
LITERARY/RHETORTICAL TERMS

ALLEGORY story or poem in which characters, settings, and events stand for other people or events or for abstract ideas or qualities.

EXAMPLE: *Animal Farm*; Dante's *Inferno*; *Lord of the Flies*

ALLITERATION repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds in words that are close together.

EXAMPLE: Why not waste a wild weekend at Westmore Water Park?

ALLUSION reference to someone or something that is known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, or another branch of culture. An indirect reference to something (usually from literature, etc.).

Example: "When she lost her job, she acted like a Scrooge, and refused to buy anything that wasn't necessary." Scrooge was an extremely stingy character from Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*.

AMBIGUITY deliberately suggesting two or more different, and sometimes conflicting, meanings in a work. An event or situation that may be interpreted in more than one way-- this is done on purpose by the author, when it is not done on purpose, it is vagueness, and detracts from the work.

ANAPHORA Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row. This is a deliberate form of repetition and helps make the writer's point more coherent. Ex: Each woman stood on the steps of her house. Each woman clapped. Each one held her breath as the men rode into town.

ANTITHESIS – the opposition or contrast of ideas; the direct opposite; ex. "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more." (*Julius Caesar*, III, ii)

APHORISM brief, cleverly worded statement that makes a wise observation about life, or of a principle or accepted general truth. Also called maxim, epigram.

Example: The simplest questions are the hardest to answer. [Northrop Frye]

APOSTROPHE calling out to an imaginary, dead, or absent person, or to a place or thing, or a personified abstract idea. If the character is asking a god or goddess for inspiration it is called an invocation.

Example: Mary Shelly uses apostrophe in her novel "Frankenstein": "Oh! Stars and clouds and winds, ye are all about to mock me; if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness."

ASSONANCE the repetition of similar vowel sounds followed by different consonant sounds especially in words that are together. Example: "Men sell the wedding bells."

ASYNDETON [think: action] Commas used without conjunction to separate a series of words, thus emphasizing the parts equally: "I came, I saw, I conquered." [Julius Caesar]

CLICHE is a word or phrase, often a figure of speech, that has become lifeless because of overuse. Avoid clichés like the plague. (That cliché is intended.)

COLLOQUIALISM a word or phrase in everyday use in conversation and informal writing but is inappropriate for formal situations.

Example: "He's out of his head if he thinks I'm gonna go for such a stupid idea."

CONNOTATION the associations and emotional overtones that have become attached to a word or phrase, in addition to its strict dictionary definition.

DICTION a speaker or writer's choice of words.

ELLIPSIS: the deliberate omission of a word or words that are implied by the context

Examples:

"The average person thinks he isn't." –Father Larry Lorenzoni

The term "average" is omitted but understood after "isn't."

John forgives Mary and Mary, John.

Note that the comma signals what has been elided, "forgives"

EPISTROPHE Device of repetition in which the same expression (single word or phrase) is repeated at the end of two or more lines, clauses, or sentences (it is the opposite of anaphora).

Example:

What lies behind **us** and what lies before **us** are tiny compared to what lies within **us**." —Emerson

EPITHET an adjective or adjective phrase applied to a person or thing that is frequently used to emphasize a characteristic quality. "Father of our country" and "the great Emancipator" are examples. A Homeric epithet is a compound adjective used with a person or thing: "swift-footed Achilles"; "rosy-fingered dawn."

EUPHEMISM: a substitution of a more pleasant expression for one whose meaning may come across as rude or offensive

Examples: You are becoming a little thin on top (bald); saying someone "passed away" instead of died

EXPLICATION: act of interpreting or discovering the meaning of a text, usually involves close reading and special attention to figurative language.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE Words which are inaccurate if interpreted literally, but are used to describe. Similes and metaphors are common forms.

FOIL A character who acts as contrast to another character. Often a funny side kick to the dashing hero, or a villain contrasting the hero.

HYPERBOLE a figure of speech that uses an incredible exaggeration or overstatement, for effect. "If I told you once, I've told you a million times..."

IMAGERY the use of language to evoke a picture or a concrete sensation of a person, a thing, a place, or an experience.

INVERSION the reversal of the normal word order in a sentence or phrase.

Example: How wonderful the weather is today!

IRONY a discrepancy between appearances and reality.

JUXTAPOSITION poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, creating an effect of surprise and wit.

