

AP Literature and Composition

Directions: You will find that on the multiple choice section of the test, you are asked to identify literary types and devices. **Memorize** definitions, but more importantly as we read during the course of the year, assign specific examples. **You will be periodically tested on these terms by means of definition and/or examples.**

Accent: the stressed portion of a word

Allegory: an extended narrative in prose or verse in which characters, events and settings represent abstract qualities and in which the writer intends a second meaning to be read beneath the surface story; the underlying meaning may be moral, religious, political, social, or satiric.

Allusion: a reference to another work or famous figure assumed to be well known enough to be recognized by the reader.

Anachronism: an event, object, custom, person, or thing that is out of order in time; some anachronisms are unintended, such as when an actor performing Shakespeare forgets to take off his watch; others are deliberately used to achieve a humorous or satiric effect, such as the sustained anachronism of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Analogy: a comparison of two similar but different things, usually to clarify an action or a relationship, such as comparing the work of a heart to that of a pump.

Anecdote: a short, simple narrative of an incident

Aphorism: A short, often witty statement of a principle or truth about life.

Apostrophe: Usually in poetry (not grammar, but sometimes in prose) the device of calling out to an imaginary, dead or absent person, or to a place, thing, or personified abstraction either to begin a poem or to make a dramatic break in thought somewhere within the poem.

Aside: a brief speech or comment that an actor makes to the audience, supposedly without being heard by the other actors on stage, often used for melodramatic or comedic effect

Assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds between different consonants, such as neigh/fade

Ballad: a long narrative poem that presents a single dramatic episode, which is often the tragic or violent; the two types of ballads are:

- **folk ballad:** one of the earliest forms of literature, a folk ballad was usually

sung and was passed down orally from singer to singer; its author (if a single author) is generally unknown, and its form and melody often changed according to a singer's preference

- **literary ballad:** also called an art ballad, this is a ballad that imitates the form and spirit of the folk ballad, but is more polished and uses a higher level of poetic diction

Blank verse: poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter, a favorite form used by Shakespeare

Burlesque: broad parody; whereas a parody will imitate and exaggerate a specific work, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, a burlesque will take an entire style or form, such as pastoral poetry, and exaggerate it into ridiculousness.

Cacophony: harsh, awkward, or dissonant sounds used deliberately in poetry or prose; the opposite of euphony

Caricature: descriptive writing that greatly exaggerates a specific feature of appearance or a facet of personality

Catharsis: the emotional release that an audience member experiences as a result of watching a tragedy

Chorus: in Greek drama, a group of characters who comments on the action taking place on stage

Classicism: the principles and styles admired in the classics of Greek and Roman literature, such as objectivity, sensibility, restraint, and formality

Colloquialism: a word or phrase used in everyday conversation and informal writing that is sometimes inappropriate in formal writing

Conceit: an elaborate figure of speech in which two seemingly dissimilar things or situations are compared

Consonance: the repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after different vowel sounds, as in *boost/best*; can also be seen within several compound words, such as *fulfill* and *ping-pong*

Conundrum: a riddle whose answer is or involves a pun; may also be a paradox or difficult problem

Description: the picturing in words of something or someone through detailed observation of color, motion, sound, taste, smell, and touch; one of the four **modes of discourse**

Diction: word choice; also called syntax

Discourse: spoken or written language, including literary works; the four traditionally classified modes of discourse are description, exposition, narration, and persuasion

Dissonance: the grating sounds that are harsh or do not go together

Elegy: a formal poem focusing on death or mortality, usually beginning with the recent death of a particular person

End rhyme: a rhyme that comes at the end of lines of poetry; for example:

Her voice, soft and lovely when she *sings*
Came to me last night in a *dream*
In my head her voice still *rings*,
How pleasant last night must *seem*

Epic: a long narrative poem about a serious or profound subject in a dignified style; usually featuring heroic characters and deeds important in legends; two famous examples include the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both written by the Greek poet Homer

Epigram: a concise, witty saying in poetry or prose that either stands alone or is part of a larger work; may also refer to a short poem of this type

Euphony: a succession of harmonious sounds used in poetry or prose; the opposite of cacophony

Exemplum: a brief tale used in medieval times to illustrate a sermon or teach a lesson

Exposition: the immediate revelation to the audience of the setting and other background information necessary for understanding the plot; also, explanation; one of the four **modes of discourse**

Farce: a light, dramatic composition characterized by broad satirical comedy and a highly improbable plot

Figurative language: language that contains figures of speech such as similes and metaphors in order to create associations that are imaginative rather than literal

Figures of speech: expressions such as similes, metaphors, and personification that make imaginative, rather than literal, comparisons or associations.

