sentence consisting of two parts that are roughly the same length, importance, and grammatical structure

Carpe Diem – Latin for seize the day

Catharsis – a point in a work of literature that provides a powerful emotional release in response to rising tension or suspense

Character – persons in a work of literature

Antagonist – a character in a work of literature who deceives, frustrates, or conflicts with the protagonist in some way

Protagonist – the main or central character in a work of literature

Narrator – the voice of the author or character that is telling or recounting a story

Antihero – a protagonist or notable character in a work of literature that does not possess conventional heroic qualities

Archetype – a generic, idealized model of a person, object, or concept from which similar instances are derived, copied or emulated

Epic Hero – a brave and noble character in an epic poem, admired for great achievements and/or affected by grand events; embodies the virtues esteemed by a particular society, culture, or people

Tragic Hero – a noble protagonist brought to ruin as a result of some extreme quality, which is both their greatness and their downfall

Dynamic character – a character that changes, over time, throughout the story

Flat Character – an uncomplicated, two-dimensional character who does not change through a story; notable for possessing one personality trait or characteristic

Round Character – a character with a complex personality (i.e. conflicted or contradictory)

Static character – a character that does not change throughout the story

Stock character – a character that displays generalizations about a specific people or group (a stereotype)

Characterization – the description of a character's personality and/or appearance

Direct characterization – the author tells you explicitly about a character's personality or appearance

Indirect characterization – the personality or appearance has to be determined from hints or clues; implicit

Chiasmus – a rhetorical device where words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order (not to be confused with **antimetabole**)

Colloquial(ism/ly) – a type of informal speech that employs local, everyday sayings and/or slang

Conflict – struggle against opposing forces that the main character(s) undergo [man v. man, man v. self, or man v. nature (or other non-human source – i.e. aliens or ghosts)]

Dialect – a particular form of a language that is peculiar to a specific region

Creole – a common language formed by the contact of two separate languages (a complex language borrowing heavily from both languages)

Pidgin – an auxiliary language created by speakers of two languages attempting communication (a simplified form of one or both languages with limited vocabulary and grammatical complexity)

Dialogue – verbal exchange between two or more characters

Diction – an author or speaker’s choice of words to fit an intended purpose

Didactic – a form of speaking or writing that is intended to teach (usually a moral lesson)

Epanalepsis – a rhetorical device where the initial word(s) or phrase(s) of a sentence is repeated at the end of the same sentence

Epiphany – a sudden realization of a great or fundamental truth, realization, or understanding

Epigraph – a short quotation or saying appearing at the beginning of a book, chapter, or poem, or other literary work, intended to suggest theme

Epistrophe (epiphora) – a rhetorical device where the same word(s) or phrase is repeated at the end of successive clauses or sentences (opposite of **anaphora**)

Epithet – a descriptive device used to emphasize a particular characteristic of a person, place, or thing

Farce – a comedic dramatic work that employs buffoonery and often crude material or characterizations, set in ludicrous or improbable situation(s)

Flashback – past events, memories, and conversations that are recalled

Figurative language – language that is used to describe one thing in terms of another (non-literal speech)

Cliché – a term so overused that it has lost its original meaning and strength

Euphemism – a milder or more acceptable word, phrase, or sentence used as a substitute for a more harsh, blunt, or obscene idea, object, or action

Hyperbole – exaggeration for emphasis or for poetic or dramatic effect

Litotes – an understatement created when a positive statement is expressed by negating its opposite expressions

Metaphor – an indirect comparison

Metonymy – a figure of speech where a word is substituted for another that is characteristic of, or associated with, that word

Synecdoche – a figure of speech where a part of a being or object replaces the whole

Oxymoron – a paradox created by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict each other

Paradox – a contradictory statement that makes sense

Pun – a play on words based on the multiple meanings of a word or on words that sound alike but have different meanings

Simile – a comparison of two dissimilar things or ideas using the words ‘like’, ‘as’, or ‘than’

Synesthesia – a descriptive device where one sense is described by a term that relates to another sense

Tautology – the superfluous addition of a descriptor which adds no meaning or understanding

Understatement – the intentional representation of something as lesser in magnitude than it actually is

Foil – a contrasting personality

Foreshadowing – the use of clues to hint at what may happen later in a work of literature

Genre – the category in which a literary work fits, based on a loose set of criteria

Hubris – an overwhelming sense of pride in a character (usually leads to the character's downfall or failure)

Hypothetical – a statement that serves as a hypothesis or a fictionalized scenario put forth to emphasize a point

Hypothetical Question – a question based on assumptions rather than facts; intended to illicit a particular response

Idiom – a phrase or saying whose meaning cannot be deduced from the denotation of the words that make up its composition

Inversion – a rhetorical device where the normal order of words is reversed (see **anastrophe**)

Imagery – words that appeal to the senses

Irony – a situation or statement characterized by a significant difference between what is expected or understood and what actually happens or is meant

Dramatic Irony – when a character says or does something that they do not fully grasp but is understood by the audience (exists between the audience and the characters)

