

A.P. Language and Composition

Rhetorical Terms & Glossary

Abstract	refers to language that describes concepts rather than concrete images (ideas and qualities rather than observable or specific things, people, or places). The observable or “physical” is usually described in concrete language.
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 of the story; the underlying meaning may be moral, religious, political, social, or satiric.
Anecdote	a short, simple narrative of an incident; often used for humorous effect or to make a point.
Annotation	Explanatory notes added to a text to explain, cite sources, or give bibliographical data.
Antithesis	the presentation of two contrasting images. The ideas are balanced by word, phrase, clause, or paragraphs. “To be or not to be...” “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country....”
Aphorism	a short, often witty statement of a principle or a truth about life: “Early bird gets the worm.”
Apostrophe	usually in poetry but sometimes in prose; the device of calling out to an imaginary, dead, or absent person or to a place, thing, or personified abstraction
Argumentation	writing that attempts to prove the validity of a point of view or an idea by presenting reasoned arguments; persuasive writing is a form of argumentation
Cacophony; Dissonance	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 a person’s appearance or a facet of personality.
Colloquialism	a word or phrase (including slang) used in everyday conversation and informal writing but that is often inappropriate in formal writing (y’all, ain’t)
Coherence; Unity	quality of a piece of writing in which all the parts contribute to the development of the central idea, theme, or organizing principle
Concrete Language	Language that describes specific, observable things, people, or places, rather than ideas or qualities.
Connotation	implied or suggested meaning of a word because of its association in the reader’s mind.
Consonance	repetition of identical consonant sounds within two or more words in close proximity, as in boost/best; it can also be seen within several compound words, such as fulfill and ping-pong
Conundrum	a riddle whose answer is or involves a pun; it may also be a paradox or difficult problem
Deduction	the process of moving from a general rule to a specific example

Denotation	literal meaning of a word as defined
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, an element of style; Diction creates tone, attitude, and style, as well as meaning. Different types and arrangements of words have significant effects on meaning. An essay written in academic diction would be much less colorful, but perhaps more precise than street slang.
Didactic	writing whose purpose is to instruct or to teach. A didactic work is usually formal and focuses on moral or ethical concerns. Didactic writing may be fiction or nonfiction that teaches a specific lesson or moral or provides a model of correct behavior or thinking.
Discourse	spoken or written language, including literary works; the four traditionally classified modes of discourse are description, exposition, narration, and persuasion.
Emotional Appeal; Pathos	When a writer appeals to readers' emotions (often through pathos) to excite and involve them in the argument.
Epigraph	the use of a quotation at the beginning of a work that hints at its theme. Hemingway begins <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> with two epigraphs. One of them is "You are all a lost generation" by Gertrude Stein.
Ethical Appeal; Ethos	When a writer tries to persuade the audience to respect and believe him or her based on a presentation of image of self through the text. Reputation is sometimes a factor in ethical appeal, but in all cases the aim is to gain the audience's confidence.
Euphemism	a more acceptable and usually more pleasant way of saying something that might be inappropriate or uncomfortable. "He went to his final reward" is a common euphemism for "he died." Euphemisms are also often used to obscure the reality of a situation. The military uses "collateral damage" to indicate civilian deaths in a military operation.
Euphony	a succession of harmonious sounds used in poetry or prose; the opposite of cacophony
Example	An individual instance taken to be representative of a general pattern. Arguing by example is considered reliable if examples are demonstrable true or factual as well as relevant.
Explication	The art of interpreting or discovering the meaning of a text. Explication usually involves close reading and special attention to figurative language.
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
Generalization	When a writer bases a claim upon an isolated example or asserts that a claim is certain rather than probable. Sweeping generalizations occur when a writer asserts that a claim applies to all instances instead of some.
Genre	a type of literary work, such as a novel or poem; there are also subgenres, such as science fiction or sonnet, within the larger genres

