

# OTHER LITERARY ANALYSIS TERMS

*useful for the AP English Language Test*

**32. Allegory** – The device of using character and/or story elements symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning. In some allegories, for example, an author may intend the characters to personify an abstraction like hope or freedom. The allegorical meaning usually deals with moral truth or a generalization about human existence. Example: Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an allegory on the brutality and dishonesty of the Soviet communist system.

**33. Allusion** – A direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art. Allusions can be historical, literary, religious, topical, or mythical. There are many more possibilities, and a work may simultaneously use multiple layers of allusion. Example: *He was destined to fail; he always flew too close to the sun.* (An allusion to the Greek myth *Icarus*.)

**34. Analogy** – A similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them. An analogy can explain something unfamiliar by associating it with or pointing out its similarity to something more familiar. Analogies can also make writing more vivid, imaginative, or intellectually engaging. Example: *Getting politicians to agree is like herding cats.* (Beware the logical fallacy of the *false* or *weak* analogy, in which the two things being compared are so dissimilar the comparison makes little sense or becomes absurd. Example: *Voting against affirmative action is like voting for slavery.*)

**35. Antecedent** – The word, phrase, or clause referred to by a pronoun. The AP language exam occasionally asks for the antecedent of a given pronoun in a long, complex sentence or in a group of sentences. A question from the 2001 AP test as an example follows:

“But **it** is the grandeur of all truth which can occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds; **it** exists eternally, by way of germ of latent principle, in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never to be planted.”

The antecedent of “it” (bolded) is...? [answer: “all truth”]

**36. Aphorism** – A terse statement of known authorship which expresses a general truth or a moral principle. (If the authorship is unknown, the statement is generally considered to be a folk *proverb*.) An aphorism can be a memorable summation of the author's point. “*A lie told often enough becomes the truth.*” ~ Vladimir Lenin

**37. 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. Even such elements as a description of the weather can contribute to the atmosphere. Frequently atmosphere foreshadows events. Perhaps it can create a mood.

**38. Caricature** – A verbal description, the purpose of which is to exaggerate or distort, for comic effect or ridicule, a person's distinctive physical features or other characteristics.

**39. Clause** – A grammatical unit that contains both a subject and a verb. An independent, or main, clause expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. A dependent, or subordinate clause, cannot stand alone as a sentence and must be accompanied by an independent clause. The point that you want to consider is the question of what or why the author subordinates one element, and you should also become aware of making effective use of subordination in your own writing.

**40. Colloquial/colloquialism** – The use of slang or informalities in speech or writing. Not generally acceptable for formal writing, colloquialisms give a work a conversational, familiar tone. Colloquial expressions in writing include local or regional dialects.

**41. Conceit** – A fanciful expression, usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects, usually used in poetry. A conceit displays intellectual cleverness as a result of the unusual comparison being made, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18: “*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?/Thou art more lovely and more temperate.*”

**42. Diction** — Related to style, diction refers to the writer’s word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness. For the AP exam, you should be able to describe an author’s diction (for example, formal or informal, ornate or plain) and understand the ways in which diction can complement the author’s purpose. Diction, combined with syntax, figurative language, literary devices, etc., creates an author’s style.

- **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)
- **Connotation** — The non-literal, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning. Connotations may involve ideas, emotions, or attitudes (the connotation of a knife might be fear, violence, anger, foreboding, etc.)

**43. Ethos** — In writing and speaking, a persuasive appeal to the audience based on the credibility, good character, etc., of the speaker/writer.

**44. Euphemism** — From the Greek for “good speech,” euphemisms are a more agreeable or less offensive substitute for a generally unpleasant word or concept. The euphemism may be used to adhere to standards of social or political correctness or to add humor or ironic understatement. Saying “earthly remains” rather than “corpse” is an example of euphemism.

**45. Extended metaphor** — A metaphor developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout a work.

**46. 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 for that genre.

**47. Homily** — This term literally means “sermon,” but more informally, it can include any serious talk, speech, or lecture involving moral or spiritual advice. (One could say, “The President delivered a homily to the American people last night.”)