Situational Irony – implying, through plot or character, that the actual situation is quite different from that presented (exists within the story itself)

Verbal Irony – the use of words in which the intended meaning is contrary to the literal meaning

Sarcasm – a form of verbal irony meant to mock or show contempt

Jargon – a highly specialized vocabulary used in specific professions, groups, and academic fields (usually difficult for others to understand)

Juxtaposition – the placing of two ideas, characters, or places side by side for the purpose of highlighting similarities and/or differences

Maxim – a short, pithy statement expressing some general truth; similar to **adage**

Mood – general mood or feeling of a literary work, passage, or scene (see **mood**)

Motif – a recurring symbol or idea throughout a work of literature that has significant meaning

Motivation – reason why characters do what they do

Extrinsic Motivation – motivation derived from some physical reward (i.e. money, power, lust)

Intrinsic Motivation – motivation derived from an internal reward (i.e. knowledge, pride, spiritual or emotional peace/wellbeing)

Onomatopoeia – words that sound like what they express

Parallelism – the use of recurring syntactical structures using similar or repeated words for emphasis and effect

Personification – giving human characteristics to something that is not human; brief, not to be confused with **anthropomorphism**

Plot – the sequence of incidents or actions in a work of literature

Exposition - introductions of characters, setting, and conflict (background information)

Rising action – series of events that lead to the climax

Climax – highest point of action/drama; culmination of major conflict

Falling action – actions after the climax, leading to the resolution

Resolution – where all conflicts are resolved and the plot concludes

Point of view – vantage point from which a story is told

1st person POV – the narrator is the main character (told in ‘I’ voice)

3rd person POV – narrated by someone unknown, outside the action and focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a central character (limited)

Omniscient POV – an all knowing narrator; can jump into the thoughts and feelings of any character in a work of literature (unlimited)

Limited omniscient POV – narrator outside the action that focuses on only a few characters

Objective POV – the narrator is completely impersonal and objectively tells the story without embellishment or comments on the characters or events

Polysyndeton – the intentional inclusion of extra conjunctions between words or phrases in a series, often without commas

Rhetoric – the art of effective or persuasive speech or writing

Ethos – speech or writing which is an appeal to the ethical or authoritative character of the speaker, writer, or source

Logos – speech or writing which is an appeal to logic and reason

Pathos – speech or writing which is an appeal to emotion

Rhetorical Question – a question used for effect or to emphasize a point when no answer is required, or the answer is self-evident, or if there is no obvious answer

Semantics – the meaning(s) of a word

Connotation – feelings and associations that are attached to the literal meaning of a word

Denotation – the literal meaning of a word

Setting – the time and place of a work of literature

Solecism – an intentional violation of grammatical rules for dramatic or stylistic effect

Style – the distinctive way in which a writer uses language (diction, syntax, and tone)

Suspense – sense of uncertainty or anxiety of what will happen later in a work of literature

Syllepsis – a grammatical construction where one word is used in two different senses

Syllogism – a three-part deductive argument in which a conclusion is based on a major premise and a minor premise

Symbolism – the use of a material object or color (symbol) to represent a broad or abstract idea

Syntax – an author or speaker's choice of sentence construction and phrasing

Theme – the main idea or central insight a work of literature (i.e. about society, human nature, etc.)

Thesis statement – an intellectual proposal; the stated main idea and/or intentions of a work

Tone – the author's attitude toward a subject or audience

Verisimilitude – having the quality of being believable or realistic

Vernacular – the language (words, phrases, idioms) specific to and spoken by ordinary people in a particular time and place

LITERARY DESCRIPTORS

Allegory – an extended metaphor used in a literary work to reveal a deeper, more complex meaning; characters generally have names which have meaning beyond themselves and can be a personification of abstract qualities

Ballad – a narrative poem written in short stanzas and often adapted to song (generally about love, romance, longing, or loss)

Comedy – a literary genre of dramatic work that is generally humorous and/or satirical and typically has a cheerful ending

Elegy – a formal poem presenting a meditation on death or other solemn topic or theme

Epic – an extended narrative poem, written in a heightened language, celebrating the feats of a legendary hero in a setting that is vast in scope

Essay – a short literary composition on a particular theme or subject

Modes of Discourse:

Argumentation – a form of discourse which uses logic, ethics, and emotional appeals to convince the reader to think or act in a certain way

Argumentative – a form of persuasion that appeals primarily to logic and reason

Persuasive – relies more on emotional appeals than facts

Descriptive – a form of discourse that uses language to create or convey a mood or emotion (paints a scene through diction and imagery)

Expository – a form of discourse in which something is explained or set forth

Narrative – a form of discourse which describes a set of events (tells a story)

Eulogy – a formal speech praising a person who has died

Fable – a brief story that teaches some moral; usually contains fantastical elements (see **parable**)

Fantasy – a genre of fiction that commonly uses magic and other supernatural phenomena as a primary plot element, theme, or setting

Homily – any serious talk, speech, or lecture providing moral or spiritual advice or guidance (sermon)