Foil: a character who, by contrast, highlights the characteristics of another character

Folklore: traditional stories, songs, dances, and customs that are preserved among a people; folklore usually precedes literature, being passed down orally between generations until recorded by scholars

Foot: the combination of stressed and unstressed syllables that makes up the basic rhythmic unit of a line of poetry; common poetic feet include:

*anapest: two unstressed followed by one stressed syllable as in-ter-**rupt**

*dactyl: one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables as **beau**-ti-ful

*iamb: one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable as dis-**turb**

*spondee: two successive stressed syllables as in **hodge-podge**

*trochee: one stressed followed by one unstressed syllable as in-**jure**

Foreshadowing: the use of a hint or clue to suggest a larger event that occurs later in the work

Free verse: poetry that is written without a regular meter, usually without rhyme

Genre: a type of literary work, such as a novel or poem; there are also subgenres, such as science fiction novel and sonnet, within the larger genres

Gothic: referring to a type of novel that emerged in the eighteenth century that uses mystery, suspense, and sensational and supernatural occurrences to evoke terror

Hubris: the excessive pride or ambition that leads a tragic hero to disregard warnings of impending doom, eventually causing his or her downfall

Humor: anything that causes laughter or amusement; up until the end of the Renaissance, humor meant a person's temperament

Hyperbole: deliberate exaggeration in order to create humor or emphasis

Idyll: a short descriptive narrative, usually a poem, about an idealized country life; also called a pastoral

Imagery: words or phrases that use a collection of images to appeal to one or more of the five senses in order to create a mental picture

Interior monologue: writing that records the conversation that occurs inside a character's head

Internal rhyme: a rhyme occurring within a line of poetry, as in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven":

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door

Inversion: reversing the customary order of elements in a sentence or phrase; used effectively in many cases, such as posing a question: "Are you going to the store?" Often used ineffectively in poetry, making it look artificial and stilted, "to the hounds she rode, with her flags behind her streaming."

Irony: a situation or statement in which the actual outcome or meaning is opposite to what was expected

Loose sentence: a sentence that is grammatically complete before its end, such as "Thalia played the violin with an intensity never before seen in a high school music class"; the sentence is grammatically complete after the word violin.

Lyric: a type of melodious, imaginative, and subjective poetry that is usually short and personal, expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker rather than telling a story.

Metaphor: a **figure of speech** in which one thing is referred to as another, for example, “my love is a fragile flower”.

Meter: the repetition of a regular rhythmic unit in a line of poetry; meters found in poetry include:

- **monometer:** one foot
- **dimeter:** two feet
- **trimeter:** three feet
- **tetrameter:** four feet
- **pentameter:** five feet
- **hexameter:** six feet
- **heptameter:** seven feet

Metonymy: a **figure of speech** that uses the name of an object, person, or idea to represent something with which it is associated, such as using “the crown” to refer to a monarch

Mode: the method or form of a literary work; a manner in which a work of literature is written

Mood: similar to tone, mood is the primary emotional attitude of a work

Myth: one story in a system of narratives set in a complete imaginary world that once served to explain the origin of life, religious beliefs, and the forces of nature as supernatural occurrences

Narration: the telling of a story in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or drama; one of the four modes of discourse

Naturalism: a literary movement that grew out of realism in France, the United States, and England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it portrays humans as having no free will, being driven by the natural forces of heredity, environment, and animalistic urges over which they have no control

Objectivity: an impersonal presentation of events and characters

Ode: a long lyric poem, usually serious and elevated in tone; often written to praise someone or something

Onomatopoeia: the use of words that sound like what they mean, such as hiss and boom

Oxymoron: a **figure of speech** composed of contradictory words or phrases, such as “wise fool”

Parable: a short tale that teaches a moral; similar to but shorter than an allegory

Paradox: a statement that seems to contradict itself but that turns out to have a rational meaning, as in this quotation from Henry David Thoreau: “I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.”