**48. 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. On a broader and deeper level, however, one image can represent more than one thing. For example, a rose may present visual imagery while also representing the color in a woman’s cheeks and/or symbolizing some degree of perfection. An author may use complex imagery while simultaneously employing other figures of speech, especially metaphor and simile. In addition, this term can apply to the total of all the images in a work. On the AP language exam, pay attention to how an author creates imagery and to the effect of this imagery.

**49. Inference/infer** — To draw a reasonable conclusion from the information presented. When a multiple choice question asks for an inference to be drawn from a passage, the most direct, most reasonable inference is the safest answer choice. If an inference is implausible, it’s unlikely to be the correct answer.

**50. Invective** — An emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language. (For example, in *Henry IV*, Part I, Prince Hal calls the large character of Falstaff “this sanguine coward, this bedpresser, this horseback breaker, this huge hill of flesh.”)

**51. Logos** — In writing and speaking, a persuasive appeal to the audience based on logic and reason.

**52. Loose sentence/non-periodic sentence** — A type of sentence in which the main idea (independent clause) comes first, followed by dependent grammatical units such as phrases and clauses. If a period were placed at the end of the independent clause, the clause would be a complete sentence. A work containing many loose sentences often seems informal, relaxed, or conversational. Generally, loose sentences create loose style. The opposite of a loose sentence is the periodic sentence.

Example: I arrived at the San Diego airport after a long, bumpy ride and multiple delays.  
Could stop at: I arrived at the San Diego airport

**53. 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.

**54. Narrative** — The telling of a story or an account of an event or series of events. In political speech, also used to suggest the “story-line” a politician wants people to hear: “The President tried to push a *narrative* that he was raising taxes to help people.”

**55. Parody** – A work that closely imitates the style or content of another with the specific aim of comic effect and/or ridicule. It exploits peculiarities of an author’s expression (propensity to use too many parentheses, certain favorite words, etc.). Well-written parody offers enlightenment about the original, but poorly written parody offers only ineffectual imitation. Usually an audience must grasp literary allusion and understand the work being parodied in order to fully appreciate the nuances of the newer work. Occasionally, however, parodies take on a life of their own and don’t require knowledge of the original.

**56. Pathos** — In writing and speaking, a persuasive appeal to the audience based on emotion.

**57. 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).

**58. Prose** – One of the major divisions of genre, prose refers to fiction and nonfiction, including all its forms. In prose the printer determines the length of the line; in poetry, the poet determines the length of the line.

**59. Point of view** – In literature, the perspective from which a story is told. There are two general divisions of point of view, and many subdivisions within those.

1) *first person narrator* tells the story with the first person pronoun, “I,” and is a character in the story. This narrator can be the protagonist, a secondary character, or an observing character.

2) *third person narrator* relates the events with the third person pronouns, “he,” “she,” and “it.” There are two main subdivisions to be aware of:

a) *third person omniscient*, in which the narrator, with godlike knowledge, presents the thoughts and actions of any or all characters.

b) *third person limited omniscient*, in which the narrator presents the feelings and thoughts of only one character, presenting only the actions of all the remaining characters.

In addition, be aware that the term point of view carries an additional meaning. When you are asked to analyze the author’s point of view, the appropriate point for you to address is the author’s attitude.

**60. Repetition** – The duplication, either exact or approximate, of any element of language, such as a sound, word, phrase, clause, sentence, or grammatical pattern.

**61. Rhetoric** – From the Greek for “orator,” this term describes the principles governing the art of writing effectively, eloquently, and persuasively.

**62. 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:

1) The purpose of *exposition* (or expository writing) is to explain and analyze information by presenting an idea, relevant evidence, and appropriate discussion. The AP language exam essay questions are frequently expository topics.

2) The purpose of *argumentation* is to prove the validity of an idea, or point of view, by presenting sound reasoning, discussion, and argument that thoroughly convince the reader. Persuasive writing is a type of argumentation having an additional aim of urging some form of action.

