

QUICK REFERENCE - LITERARY TERMS

allegory - The device of using character and/or story elements symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning. In some allegories, for example, an author may intend the characters to personify an abstraction like hope or freedom. The allegorical meaning usually deals with moral truth or a generalization about human existence.

alliteration - The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words (as in “she sells sea shells”). Although the term is not frequently in the multiple choice section, you can look for alliteration in any essay passage. The repetition can reinforce meaning, unify ideas, supply a musical sound, and/or echo the sense of the passage.

allusion - A direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art. Allusions can be historical, literary, religious, topical, or mythical. There are many more possibilities, and a work may simultaneously use multiple layers of allusion.

ambiguity - The multiple meanings, either intentional or unintentional, of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage.

anaphora - the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses (example: “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills.”)

antimetabole (chiasmus) - is a sentence strategy in which the arrangement of ideas in the second clause is a reversal of the first (Example: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”)

antithesis - the opposition or contrast of ideas; the direct opposite.

assonance - the repetition of accented vowel sounds in a series of words (Example: the words “cry” and “side” have the same vowel sound and so are said to be in assonance.)

asyndeton - deliberate omission of conjunctions in a series of related clauses (Example: “I came, I saw, I conquered.”)

chiasmus - see antimetabole

connotation - The non-literal, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning. Connotations may involve ideas, emotions, or attitudes.

consonance - repetition of consonant sounds within a series of words to produce a harmonious effect (Example: “And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.” Both the ‘d’ sound and the ‘s’ sound is in consonance.

denotation - The strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, devoid of any emotion, attitude, or color. (Example: the *denotation* of a knife would be a utensil used to cut; the *connotation of a knife might be fear, violence, anger, foreboding, etc.*)

details - facts revealed by the author or speaker that support the attitude or tone in a piece of writing

diction - Related to style, word choice intended to convey a certain effect

- **high or formal diction** - contains language that creates an elevated tone . It is free of slang, idioms, colloquialisms, and contractions.

- **neutral diction** - uses standard language and vocabulary without elaborate words and may include contractions

- **informal or low diction** - language of everyday use. It is relaxed and conversational. It often includes common and simple words, idioms, slang, jargon, and contractions

- **slang** refers to a group of recently coined words often used in informal situations

- **colloquial/colloquialism** - The use of slang or informalities in speech or writing. Not generally acceptable for formal writing, colloquialisms give a work a conversational, familiar tone. Colloquial expressions in writing include local or regional dialects.

- **jargon** consists of words and expressions characteristic of a particular trade, profession, or pursuit

- **dialect** is a nonstandard subgroup of a language with its own vocabulary and grammatical features; Writers often use regional dialects or dialects that reveal a person's economic or social class.

- **concrete diction** consists of specific words that describe physical qualities or conditions

- **abstract diction** refers to language that denotes ideas, emotions, conditions, or concepts that are intangible

didactic - From the Greek, *didactic literally means "teaching."* Didactic words have the primary aim of teaching or instructing, especially the teaching of moral or ethical principles.

euphemism - From the Greek for "good speech," euphemisms are a more agreeable or less offensive substitute for a generally unpleasant word or concept.

figurative language - Writing or speech that is not intended to carry literal meaning and is usually meant to be imaginative and vivid.

figure of speech - Words or phrases that describe one thing in terms of something else. They always invoke some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things. Figures of speech include apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, oxymoron, paradox, personification, simile, synecdoche, and understatement.

flashback - a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event

foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future action

genre - The major category into which a literary work fits. The basic divisions of literature are prose, poetry, and drama. However, genre is a flexible term; within these broad boundaries exist many subdivisions that are often called genres themselves. For example, prose can be divided into fiction (novels and short stories) or nonfiction (essays, biographies, autobiographies, etc.). Poetry can be divided into lyric, dramatic, narrative, epic, etc. Drama can be divided into tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, etc. On the AP language exam, expect the majority of the passages to be from the following genres: autobiography, biography, diaries, criticism, essays, and journalistic, political, scientific, and nature writing. There may be fiction or poetry.

hyperbole - A figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement.

imagery - The sensory details or figurative language used to describe, arouse emotion, or represent abstractions.

irony/ironic - The contrast between what is stated explicitly and what is really meant, or the difference between what appears to be and what is actually true. Irony is often used to create poignancy or humor. In general, there are three major types of irony used in language:

- **verbal irony** - when the words literally state the opposite of the writer's (or speaker's) meaning

- **situational irony** - when events turn out the opposite of what was expected; when what the characters and readers think ought to happen is not what does happen

- **dramatic irony** - when facts or events are unknown to a character in a play or piece of fiction but known to the reader, audience, or other characters in the work.

litotes (pronounced almost like "little tee") - a form of understatement that involves making an affirmative point by denying its opposite. *Litote is the opposite of hyperbole. Examples: "Not a bad idea," "Not many," "It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain"* (Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*).

meosis - an intentional understatement for humorous or satiric effect

metaphor - A figure of speech using implied comparison of seemingly unlike things or the substitution of one for the other, suggesting some similarity. Metaphorical language makes writing more vivid, imaginative, thought provoking, and meaningful.

