

Glossary of Terms

Active voice

A sentence is written in the active voice when the subject acts upon the verb or performs the action.

The cat scratched the post.

Allegory

A form of writing that uses fictional characters and events to symbolically represent a deeper meaning, including political and moral.

George Orwell's Animal Farm

Alliteration

The repetition of similar sounds or letters at the beginning of words in a line of poetry.

What wild windy whirls?

Allusion

A reference to something with which most people are familiar, whether that be an historical event, Biblical reference, myth, or even another piece of literature in a poem or short story or novel.

Analogy

A comparison of ideas or objects that are essentially different but are alike in one significant way.

Antagonist

The character or force that opposes the protagonist or main character in a story. (An easy memory trick is to think, "antagonist = against the main character.")

In Star Wars Darth Vader is the antagonist, the character opposing Luke Skywalker.

Anecdotal evidence

A form of evidence that is often informal and takes the form of hearsay or true stories to prove a point.

Anti-climax

An outcome to a situation that by contrast to what was anticipated, is disappointing or even ludicrous. Sometimes the result can be humorous.

Antithesis

The placing of contrasting elements side by side in parallel structures.

To err is human; to forgive is divine.

Apostrophe

A figure of speech in which the speaker addresses an inanimate object as if it were alive or an absent or dead person as if he or she is alive.

"Oh, Canada, our home and native land."

"Death, be not proud."

Archaic language

Words and language structures that have become outdated and no longer used in common speech.

Methought I observed the taper flicker.

Argumentative essay

A type of essay that asserts that a particular theory, opinion, or hypothesis is correct or more truthful than other perspectives.

Aside

A technique in drama (a play, movie, TV show) where a character speaks directly to the audience. The other characters on stage do not hear this character's aside words.

Atmosphere

The general feeling of a piece of writing. This can also be referred to as the tone or mood. Often emotion words are used to describe atmosphere.

The atmosphere of a story could be scary or suspenseful.

Audience

The person or group of people that a writer or author is writing for.

A newspaper reporter's audience is the group of people who read the newspaper.

Autobiography

An account of someone's life written by that person.

Ballad

A song or a poem that is a narrative or tells a story.

"The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service

Ballad stanza

A common stanza form used in ballads, typically quatrains with an A B C B rhyme scheme and iambic rhythms.

*All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.*

Bias

An unfair preference or dislike of something/someone; a personal belief or stance on a subject; a person with bias may not consider another person's point of view.

Biography

An account of a person's life written by another person.

Blank verse

A form of poetry that is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter: every line of the poem has 10 syllables and those syllables have a sing-songy up and down sound to them. Most of Shakespeare's plays are written in blank verse.

u / u / u / u / u /
Two households, both alike in dignity

u / u / u / u / u /
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

(The "u" indicates an unstressed syllable; the "/" indicates a stressed syllable.)

Cacophony

Harsh, unpleasant, discordant sounds.

The clatter of crashing vied for my attention.

Caricature

A depiction or representation of a person that is exaggerated for a comic effect.

Case study

A form of research that examines a single event or instance in depth as opposed to a larger group study.

Catastrophe

In a drama, particularly tragedy, the concluding action following the climax that contains the resolution of the plot.

Cause and effect

A method of organizing information that outlines the problem first, including its cause, and the subsequent outcome or effects.

Character

The fictional people an author creates in a story or poem; a character can be complex (round), or simple (flat); a character can change over the course of a story (dynamic), or remain unchanged (static); a good writer makes characters interesting and believable.

Characterization

The method an author uses to describe or create a distinctive character. Methods include indirect and direct presentation. Character can be revealed indirectly by what he or she thinks, says, or does; it can be revealed directly through description of his or her appearance; and character can be revealed by what other characters say or think about a character.

Character foil

See Foil

Chorus

Common in Greek tragedies, the chorus is a group of actors, often masked, who provide commentary on the happenings in the play.