3) The purpose of *description* is to recreate, invent, or visually present a person, place, event or action so that the reader can picture that being described. Sometimes an author engages all five senses in description; good descriptive writing can be sensuous and picturesque. Descriptive writing may be straightforward and objective or highly emotional and subjective.

4) The purpose of *narration* is to tell a story or narrate an event or series of events. This writing mode frequently uses the tools of descriptive writing.

**63. Sarcasm** – From the Greek meaning “to tear flesh,” sarcasm involves bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something. It may use irony as a device, but not all ironic statements are sarcastic (that is, intended to ridicule). When well done, sarcasm can be witty and insightful; when poorly done, it is simply cruel.

**64. Satire** – A work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule. Regardless of whether or not the work aims to reform human behavior, satire is best seen as a style of writing rather than a purpose for writing. It can be recognized by the many devices used effectively by the satirist: irony, wit, parody, caricature, hyperbole, understatement, and sarcasm. The effects of satire are varied, depending on the writer’s goal, but good satire, often humorous, is thought provoking and insightful about the human condition.

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

**66. 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 movements.

**67. Subject complement** – The word (with any accompanying phrases) or clause that follows a linking verb and complements, or completes, the subject of the sentence by either (1) renaming it (the predicate nominative) or (2) describing it (the predicate adjective). These are defined below:

- 1) *the predicate nominative* – a noun, group of nouns, or noun clause that renames the subject. It, like the predicate adjective, follows a linking verb and is located in the predicate of the sentence.  
*Example:* Julia Roberts is a movie star.  
*movie star* = predicate nominative, as it renames the subject, Julia Roberts
- 2) *the predicate adjective* -- an adjective, a group of adjectives, or adjective clause that follows a linking verb. It is in the predicate of the sentence, and modifies, or describes, the subject.  
*Example:* Warren remained optimistic.  
*optimistic* = predicate adjective, as it modifies the subject, Warren.

**68. Subordinate clause** – Like all clauses, this word group contains both a subject and a verb (plus any accompanying phrases or modifiers), but unlike the independent clause, the subordinate clause cannot stand alone; it does not express a complete thought. Also called a dependent clause, the subordinate clause depends on a main clause (or independent clause) to complete its meaning. Easily recognized key words and phrases usually begin these clauses. For example: *although, because, unless, if, even though, since, as soon as, while, who, when, where, how and that.*

*Example:* Yellowstone is a national park in the West *that is known for its geysers.*  
italicized phrase = subordinate clause

**69. 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.

Or:

A = B  
B = C  
Therefore A = C

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”).

**70. Symbol/symbolism** – Generally, anything that represents itself and stands for something else. Usually a symbol is something concrete -- such as an object, action, character, or scene – that represents something more abstract. However, symbols and symbolism can be much more complex. One system classifies symbols into three categories:

- 1) *natural symbols* are objects and occurrences from nature to symbolize ideas commonly associated with them (dawn symbolizing hope or a new beginning, a rose symbolizing love, a tree symbolizing knowledge).
- 2) *conventional symbols* are those that have been invested with meaning by a group (religious symbols such as a cross or Star of David; national symbols, such as a flag or an eagle; or group symbols, such as a skull and crossbones for pirates or the scale of justice for lawyers).
- 3) *literary symbols* are sometimes also conventional in the sense that they are found in a variety of works and are more generally recognized. However, a work's symbols may be more complicated.

On the AP exam, try to determine what abstraction an object is a symbol for and to what extent it is successful in representing that abstraction.

**71. 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.

**72. 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 stated, especially in expository or argumentative writing.

**73. 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.

**74. 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.

**75. 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.

**76. 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."

**77. 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.

**78. Zeugma** [ZOOG-ma]: Artfully using a single verb to refer to two different objects in an ungrammatical but striking way, or artfully using an adjective to refer to two separate nouns, even though the adjective would logically only be appropriate for one of the two. For instance, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Fluellen cries, "Kill the boys and the luggage." (The verb kill normally wouldn't be applied to luggage, so it counts as zeugma.):

"If we don't hang together, we shall hang separately!" (Ben Franklin).