- **extended metaphor** - A metaphor developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout a work.

metonymy - (mětõň' ģmē) A term from the Greek meaning "changed label" or "substitute name," metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of one object is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. (Example: I love Shakespeare)

mood - The prevailing atmosphere or emotional aura of a work.

motivation - a circumstance that prompts a character to act in a certain way or that determines the outcome of a situation or work

narration - the telling of a story in writing or speech

onomatopoeia - A figure of speech in which natural sounds are imitated in the sounds of words.

oxymoron - From the Greek for "pointedly foolish," an oxymoron is a figure of speech wherein the author groups apparently contradictory terms to suggest a paradox. Simple examples include "jumbo shrimp" and "cruel kindness."

paradox - occurs when the elements of a statement contradict each other. Although the statement may appear illogical, impossible, or absurd, it turns out to have a coherent meaning that reveals a hidden truth (Example: At the beginning of Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....")

parody - A work that closely imitates the style or content of another with the specific aim of comic effect and/or ridicule.

pedantic - An adjective that describes words, phrases, or general tone that is overly scholarly, academic, or bookish (language that might be described as “show-offy”; using big words for the sake of using big words).

personification - A figure of speech in which the author presents or describes concepts, animals, or inanimate objects by endowing them with human attributes or emotions. Personification is used to make these abstractions, animals, or objects appear more vivid to the reader.

apostrophe - A figure of speech that directly addresses an absent or imaginary person or a personified abstraction, such as liberty or love. It is an address to someone or something that cannot answer. The effect may add familiarity or emotional intensity. William Wordsworth addresses John Milton as he writes, “Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England hath need of thee.” Another example is Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” in which Keats addresses the urn itself: “Thou still unravished bride of quietness.” Many apostrophes imply a personification of the object addressed.

plot - the sequence of events or actions in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem

point of view - In literature, the perspective from which a story is told. There are two general divisions of point of view, and many subdivisions within those.

- **first person narrator** tells the story with the first person pronoun, “I,” and is a character in the story. This narrator can be the protagonist, a secondary character, or an observing character.

- **third person narrator** relates the events with the third person pronouns, “he,” “she,” and “it.” There are two main subdivisions of third person point of view to be aware of:

- 1) **omniscient** - in which the narrator, with godlike knowledge, presents the thoughts and actions of any or all characters
- 2) **limited omniscient**, in which the narrator presents the feelings and thoughts of only one character, presenting only the actions of all the remaining characters.

polysyndeton - the deliberate use of many conjunctions for special emphasis - to highlight quantity or mass of detail or to create a flowing, continuous sentence pattern (Example: The meal was huge - my mother fixed okra and green beans and ham and apple pie and green pickled tomatoes and ambrosia salad and all manner of fine country food - but no matter how I tried, I could not consume it to her satisfaction.”)

prosody - study of sound and rhythm in poetry

protagonist - the central character of a drama, novel, short story, or narrative poem. Conversely, the antagonist is the character who stands directly opposed to the protagonist

pun - a play on words that are identical or similar in sound but have sharply diverse meanings. Puns can have either serious or humorous uses (Example: when Mercutio is bleeding to death in *Romeo and Juliet*, he says to his friends, “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.”)

repetition - The duplication, either exact or approximate, of any element of language, such as a sound, word, phrase, clause, sentence, or grammatical pattern.

rhetoric - From the Greek for “orator,” this term describes the principles governing the art of writing effectively, eloquently, and persuasively.

rhyme - the repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem.

- **end rhyme** occurs at the end of lines
- **internal rhyme** occurs within a line
- **slant rhyme** is approximate rhyme
- **rhyme scheme** is the pattern of end rhymes

sarcasm - the use of verbal irony in which a person appears to be praising something but is actually insulting it. (Example: As I fell down the stairs headfirst, I heard her say, "Look at that coordination.")

satire - A work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule. Regardless of whether or not the work aims to reform human behavior, satire is best seen as a style of writing rather than a purpose for writing. It can be recognized by the many devices used effectively by the satirist: irony, wit, parody, caricature, hyperbole, understatement, and sarcasm. The effects of satire are varied, depending on the writer's goal, but good satire, often humorous, is thought provoking and insightful about the human condition.

Sentence patterns consist of:

- A **declarative sentence** makes a statement (Example: "The king is sick.")
- An **imperative sentence** gives a command (Example: "Cure the king.")
- An **interrogative sentence** asks a question (Example: "Is the king sick?")
- An **exclamatory sentence** provides emphasis and emotion (Example: "Long live the king!")