Parallelism: the technique of arranging words, phrases, clauses, or larger structures by placing them side to side and making them similar in form

Parody: a work that ridicules the style of another work by imitating and exaggerating its elements

Pastoral: a poem about idealized rural life, or shepherds, or both; also called an idyll.

Periodic sentence: a sentence that is not grammatically complete until its last phrase, such as , “Despite Glenn’s hatred of his sister’s laziness and noisy eating habits, he still cared for her.”

Personification: the attribution of human qualities to a nonhuman or an inanimate object

Persuasion: one of the four modes of discourse’ language intended to convince through appeals to reason or emotion; also called argument

Petrarchan sonnet: one of the most important types of sonnets, composed of an octave with an *abba abba* rhyme scheme, and ending in a sestet with a *cde cde* rhyme scheme; also called an Italian sonnet

Point of view: the perspective from which a story is presented; common points of view include:

First person narrator: a narrator, referred to as “I,” who is a character in the story and relates the actions through his or her own perspective, also revealing his or her own thoughts

Stream of consciousness narrator: like a first person narrator, but instead placing the reader inside the character’s head, making the reader privy to the continuous, chaotic flow of disconnected, half-formed thoughts and impressions as they flow through the character’s consciousness

Omniscient narrator: a third person narrator, referred to as “he,” “she,” or “they,” who is able to see into each character’s mind and understands all the action

Limited omniscient narrator: a third person narrator who only reports the thoughts of one character, and generally only what that one character sees

Objective narrator: a third person narrator who only reports what would be visible to a camera; thoughts and feelings are only revealed if a character speaks of them

Protagonist: the main character in a literary work

Realism: a nineteenth-century literary movement in Europe and the United States that stressed accuracy in the portrayal of life, focusing on characters with whom middle-class readers could easily identify; in direct contrast with romanticism

Refrain: a line or group of lines that are periodically repeated throughout a poem

Regionalism: an element in literature that conveys a realistic portrayal of a specific geographical locale, using the locale and its influences as a major part of the plot

Rhyme: a similarity of accented sounds between two words, such as sad/mad; rhymes can be masculine or feminine:

masculine: the rhyme sound is the last syllable of a line, i.e. profound/bound

feminine: the accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable, i.e. banding/landing

Romanticism: a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement that began in the eighteenth century as a reaction against neoclassicism; the focal points of the movement are imagination, emotion, and freedom, stressing subjectivity, individuality, the love and worship of nature, and a fascination with the past.

Sarcasm: harsh, caustic personal remarks to or about someone; less subtle than irony

Simile: a figure of speech that uses like, as, or as if to make a direct comparison between two essentially different objects, actions, or qualities; for example, "the sky looked like an artist's canvas"

Soliloquy :a speech spoken by a character alone on stage, giving the impression that the audience is listening to the character's thoughts; perhaps the most famous example is Hamlet's speech beginning "To be, or not to be"

Sonnet: a fourteen line lyric poem in iambic pentameter

Speaker: the voice of a poem; an author may speak as him/herself or as a fictitious character

Stanza: a group of lines in the formal pattern of a poem; types of stanzas include:

Couplet: the simplest stanza, consisting of two rhymed lines

Tercet: three lines, usually having the same rhyme

Quatrain: four lines

Cinquain: five lines

Sestet: six lines

Octave: eight lines

Stereotype: a character who represents a trait that is usually attributed to a particular social or racial group and lacks individuality

Stock character: a standard character who may be stereotyped, such as the miser or the fool; or universally recognized, like the hard-boiled private eye in a detective story.

Style: an author's characteristic manner of expression

Subjectivity: a personal presentation of events and characters, influenced by the author's feelings and opinions

Suspension of disbelief: the demand made of a theater audience to provide some details with their imagination and to accept the limitations of reality and staging; also, the acceptance of the incidents of the plot by a reader or audience

Symbolism: the use of symbols, or anything that is meant to be taken both literally and as representative of a higher and more complete significance

Synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole, such as using "boards" to mean "a stage," or "wheels" to mean a car

Syntax: word choice in diction

Theme: the central idea or "message" of a literary work

Tone: the characteristic emotion or attitude of an author toward the characters, subject, and audience

Tragic flaw: the one weakness that causes the downfall of a hero in a tragedy

Villanelle: a lyric poem consisting of five tercets and a final quatrain

Voice: the way a written work conveys an author's attitude