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 (Example: He was so hungry he could have eaten a horse.)
Image	A word or words, either figurative or literal, used to describe a sensory experience or an object perceived by the sense. An image is always a concrete representation.
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
Induction	the process that moves from a given series of specifics to a generalization
Inference	a conclusion one can draw from the presented details
Invective	a verbally abusive attack
Inversion	reversing the customary (subject first, then verb, then complement) order of elements in a sentence or phrase; it is used effectively in many cases, such as posing a question: "Are you going to the store?" Usually, the element that appears first is emphasized more than the subject.
Jargon	The special language of a profession or group. The term jargon usually has pejorative Associations with the implication that jargon is evasive, tedious, and unintelligible to outsiders. The writings of the lawyer and the literary critic are both susceptible to jargon.
Logical Appeal; Logos	When a writer tries to persuade the audience based on statistics, facts, and reasons. The process of reasoning
Lyrical	Songlike; characterized by emotions, subjectivity, and imagination.
Mode	the method or form of a literary work; the manner in which a work of literature is written
Mood	similar to tone, mood is the primary emotional attitude of a work (the feeling of the work; the atmosphere). Syntax is also a determiner of mood because sentence strength, length, and complexity affect pacing.
Narration	the telling of a story in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or drama; one of the four modes of discourse
Objectivity	an impersonal presentation of events and characters. It is a writer's attempt to remove himself or herself from any subjective, personal involvement in a story. Hard news journalism is frequently prized for its objectivity, although even fictional stories can be told without a writer rendering personal judgment.
Oversimplification	When a writer obscures or denies the complexity of the issues in an argument
Oxymoron	a figure of speech composed of contradictory words or phrases, such as "wise fool," bitter-sweet, "pretty ugly," "jumbo shrimp," "cold fire"
Pacing	the movement of a literary piece from one point or one section to another
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 by side and making them similar in form. Parallel structure may be as simple as listing two or three modifiers in a row to describe the same noun or verb; it may take the form of two or more of the same type of phrases (prepositional, participial, gerund, appositive) that modify the same noun or verb; it may also take the form of two or more subordinate clauses that modify the same noun or verb. Or, parallel structure may be a complex bend of single-word, phrase, and clause parallelism all in the same sentence. Example (from Churchill): “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields.”
Parody	a work that ridicules the style of another work by imitating and exaggerating its elements. It can be utterly mocking or gently humorous. It depends on allusion and exaggerates and distorts the original style and content.
Pathetic Appeal; Pathos	When a writer tries to persuade the audience by appealing to their emotions. The aspects of a literary work that elicit sorrow or pity from the audience. An appeal to emotion that can be used as a means to persuade. Over-emotionalism can be the result of an excess of pathos.
Pedantic	a term used to describe writing that borders on lecturing. It is scholarly and academic and often overly difficult and distant
Persuasion	a form of argumentation, one of the four modes of discourse; language intended to convince through appeals to reason or emotion.
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
Repetition	Word or phrase used two or more times in close proximity
Rhetorical modes	exposition, description, narration, argumentation
Rhetorical Question	one that does not expect an explicit answer. It is used to pose an idea to be considered by the speaker or audience.
Sarcasm	harsh, caustic personal remarks to or about someone; less subtle than irony
Satire	A work that reveals a critical attitude toward some element of human behavior by portraying it in an extreme way. Satire doesn't simply abuse (as in invective) or get personal (as in sarcasm). Satire targets groups or large concepts rather than individuals.
Speaker	the voice of a work; an author may speak as himself or herself or as a fictitious persona
Stereotype	a character who represents a trait that is usually attributed to a particular social or racial group and who lacks individuality; a conventional pattern, expression or idea.
Style	an author's characteristic manner of expression – his or her diction, syntax, imagery, structure, and content all contribute to style
Subjectivity	a personal presentation of events and characters, influenced by the author's feelings and opinions

Syllogism	A form of reasoning in which two statements are made and a conclusion is drawn from them. A syllogism is the format of a formal argument that consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. Example: Major Premise: All tragedies end unhappily. Minor Premise: Hamlet is a tragedy. Conclusion: Therefore, Hamlet ends unhappily.
Synecdoche	a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent a whole, such as using “boards” to mean a stage or “wheels” to mean a car – or “All hands on deck.”
Syntactic Fluency	Ability to create a variety of sentence structures, appropriately complex and/or simple and varied in length.
Syntactic Permutation	Sentence structures that are extraordinarily complex and involved. They are often difficult for a reader to follow.
Syntax	the grammatical structure of a sentence; the arrangement of words in a sentence. Syntax includes length of sentence, kinds of sentences (questions, exclamations, declarative sentences, rhetorical questions, simple, complex, or compound).
Theme	the central idea or “message” or a literary work
Thesis	the main idea of a piece of writing. It presents the author’s assertion or claim. The effectiveness of a presentation is often based on how well the writer presents, develops, and supports the thesis.
Tone	the characteristic emotion or attitude of an author toward the characters, subject, and audience (anger, sarcastic, loving, didactic, emotional, etc.)
Transition	a word or phrase that links one idea to the next and carries the reader from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph.
Understatement	the opposite of exaggeration. It is a technique for developing irony and/or humor where one writes or says less than intended.
Voice	refers to two different areas of writing. One refers to the relationship between a sentence’s subject and verb (active and passive voice). The second refers to the total “sound” of a writer’s style.