Chronological order

A story or event that is presented in the order that things happened in time - the beginning, middle, and then the end. There are no flashbacks or jumping around in time.

Climactic order

A method of organizing information that presents the least important information first and builds to present the most important information last.

Cliché

A metaphor, simile, or saying that has become so overused that it is no longer unique.

Strong as a bull. Happy as a clam. Big as a house.

Climax

The high point of tension or suspense in a story; the decisive moment or turning point in a story; an author writes a story that builds towards a climax; the climax often determines the outcome of the conflict.

Colloquial language / Colloquialism

A way of expression, written or spoken, that is usually found in informal situations or in language confined to a particular region.

"Hi ya" is an informal way of saying "hello."

Comedy

Comedy is a type of fiction or drama that depicts humorous plots where the protagonist (central character) is faced with a light-hearted challenge and in the end overcomes it and the story or play ends happily.

Comic relief

A comic episode or element inserted in an otherwise serious or tragic play to provide some relief from the heavy mood.

Compare

When you are asked to compare, you are essentially being asked to consider the similarities between two or more stories, poems, essays, or things.

You might compare how you and your best friend are alike.

Conflict (internal, external)

Occurs when the protagonist (main character) is opposed by some person or force in a story. The conflict might be external, character vs. character, or character vs. nature, or internal, character vs. self; the conflict can be internal, or external, or both.

Consonance

The repetition of consonant sounds near to each other in a line of poetry.

The error ran through the rest.

Connotation

Connotation is the emotional meaning associated with a word. For example, a person who is underweight might be described as slight or scrawny. Slight has a fairly positive emotional connotation while scrawny has a negative connotation.

Contrast

When you are asked to contrast, you are essentially being asked to consider the differences between two or more stories, poems, essays, or things.

You might contrast life in the city versus life in the country.

Couplet

Two successive lines of verse that rhyme and are usually of equal length.

It think it is time / You learned to rhyme.

Denotation

The dictionary definition of a word is the denotative meaning. There is no emotional association with the word.

The word "grind" means to process a substance into small bits.

Dénouement

A series of events that follows the climax thus serving as the conclusion of the story. The final resolution or clarification of a dramatic or narrative plot. It follows the climax and the falling action.

Description

Writing that gives a detailed account of a character, an object, an event, or a sequence of events. Descriptive writing evokes all the senses - sights, smells, sounds, tastes, textures, and feelings are described in detail.

Descriptive essay

An essay that describes something or someone by providing details, including sensory details, to illustrate a point to a reader.

Dialect

The speech that is characteristic of a particular region or of a class or group of people. Although people in Canada and Scotland both speak English, they may still have trouble understanding each other due to differences in dialect.

Dialogue

Speech that occurs between two or more characters in a story; dialogue is typically indicated by using quotation marks. Through informal or formal speech, dialogue develops character as well as setting and atmosphere. An accent or dialect can give information about the setting. The way two characters interact creates atmosphere, whether the interaction is informal, formal, curt, or otherwise.

Diary

A personal journal or written account of experiences, feelings, or observations.

Diction

Choice or use of words in speech or writing.

Didactic

A piece of writing that is designed to be morally instructive or teach a lesson.

Dilemma

A situation in which a choice must be made between two equally unfavourable options.

Direct presentation

See *Characterization*

Dissonance

In poetry, a combination of sounds that is unpleasant to hear.

Drama

A piece of writing, especially with a serious topic, that is intended to be acted out for presentation to an audience.

A theatrical play, a TV show, a radio story, a webcast drama

Dramatic irony

See *Irony*

Dramatic dialogue

in drama a dialogue form that is more than conversational: it advances the plot and / or develops character.

Dramatic form

A medium or a way of expressing dramatic meaning.

Comedy, tragedy, mime, improvisation

Dynamic character

A character who learns something or whose personality changes through the course of a story.

Exposition

The first section of the plot, in which characters, setting, and any necessary information are introduced.

Editorial

An article that gives opinions or perspectives on a topic.

Elegy

A poem that is mournful or expresses sorrow, often a lament for the dead.