Ezra Pound: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/ Petals on a wet, black bough."

Juxtaposition is also a form of contrast by which writers call attention to dissimilar ideas or images or metaphors.

Martin Luther King: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

METAPHOR a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things without the use of such specific words of comparison as like, as, than, or resembles.

IMPLIED METAPHOR does not state explicitly the two terms of the comparison: “I like to see it lap the miles” is an implied metaphor in which the verb lap implies a comparison between “it” and some animal that “laps” up water.

EXTENDED METAPHOR is a metaphor that is extended or developed as far as the writer wants to take it.

MIXED METAPHOR is a metaphor that has gotten out of control and mixes its terms so that they are visually or imaginatively incompatible. “The President is a lame duck who is running out of gas.”

METONYMY a figure of speech in which a person, place, or thing, is referred to by something closely associated with it. “We requested from the crown support for our petition.” The crown is used to represent the monarch.

MOOD An atmosphere created by a writer’s diction and the details selected.

MOTIF a recurring image, word, phrase, action, idea, object, or situation used throughout a work (or in several works by one author), unifying the work by tying the current situation to previous ones, or new ideas to the theme. Kurt Vonnegut uses “So it goes” throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five* to remind the reader of the senselessness of death.

ONOMATOPOEIA the use of words whose sounds echo their sense. “Pop.” “Zap.”

OXYMORON a figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory terms in a brief phrase. “Jumbo shrimp.” “Pretty ugly.” “Bitter-sweet”

PARADOX a statement that appears self-contradictory, but that reveals a kind of truth.

Example: Whosoever loses his life, shall find it.

PARALLEL STRUCTURE (parallelism) the repetition of words or phrases that have similar grammatical structures. Example: “We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future.”

PERSONIFICATION a figure of speech in which an object or animal is given human feelings, thoughts, or attitudes.

POLYSYNDETON [think: pause] sentence which uses a conjunction with NO commas to separate the items in a series. Instead of “I came, I saw, I conquered” it would be “I came and I saw and I conquered.”

PROTAGONIST the central character in a story, the one who initiates or drives the action. Usually the hero or anti-hero; in a tragic hero, like John Proctor of *The Crucible*, there is always a hamartia, or tragic flaw in his character which will lead to his downfall.

PUN a “play on words” based on the multiple meanings of a single word or on words that sound alike but mean different things.

SATIRE a type of writing that ridicules the shortcomings of people or institutions in an attempt to bring about a change.

SIMILE a figure of speech that makes an explicitly comparison between two unlike things, using words such as like, as , than, or resembles.

STEREOTYPE a fixed idea or conception of a character or an idea which does not allow for any individuality, often based on religious, social, or racial prejudices.

STYLE the distinctive way in which a writer uses language: a writer's distinctive use of diction, tone, and syntax.

SYMBOL a person, place, thing, or event that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something more than itself.

SYNECDOCHE a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. "If you don't drive properly, you will lose your wheels." The wheels represent the entire car.

SYNTAX: The way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences

THEME the insight about human life that is revealed in a literary work.

TONE the attitude a writer takes toward the subject of a work, the characters in it, or the audience, revealed through diction, figurative language, and organization.

TRAGEDY in general, a story in which a heroic character either dies or comes to some other unhappy end.

UNDERSTATEMENT a statement that says less than what is meant.

Example: During the second war with Iraq, American troops complained of a fierce sand storm that made even the night-vision equipment useless. A British commando commented about the storm: "It's a bit breezy."

RHETORIC: the art of persuasion in speaking or writing

- o **Rhetorical devices:** using language that will increase the persuasiveness of a piece of writing

- o **Some common rhetorical devices:**

- o Parallel structure
 - o Rhetorical questions
 - o Sentence variety
 - o Logical and emotional appeals

Three methods of persuasion:

- o **ethos:** the writer's character or image; using a person's credibility to convince audience (think: "ethics")
- o **pathos:** playing on the emotions of the audience (think: "sympathy")
- o **logos:** logical arguments; use of logic, claims, and evidence to convince an audience (think: "logic")

- o **fallacies:** errors in reasoning
- o **emotional appeals:** attempting to persuade one's audience by appealing to their emotions

rhetorical question: a question asked for an effect, and not actually requiring an answer.

aporia: questioning oneself (or rhetorically asking the audience), often pretending to be in doubt