Types of Sentences:

- A **simple sentence** contains one independent clause (Example: "The singer bowed to her audience.")
- A **compound sentence** contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon (Example: "The singer bowed to her audience, but she sang no encores.")
- A **complex sentence** contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses (Example: "Because the singer was tired, she went straight to bed after the concert.")
- A **compound-complex sentence** contains two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses (Example: "The singer bowed while the audience applauded, but she sang no encores.")
- A **loose or cumulative sentence** makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending (Example: "We reached Edmonton that morning after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, tired but exhilarated, full of stories to tell our friends and neighbors.")
- A **periodic sentence** makes sense fully only when the end of the sentence is reached (Example: "That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton.")
- In a **balanced sentence**, the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure, meaning, or length. (Example: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.")

Types of Sentences continued...

-**Natural order of a sentence** involves constructing a sentence so the subject comes before the predicate (Example: "Oranges grow in California.")

-**Inverted order of a sentence** involves constructing a sentence so the predicate comes before the subject (Example: "In California grow the oranges.") This is a device in which typical sentence patterns are reversed to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect.

-**Juxtaposition** is a poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, often creating an effect of surprise and wit (Example: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd:/Petals on a wet, black bough.")

- **Parallel Structure (parallelism)** - refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased (Example: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...")

-A **rhetorical question** is a question that requires no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement (Example: "If Mr. Peterson is always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mrs. Baldwin's arguments?")

-A **rhetorical fragment** is a sentence fragment used deliberately for a persuasive purpose or to create a desired effect (Example: "Something to consider.")

setting - the time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem take place

shift - Also referred to as **turn** or **volta** refers to a change or movement in a piece resulting from an epiphany, realization, or insight gained by the speaker, a character, or the reader

simile - a comparison of two different things or ideas using the words 'like' or 'as'. It is a definitely stated comparison in which the poet says one thing is like another. (Example: "The warrior fought like a lion.")

sound devices - stylistic techniques that convey meaning through sound. Some examples of sound devices include rhyme, assonance, consonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia.

stichomythia - a dialogue in which the endings and beginnings of each new line echo each other, taking on a new meaning with each new line

Example: "Hamlet: Now mother, what's the matter?
Queen: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended.
Queen: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
Hamlet: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue."

structure - framework or organization of a literary selection. For example, the structure of fiction is usually determined by plot and chapter divisions, the structure of drama depends upon its division into acts and scenes; the structure of an essay depends upon the organization of ideas; the structure of poetry is determined by its rhyme scheme and stanzaic form

style - the writer's characteristic manner of employing language

suspense - the quality of a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events

symbol/symbolism - Generally, anything that represents itself and stands for something else. Usually a symbol is something concrete -- such as an object, action, character, or scene - that represents something more abstract -- such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value (Example: the land turtle in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* suggests or reflects the toughness and resilience of migrant workers.)

synecdoche - a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole or, occasionally, the whole is used to represent a part. Examples: To refer to a boat as a "sail"; to refer to a car as "wheels"; to refer to the violins, violas, etc. in an orchestra as "the strings." **Different than *metonymy*, in which one thing is represented by another thing that is commonly physically associated with it (but is not necessarily a part of it), i.e., referring to a monarch as "the crown" or the President as "The White House."

synesthesia - when one kind of sensory stimulus evokes the subjective experience of another. Ex: The sight of red ants makes you itchy. In literature, *synesthesia* refers to the practice of associating two or more different senses in the same image. Red Hot Chili Peppers' song title, "Taste the Pain," is an example.

syntax - The way an author chooses to arrange words and the order of grammatical elements in a sentence. In the multiple-choice section of the AP exam, expect to be asked some questions about how an author manipulates syntax. In the essay section, you will need to analyze how syntax produces effects.

theme - The central idea or message of a work, the insight it offers into life. It is not the same as a subject, which can be expressed in a word or two -- courage, survival, war, pride, etc. The theme is the idea the author wishes to convey about that subject. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme, and most themes are not directly stated but are implied. (Example: An example of a theme on the subject of pride might be that pride often precedes a fall.)

thesis - the thesis statement is the sentence or group of sentences that directly expresses the author's opinion, purpose, meaning, or position. Expository writing is usually judged by analyzing how accurately, effectively, and thoroughly a writer has proven the thesis.

tone - Similar to mood, tone describes the author's attitude toward his material, the audience, or both. Tone is easier to determine in spoken language than in written language. Considering how a work would sound if it were read aloud can help in identifying an author's tone. Some words describing tone are *playful, serious, businesslike, sarcastic, humorous, formal, ornate, sardonic, somber, etc.*

understatement (see also meiosis, litotes) - It is a kind of irony that deliberately represents something as being much less than it really is (Example: "I could probably manage to survive on a salary of two million dollars per year.")

wit -- in modern usage, intellectually amusing language that surprises and delights. A witty statement is humorous, while suggesting the speaker's verbal power in creating ingenious and perceptive remarks.

zeugma - the use of a verb that has two different meanings with objects that complement both meanings (Example: "He stole both her car and her heart that fateful night.")

MORE LITERARY TERMS...

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