Emotional appeal

The deliberate attempt to stir and rouse specific emotions in those who see or hear a piece of writing or advertisement.

Epic

A long, narrative poem typically on a serious topic recounted in an elevated style.

Odyssey, Iliad, Paradise Lost

Epiphany

A sudden understanding of the essential nature or meaning of something, often associated with the divine.

Epigram

A short saying or poem that is witty and often paradoxical

*"Some praise at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the last opinion right." Alexander Pope*

Epitaph

An inscription on a monument or tombstone about the person buried there.

Euphemism

A mild or inoffensive expression use in place of one that is harsh or offensive.

Correctional facility for jail or pre-owned vehicle for used car

Euphony

Pleasing or harmonious quality of sounds, especially words.

Expert testimony

Comments or opinions on a topic provided by a subject-matter expert.

Expository

Non-fiction writing that contains a main idea and one or more paragraphs (often an essay). Another word for expository is explanatory; the writer of an expository essay tries to explain something.

A simple kind of expository writing would be a recipe; a more complex kind of expository writing is a car rental agreement.

Extended metaphor

A metaphor that is developed beyond a single line or two – it may be developed at length throughout a work.

External conflict

See *Conflict*

Fantasy

A piece of fiction involving such unreal characters and implausible events that reader is not expected to believe it. Fantasy is often used to entertain or to satirize people and customs.

Farce

A form of fiction, usually drama, where humour is achieved through the creation of exaggerated or far-fetched situations or characters.

Falling action

Deals with the effects that the climax has on the characters. This part of the plot comes after the climax and leads up to the denouement.

Figurative language

A way of saying one thing and meaning something else; poets use figurative language when writing poetry; some common examples of figurative language are simile, metaphor, and personification.

First person point of view

See *Point of View*

Flashback

This is where a writer presents information that happened before the story begins; a flashback might be a character's dream, memory of the past, or story of a past event.

Flat character

A simple or one-sided character in a story; one who does not change or develop.

Foil

A character who is used to contrast with another character.

In Cinderella, the ugly stepsisters are foils to Cinderella and their differences emphasize Cinderella's sweetness and virtue.

Foreshadowing

The method an author uses to build suspense by providing clues as to what might happen in a story.

In Romeo and Juliet, Romeo's expression of fear at the beginning of the play foreshadows the catastrophe and tragedy to come at the end of the play.

Form

Can indicate literary type, short story, sonnet, ode, or can indicate patterns of metre, rhyme, and lines, such as free verse or iambic pentameter.

Formal essay

A style of essay writing that tends to be impersonal, systematic, and expository, and often has a serious tone.

Formal language

Language that is elevated or uses a high level of diction – commonly used in essays, lectures, and traditional poetry.

Free verse

A kind of poem that has no clear rhyme or pattern. Free verse poetry is intended to imitate the spoken word.

Genre

Genre means "type" or "kind," as in "what kind of novel do you like?"
Jules has two favourite genres of fiction - mystery and fantasy novels.

Graphic text

Text that is primarily graphic in nature or text that relies on a visual dimension to present information (like a photo essay).

Hero

The main character in a work of fiction, often the protagonist.

Historical reference

A reference or allusion to an event that has taken place in the past.

Hyperbole

Deliberate exaggeration for emphasis.

I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.

Iambic pentameter

Poetic rhythm consisting of lines of five iambic feet (five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables).

u / u / u / u / u /
Two households, both alike in dignity

u / u / u / u / u /
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

(The "u" indicates an unstressed syllable; the "/" indicates a stressed syllable.)

Idiom

The language or way of speaking that is typical of a particular group of people or region; a manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language.

You are the apple of my eye.

Image / imagery

A word or group of words in a story or poem that appeals to one or more of the senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing, and smell.

Irony

The difference between what is said and what is meant, or what we expect to happen and what actually happens; sarcasm is a kind of irony, where the words said are not really what is meant.

