

AP Literature & Composition - Glossary of Literary Terms

Allegory	A story in which people, things, or even events have another – often symbolic meaning
Alliteration	The repetition of the same consonant sound, especially at the beginning of words
Allusion	A reference to another event, person, place or work of literature. The allusion is usually implied rather than explicit and provides another layer of meaning to what is being said
Ambiguity	Use of language where the meaning is unclear or has two or more possible meanings or interpretations. It could be created by a weakness in the writer’s expression, but it is more likely it is a deliberate device used by the writer to create layers of meaning
Assonance	The repetition of similar vowel sounds
Author’s purpose	Reason for writing a work of literature; to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to express an opinion, to convey ideas, etc.
Colloquial	Ordinary, everyday speech and language
Connotation	An implication or association attached to a word or phrase. It is suggested or felt rather than being explicit
Diction	The choice of words a writer uses. Another word for “vocabulary”
Denouement	The final stage in the plot structure in which the problem is resolved
Empathy	A feeling on the part of the reader of sharing the particular experience being described by the character or writer
Figurative language	Language that is symbolic or metaphorical and not meant to be taken literally
Foreshadowing	Hints or clues that suggest events yet to occur
Genre	A particular type of writing – eg prose, poetry, drama
Imagery	The use of words to create a picture or “image” in the mind of the reader. Images can relate to any of the senses, not just sight
Irony	At its simplest level, it means saying one thing while meaning another. It occurs where a word or phrase has one surface meaning but another contradictory, possibly opposite meaning is implied. Irony is often confused with sarcasm. Sarcasm is spoken, relying on the tone of voice and is much more blunt than irony
Metaphor	A comparison of one thing to another to make the description more vivid. The metaphor actually states that one thing is another
Mood	Atmosphere or feeling conveyed by a literary work through the use of setting, characters, imagery, figurative language, etc.
Narrative	A piece of writing that tells a story
Omniscient Point of View	The vantage point of a story in which the narrator can know, see, and report whatever he or she chooses
Onomatopoeia	The use of words whose sounds copies the thing or process they describe
Paradox	A statement that seems to be self-contradictory but, in fact, is true
Parody	A composition that imitates the style of another composition, often for comic effect

Personification	The attribution of human feelings, emotions, or sensations to an inanimate object.
Plot	The sequence of events in a poem, play, novel or short story that make up the main storyline
Point of View	A story can be told by one of the characters or from another point of view. The point of view can change from one part of the story to another when events are viewed through the minds of two or more characters.
Protagonist	The main character or speaker in a poem, monologue, play or story
Pun	A play on words that have similar sounds but quite different meanings
Satire	The highlighting or exposing of human failings or foolishness through ridiculing them. Satire can range from being gentle and light to extremely biting and bitter in tone
Setting	The background of a story – the physical location of a play, story, or novel – involves time and place
Simile	The comparison of one thing to another in order to make the description more vivid
Soliloquy	A speech in which a character who is alone speaks his or her thoughts out loud
Stanza	The blocks of lines into which a poem is divided. [Sometimes these are, less precisely, referred to as verses, which can lead to confusion as poetry is sometimes called 'verse']
Stereotype	A conventional pattern, expression, character, or idea
Structure	The way a poem or play or other piece of writing has been put together
Style	The individual way in which the writer has used language to express his or her ideas
Subject	The central idea of a text represented in word(s).
Symbol	Like the use of images, symbols present things which represent something else. In very simple terms, a red rose can be used to symbolise love; distant thunder can symbolise approaching trouble. Symbols can be very subtle and multi-layered in their significance
Syntax	The way in which sentences are structured. Sentences can be structured in different ways to achieve different effects
Theme	The central idea or ideas that a writer explores through a text. A theme is at least one sentence and is usually a universal statement about human nature or mankind.
Tone	The manner in which the author expresses and controls his or her attitude