Legend – a traditional story or group of stories about a particular person or place that are perceived by both teller and listener to have taken place within human history and have characteristics that provide a sense of verisimilitude

Lyrical Poem – a short, song-like poem that does not tell a story; rather, it expresses a thought, feeling, or emotion

Myth – a traditional story presenting supernatural characters, events, and episodes that explain natural events and phenomena

Narrative – a story, true or fictional, that recounts a series of events, experiences, etc.; a story

Parable – a simple story used to emphasize a moral or spiritual lesson; typically more realistic (see **fable**)

Parody – a humorous imitation of a serious work

Pastoral – a story or poem which presents an idealized view of rural, rustic, or country life

Romance – a story or poem which presents an idealized version of a particular time and place, often employing heroic and/or supernatural elements

Satire – writing that attacks and ridicules some social evil or human weakness

Soliloquy – the act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when alone or regardless of any hearers; especially by a character in a play

Stream of Consciousness – a method of narration that describes, in words, the flow of the thoughts of a character

Tall Tale – a story with fantastic and unbelievable elements, related as if it were true and factual

Tragedy – a literary work in which the central character(s) is brought to ruin as a result of some tragic flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with unfavorable circumstances

LITERARY MOVEMENTS AND STYLES

Impressionism – a nineteenth-century movement in literature and art which advocated a recording of the artist's personal impressions of the world, rather than a strict representation of reality

Modernism – a term for bold new experimental styles and forms that arose during the early twentieth century

Naturalism – a nineteenth-century literary movement that was an extension of **realism** that claimed to portray life as it exactly was

Plain Style – a writing style that stresses simplicity and clarity of expression, while still utilizing allusions and metaphors, and was the main form of Puritan writers

Puritanism – the writing style of America’s early English-speaking colonists; emphasizes their theology and consists mainly of journals, sermons, and poetry

Rationalism – a movement that began in Europe in the seventeenth century which held that people can arrive at truth by using reason rather than relying on the authority of the past, of the church, or any other institution (neoclassicism and the Age of Reason)

Realism – a style of writing developed during the nineteenth century that attempts to depict life accurately without idealizing or romanticizing it

Regionalism – literature that emphasizes a specific geographic setting and reproduces the speech, behavior, and attitudes of the people in that region

Romanticism – a revolt against **rationalism** that began in the late eighteenth century and carried on into the nineteenth; presents an idealized version of life and tends to emphasize the purity of nature; emphasizes intuition, feelings, and emotions

Surrealism – a literary and artistic movement that started in Europe in the 1920s, that replaced realism with the full expression of the unconscious mind and was viewed by surrealists to be more “real” than the real world

Symbolism – a literary movement that began in late nineteenth-century France, in which writers rearranged the world of appearances in order to reveal a more truthful version of reality

Transcendentalism – a nineteenth-century movement in the Romantic tradition; held that individuals can achieve truths through spiritual intuition and contemplation, which transcends reason and logic

TIMELINE:

PURITANISM 1620 – 1770S

NEOCLASSIC/RATIONALISM 1770S – EARLY 1800S

REALISM 1850S – EARLY 1900S

NATURALISM/ROMANTICISM/TRANSCENDENTALISM MID/LATE 1800S – MID 1900S

MODERNISM – 1920S – 1945

POST-MODERN 1945 –

POETIC TERMS & DEVICES

Accent – where the stress(es) fall in a word creating a rhythm to speech, writing, or poetry

Blank verse – unrhymed iambic pentameter

Caesura – an audible pause that breaks up a line of a verse

Conceit – an extended complex metaphor that encompasses an entire poem

End stopped – phrases that end at the end of a line

Enjambment – when a phrase continues on to the next line

Free verse – poetry not adhering to any regular rhyme or rhythmic patterns

Meter – the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables

Foot – the basis of meter, the regular unit of rhythm

Anapest – two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable (anapestic)

Dactyl – a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (dactylic)

Iamb – an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (iambic)

Pyrrhus – two unstressed syllables (pyrrhic)

Spondee – two stressed syllables (spondaic)

Troche – a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable (trochaic)

Dimeter – a line of verse with two metric feet

Trimeter – a line of verse with three metric feet

Tetrameter – a line of verse with four metric feet

Pentameter – a line of verse with five metric feet

Hexameter – a line of verse with six metric feet

Heptameter – a line of verse with seven metric feet

Octameter – a line of verse with eight metric feet

Refrain – a portion of a poem, usually a word, phrase, line, or set of lines that is repeated at the end of certain stanzas or at a point where a poem divides into different sections; repeated at regular intervals, sometimes with variation, to emphasize rhyme or an idea through repetition

Scan/Scansion – marking the stresses in a poem to establish the prevailing metrical pattern(s)

Stanza – a (usually) regular grouping of lines; a unit within a larger poem

Couplet – a two line stanza (usually rhyming)

Quatrain – a four line stanza

Sestet – a six line stanza

Octave – an eight line stanza