Indeterminate ending

An ending in which the central conflict is left unresolved.

Indirect presentation

See *Characterization*

Informal essay

A style of essay writing that takes a more relaxed, personal form of expression, often using humour for effect.

Informal language

A language style that is conversational, relaxed, and "real-life."

Internal monologue

The internal thoughts or conversation of a character in a work of fiction to which only the reader or audience has access.

Internal conflict

See *Conflict*

Internal rhyme

Rhyme that occurs within a line of poetry rather than at the end of a line.

He walked with a cane down an old lane.

Irony

The difference between what is said and what is meant, or what we expect to happen and what actually happens; sarcasm is a kind of irony, where the words said are not really what is meant.

Irony can be divided into three types:

Dramatic Irony—refers to a dramatic situation in which the audience knows something a character does not.

Situational Irony—refers to a contrast between what a character or the reader expects to happen in a situation and what really happens.

Verbal Irony—one thing is said while the opposite is meant.

Jargon

Specialized language often characteristic of a particular subject. Using jargon should be avoided when writing for most audiences.

There is a lot of technical jargon when speaking of computers -

"How many megs have you got?"

Juxtaposition

The placement of two dissimilar things side by side to create a particular effect. For example, placing two distinctly different characters together in a scene can result in emphasizing the dissimilar qualities in each. The evil stepmother may seem more evil when presented alongside the innocent child.

Legend

A story that has been passed down generation after generation. Although the story may seem unbelievable, there is usually some basis in history.

Limited omniscient point of view

See *Point of View*

Literal language

Words or language that takes its meaning from the dictionary definitions, without any deeper or symbolic meaning.

The final exam was challenging, but the students were well prepared.

Lyric

A form of poetry that focuses on creating a mood or recalling a feeling.

Melodrama

A type of drama characterized by extreme behaviours and emotions, often using stereotypical characters in simplistic conflicts.

Metaphor

A type of figurative language where the writer compares two essentially unlike things; a metaphor is a direct comparison.

She is the sunshine of my life.

Metre

The rhythm of a line of poetry created by the regular repetition of similar accent patterns, or feet. The grocery store is miles away. I don't suppose we'll go today.

Mood

The feeling evoked in the reader by the writer's choice of words or by the overall emotional effect of a passage.

Metonymy

A figure of speech based on the association of ideas. It compares two things or ideas that are so closely associated that one immediately suggests the other.

Blood is thicker than water (relatives are more important than friends).

Monologue

A passage in drama in which a single actor speaks alone to the audience.

Mystery

A type of fiction whose plot centres around solving a crime or understanding a puzzling event.

Myth

A traditional story about heroes or supernatural beings that attempts to explain natural phenomena or human behaviours and beliefs.

Narration

The act or process of telling a story. Narration is different from pure description or explanation.

Narrative

A style of writing that tells a story; a narrative style can be used in a novel, short story, poem, or essay where the writer is telling a story or recounting events.

Narrator

A character in the story who tells the story. In all works other than autobiographies, the narrator is not the author.

Objective (language, tone)

Language or tones that are neutral and without subjectivity or bias.

Objective point of view

The story is told from the perspective of an outsider, like a roving camera that can go anywhere but captures only what is seen and heard. It cannot provide commentary, interpretation, or enter a character's mind.

Octave

See *Stanza*

Ode

A long, lyric poem that expresses an exalted or enthusiastic emotion, often about a worthy person or occasion.

Omniscient point of view

See *Point of View*

Onomatopoeia

A type of figurative language where the writer uses words whose pronunciation imitates the sound the word describes.

The word "spit" sounds rather like the act of spitting.

Oxymoron

A figure of speech in which words in a phrase, often an adjective and a noun, are seemingly contradictory.

jumbo shrimp or burning cold

Paradox

A statement that first appears to be contradictory but actually states a truth.

"History teaches us that we learn nothing from history."

Parallelism

The effective use of words, phrases, sentences, or ideas that are parallel or have a similar structure in order to heighten the focus.

