

## Terms – AP English Language and Composition

**allegory** – The device of using character and/or story elements symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning.

**alliteration** – The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words (as in “she sells sea shells.”)

**allusion** – A direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art

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

**analogy** – A similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them.

**antecedent** – The word, phrase, or clause referred to by a pronoun.

**antithesis** – the opposition or contrast of ideas; the direct opposite.

**aphorism** – A terse statement of known authorship which expresses a general truth or a moral principle.

**apostrophe** – A figure of speech that directly addresses an absent or imaginary person or a personified abstraction, such as liberty or love

**atmosphere** – The emotional nod created by the entirety of a literary work, established partly by the setting and partly by the author’s choice of objects that are described.

**caricature** – a verbal description, the purpose of which is to exaggerate or distort, for comic effect, a person’s distinctive physical features or other characteristics.

**colloquial/colloquialism** – The use of slang or informalities in speech or writing.

**conceit** – A fanciful expression, usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects.

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

**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.)

**diction** – Related to style, diction refers to the writer’s word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness.

**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.

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

**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** – A device used to produce figurative language. Many compare dissimilar things. Figures of speech include apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, oxymoron, paradox, personification, simile, synecdoche, and understatement.

**generic conventions** – This term describes traditions for each genre. These conventions help to define each genre; for example, they differentiate an essay and journalistic writing or an autobiography and political writing. On the AP language exam, try to distinguish the unique features of a writer's work from those dictated by convention.

**genre** – The major category into which a literary work fits.

**homily** – This term literally means “sermon,” but more informally, it can include any serious talk, speech, or lecture involving moral or spiritual advice.

**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. On a physical level, imagery uses terms related to the five senses: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory.

**invective** – an emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language

**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.

**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*).

**metaphor** – A figure of speech using implied comparison of seemingly unlike things or the substitution of one for the other, suggesting some similarity

**metonymy** – (mĕtŏn' ŭmē) 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

**mood** – The prevailing atmosphere or emotional aura of a work. Setting, tone, and events can affect the mood. Mood is similar to tone and atmosphere.

**narrative** – The telling of a story or an account of an event or series of events.

**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. – jumbo shrimp.

**paradox** – A statement that appears to be self-contradictory or opposed to common sense but upon closer inspection contains some degree of truth or validity. (Think of the beginning of Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....”)

**parallelism** – Also referred to as parallel construction or parallel structure, this term comes from Greek roots meaning “beside one another.” It refers to the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to give structural similarity.

**anaphora** – A sub-type of *parallelism*, when the exact repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of successive lines or sentences. MLK used anaphora in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech (1963).

**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).

**periodic sentence** – The opposite of *loose sentence*, a sentence that presents its central meaning in a main clause at the end. (Example: After a long, bumpy flight and multiple delays, I arrived at the San Diego airport.)

**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.

**point of view** – In literature, the perspective from which a story is told.

**prose** – That which is not poetry.

**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.

**rhetorical modes** – This flexible term describes the variety, the conventions, and the purposes of the major kinds of writing. The four most common rhetorical modes (often referred to as “modes of discourse”) are as follows: exposition, argument, description, and narrative.

**sarcasm** – From the Greek meaning “to tear flesh,” sarcasm involves bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something

**satire** – A work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule.

**semantics** – The branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of words, their historical and psychological development, their connotations, and their relation to one another.

**style** – The consideration of style has two purposes:

(1) An evaluation of the sum of the choices an author makes in blending diction, syntax, figurative language, and other literary devices. Some authors’ styles are so idiosyncratic that we can quickly recognize works by the same author.

We can analyze and describe an author’s personal style and make judgments on how appropriate it is to the author’s purpose. Styles can be called flowery, explicit, succinct, rambling, bombastic, commonplace, incisive, laconic, etc.

(2) Classification of authors to a group and comparison of an author to similar authors. By means of such classification and comparison, we can see how an author’s style reflects and helps to define a historical period, such as the Renaissance or the Victorian period, or a literary movement, such as the romantic, transcendental, or realist movement.

**syllogism** – From the Greek for “reckoning together,” a syllogism (or syllogistic reasoning or syllogistic logic) is a deductive system of formal logic that presents two premises (the first one called “major” and the second called “minor”) that inevitably lead to a sound conclusion. A frequently cited example proceeds as follows:

*major premise:* All men are mortal.

*minor premise:* Socrates is a man.

*conclusion:* Therefore, Socrates is a mortal.

A syllogism’s conclusion is valid only if each of the two premises is valid. Syllogisms may also present the specific idea first (“Socrates”) and the general second (“all men”).

**symbol/symbolism** – Generally, anything that represents itself and stands for something else

**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 join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax is similar to diction, but you can differentiate them by thinking of syntax as groups of words, while diction refers to the individual words. 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. Usually theme is unstated in fictional works, but in nonfiction, the theme may be directly state, especially in expository or argumentative writing.

**thesis** – In expository writing, 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.

**transition** – A word or phrase that links different ideas. Used especially, although not exclusively, in expository and argumentative writing, transitions effectively signal a shift from one idea to another. A few commonly used transitional words or phrases are *furthermore, consequently, nevertheless, for example, in addition, likewise, similarly, on the contrary*, etc. More sophisticated writers use more subtle means of transition.

**understatement** – the ironic minimalizing of fact, understatement presents something as less significant than it is. The effect can frequently be humorous and emphatic. Understatement is the opposite of *hyperbole*. Example: Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*: “Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse.”

**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. Wit usually uses terse language that makes a pointed statement. Historically, wit originally meant basic understanding. Its meaning evolved to include speed of understanding, and finally, it grew to mean quick perception including creative fancy and a quick tongue to articulate an answer that demanded the same quick perception.

Adapted from V. Stevenson, Patrick Henry High School, and Abrams’ Glossary of Literary Terms