"She exhausted both her audience and her repertoire." (anonymous)

"She looked at the object with suspicion and a magnifying glass." (Charles Dickens)

# TONE VOCABULARY

Like the tone of a speaker's voice, the tone of a work of literature expresses the writer's feelings. To determine the tone of a passage, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1) What is the subject of the passage? Who is its intended audience?
- 2) What are the most important words in the passage? What connotations do these words have?
- 3) What feelings are generated by the images of the passage?
- 4) Are there any hints that the speaker or narrator does not really mean everything he or she says? If any jokes are made, are they lighthearted or bitter?
- 5) If the narrator were speaking aloud, what would the tone of his or her voice be?

## Positive Tone/Attitude Words

Amiable	Consoling	Friendly	Playful
Amused	Content	Happy	Pleasant
Appreciative	Dreamy	Hopeful	Proud
Authoritative	Ecstatic	Impassioned	Relaxed
Benevolent	Elated	Jovial	Reverent
Brave	Elevated	Joyful	Romantic
Calm	Encouraging	Jubilant	Soothing
Cheerful	Energetic	Lighthearted	Surprised
Cheery	Enthusiastic	Loving	Sweet
Compassionate	Excited	Optimistic	Sympathetic
Complimentary	Exuberant	Passionate	Vibrant
Confident	Fanciful	Peaceful	Whimsical

## Negative Tone/Attitude Words

Accusing	Choleric	Furious	Quarrelsome
Aggravated	Coarse	Harsh	Shameful
Agitated	Cold	Haughty	Smooth
Angry	Condemnatory	Hateful	Snooty
Apathetic	Condescending	Hurtful	Superficial
Arrogant	Contradictory	Indignant	Surly
Artificial	Critical	Inflammatory	Testy
Audacious	Desperate	Insulting	Threatening
Belligerent	Disappointed	Irritated	Tired
Bitter	Disgruntled	Manipulative	Uninterested
Boring	Disgusted	Obnoxious	Wrathful
Brash	Disinterested	Outraged	
Childish	Facetious	Passive	

## Humor-Irony-Sarcasm Tone/Attitude Words

Amused	Droll	Mock-heroic	Sardonic
Bantering	Facetious	Mocking	Satiric
Bitter	Flippant	Mock-serious	Scornful
Caustic	Giddy	Patronizing	Sharp
Comical	Humorous	Pompous	Silly
Condescending	Insolent	Quizzical	Taunting
Contemptuous	Ironic	Ribald	Teasing
Critical	Irreverent	Ridiculing	Whimsical
Cynical	Joking	Sad	Wry
Disdainful	Malicious	Sarcastic	

## Sorrow-Fear-Worry Tone/Attitude Words

Aggravated	Embarrassed	Morose	Resigned
Agitated	Fearful	Mournful	Sad
Anxious	Foreboding	Nervous	Serious
Apologetic	Gloomy	Numb	Sober
Apprehensive	Grave	Ominous	Solemn
Concerned	Hollow	Paranoid	Somber
Confused	Hopeless	Pessimistic	Staid
Dejected	Horrific	Pitiful	Sulky
Depressed	Horror	Poignant	
Despairing	Melancholy	Regretful	
Disturbed	Miserable	Remorseful	

## Miscellaneous Tone/Attitude Words

Admonitory	Dramatic	Instructive	Questioning
Allusive	Earnest	Judgmental	Reflective
Apathetic	Expectant	Learned	Reminiscent
Authoritative	Factual	Loud	Resigned
Baffled	Fervent	Lyrical	Restrained
Callous	Formal	Matter-of-fact	Seductive
Candid	Forthright	Meditative	Sentimental
Ceremonial	Frivolous	Nostalgic	Serious
Clinical	Haughty	Objective	Shocking
Consoling	Histrionic	Obsequious	Sincere
Contemplative	Humble	Patriotic	Unemotional
Conventional	Incredulous	Persuasive	Urgent
Detached	Informative	Pleading	Vexed
Didactic	Inquisitive	Pretentious	Wistful
Disbelieving	Insipid	Provocative	Zealous