Have you ever thought of what it is like to fly, to hope, to dream?

Parody

A humorous imitation of a more serious piece of literature, writing, or song.

Passive voice

A sentence is written in the passive voice when the subject receives the action or is acted upon.

The post was scratched by the cat.

Pastoral

A type of literary work that idealizes country life.

Pathos

A quality in writing that evokes pity or compassion in the reader.

Personal essay

An essay style that focuses on subjective experiences or personal perspectives.

Personification

A type of figurative language where the writer gives an inanimate or non-living thing human characteristics.

The tree branches waved and the leaves laughed.

Persuasion; persuasive

Writing that tries to convince your reader of a point of view using logic and reason.

Plot

The structure of a story; the sequence of events that happen in a story. Plot elements include the initial incident, rising action, the climax, falling action, and resolution.

Point of view

The voice or speaker in a story; a story can be told in the first person (where a character tells the story from his or her perspective—this is indicated by “I”), or a story can be told in the third person, telling things from the perspective of an onlooker; the third-person point of view can be omniscient (where the author reveals everything), or limited omniscient (where an author will select what to reveal, often only the point of view of one character).

Propaganda

Information or ideas that are spread for the purpose of promoting some person or group's opinions. Propaganda is usually misleading as no other perspectives are considered.

Pro and con argument

A style of writing that presents arguments both for and against a particular topic.

Prologue

An introductory section or scene in a literary work that often provides information about events that took place before the work begins.

Propaganda

Information or ideas that are spread for the purpose of promoting some person or group's opinions. Propaganda is usually misleading as no other perspectives are considered.

Protagonist

The central or main character in a story; all that happens in a story revolves around the protagonist.

Everything in Romeo and Juliet revolves around the two main characters: Romeo and Juliet.

Proverb

A short statement or saying that offers a general truth or piece of advice.

A faithful friend is medicine for life.

Purpose

The anticipated outcome that drives your course of action. In writing, your purpose may be to inform or persuade your audience about a given topic.

Pun

An amusing play on words where humour arises from double meanings.

What's black and white and red (= read) all over?

"A newspaper."

Quatrain

See *Stanza*

Question and answer

- a) Assessment style where questions are posed and students demonstrate knowledge through their answers.
- b) A rhetorical style in which a writer poses questions and provides answers as a means to convey information.

Refrain

Is the line or lines that are repeated in poetry or music. In songs, we commonly refer to the refrain as the chorus.

Repetition

A literary device that involves the repeating of words, phrases, or structures for a desired effect.

I came, I saw, I conquered.

Research

A systematic form of study used to establish a fact or revise a theory.

Resolution

The point in the story where the conflict is resolved.

Rhetorical question

A question asked for a dramatic effect and to which no answer is expected.

Rhyme

The repetition of similar sounds at the end of two or more lines of poetry.

I think that now is the time / For you to understand rhyme.

Rhyme scheme

The pattern of rhymed words at the end of the lines of a poem. Each new rhyme sound is assigned a letter from the alphabet beginning with “a.” This poem has an abcb rhyme scheme.

*Roses are red a
Violets are blue b
Sugar is sweet c
And so are you b*

Rhythm

Think of rhythm as the music or beat of a poem. Often poems have a rhythm or beat that is consistent throughout the poem.

Rising action

The events that occur before the climax of a story where the conflict in the story increases and action intensifies. The events that take place between the exposition and the climax of the story.

Round character

See *Character*

Sarcasm

A form of irony whereby a person or writer says or writes the opposite of what is meant.

“That was fun!” (When the speaker means the event was boring)

Satire

A way of writing to make fun of a person or topic or human quality by making it appear ridiculous. This often involves the use of irony or sarcasm.

Sestet

See *Stanza*

Setting

The time and place or the when and where of a story.

Romeo and Juliet is set in Verona, Italy during the Middle Ages.

Simile

A type of figurative language where the writer compares two essentially unlike things using like, than, or as; a simile is an indirect comparison.

She is like the sunshine of my life. She runs like a cheetah. He is as strong as an ox.

Slang

Words that are used popularly, or in a particular class of society, but are not generally acknowledged as correct English.

Calling a car a "beater" is slang and means that it is old and undependable.

Soliloquy

In drama, lines spoken by a character to him or herself rather than to another character. The character is "thinking aloud" in order to reveal information about him/herself or an event that the audience needs to know.

Sonnet

A fourteen-line, lyric poem that focuses on a specific theme and is written in iambic pentameter.

The two most traditional sonnet structures are the Petrarchan (Italian) sonnet and the Shakespearean (English) sonnet. The Petrarchan is divided into the eight-line octave and the six-line sestet. The rhyme scheme of the octave is usually abba abba; the rhyme scheme of the sestet is either cde cde or cd cd cd. The octave often asks a question or states a problem while the sestet provides the answer or solution.

The Shakespearean sonnet is composed of three four-line quatrains and a rhyming couplet. The usual rhyme scheme is abab, cdcd, efef, gg. Each quatrain usually develops a variation of the main theme. The rhyming couplet usually provides a summary or conclusion.

Speaker

An imaginary voice taken on by a poet to tell you a poem. Do not assume that the speaker of a poem is the author - it is rarely the case.

Stanza

A “paragraph” of poetry or a group of lines sectioned off in a poem. If a poem you are reading has three stanzas, each “section” will be distinct and separated from the other by a blank line; you will easily be able to see and count each stanza.

Stanzas are named according to the number of lines found in them. For example:

couplet—two-line stanza

quatrain—four-line stanza

sestet—six-line stanza

octave—eight-line stanza

Stream of consciousness

A style of fictional writing that reveals the random thoughts and actions of a character as a continuous flow.

Static character

A character whose personality does not change throughout the story.

Statistical evidence

The use of statistics or numeric principals to support a theory or thesis.

Stereotyped (stock) character

A character that is immediately identified with a group. A stereotypical character is one we are immediately familiar with because we have seen the type before.

The smart geek, the absent-minded professor, the evil step-mother

Style

A distinctive way in which a writer uses language, both choice and arrangement of words. Style is the way authors express what they have to say.

Style can be formal or familiar, plain, or complex.

Subjective (language, tone)

A style of writing that reveals opinions, thoughts, and feelings of the speaker rather than presenting objective evidence or facts.

Surprise ending

An ending that the reader did not anticipate.

Suspense

A feeling of curiosity or expectation about events to follow or an outcome in a story. The tension an author creates in a story or narrative poem. As a reader, you want to know what will happen next.

Symbol / symbolism

An object that represents or stands in for a more abstract idea – for example, a dove is a symbol for peace.

The colour white might symbolize peace, purity, or surrender.

Synecdoche

A figure of speech based on the association of ideas where a part stands in or represents a whole.

I have five mouths to feed. Mouths represent people.

Check out my new wheels. Wheels represent a car.

Theme

The main idea that an author develops in a story or poem. A theme can usually be summarized in one sentence and is universal.

One possible theme for Romeo and Juliet is that "Romantic love is the most important aspect of life and that it should conquer all."

Thesis / thesis statement

A written statement in an essay that outlines the purpose or topic of the paper.

Third person point of view

See *Point of View*

Tone

Expresses the author's attitude toward his or her subject; the tone of a story might be angry, or the tone of a poem might be bitter; the words a writer carefully uses will help you identify tone.

Tragedy

A story or play in which the main character is brought to death or suffers extreme sorrow, especially as a result of a tragic flaw, moral weakness, or an inability to manage bad circumstances.

Shakespeare's plays, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and MacBeth

Understatement

A statement that lessens or minimizes the importance of what is meant.

If you were in the desert and it was 45 degrees Celsius, you might say, "It's rather warm outside today."

Voice

The dominant tone of a literary work that underlies the character or narrator.

Wit

A clever and often humorous use of words. Many puns are a form of wit.