**AP English Language & Composition**

**Literary Terms**

**Rhetorical Devices and Strategies**

Abstract—Not related to the concrete properties of an object; pertaining to ideas, concepts, or qualities, as opposed to physical attributes.

Alliteration—The repetition of initial consonant sounds or any vowel sounds within a formal grouping, such as a poetic line or stanza, or in close proximity in prose.

Allusion—A figure of speech which makes brief, even casual reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object to create a resonance in the reader or to apply a symbolic meaning to the character or object of which the allusion consists. For example, in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the surname of the protagonist, George Milton, is an allusion to John Milton, author of Paradise Lost, since by the end of the novel, George has lost the dream of having a little ranch of his own to share with his friend Lennie.

Ambiguity—Use of language in which multiple meanings are possible. Ambiguity can be unintentional through insufficient focus on the part of the writer; in good writing, ambiguity is frequently intentional in the form of multiple connotative meanings, or situations in which either the connotative or the denotative meaning can be valid in a reading.

Anachronism—Use of historically inaccurate details in a text; for example, depicting a 19th-century character using a computer. Some authors employ anachronisms for humorous effect, and some genres, such as science fiction or fantasy, make extensive use of anachronism.

Anadiplosis—Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the next clause. For example, "The crime was common, common be the pain." (Alexander Pope)

Analogy—Comparison of two things that are alike in some respects. Metaphors and similes are both types of analogy.

Antagonist—Character or force in a literary work that opposes the main character, or protagonist.

Anaphora—regular repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases or clauses. For example, "We shall fight in the trenches. We shall fight on the oceans. We shall fight in the sky."

Anastrophe—The reversal of the natural order of words in a sentence or line of poetry. Shakespeare was a whiz with anastrophe. *The poisoned apple she ate to her gave cramps of a serious nature.* Also think of how the nasty little Yoda spoke. Get it? Nasty…anastrophe? Welcome you are. ☺

Antihero—Protagonist of a literary work who does not embody the traditional qualities of a hero (e.g., honor, bravery, kindness, intelligence).

Aphorism—A short, concise statement designed to make a point or illustrate a commonly held belief. The writings of Benjamin Franklin contain many aphorisms, such as "Early to bed and early to rise/Make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Apostrophe—A figure of speech in which a person, thing, or abstract quality is addressed as if present; for example, the invocation to the muses usually found in epic poetry.

Anecdote—A brief story or tale told by a character in a piece of literature.

Appositive—Noun phrase that modifies the noun next to it.

Assonance—The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds, usually in successive or proximate words.

Asyndeton—The practice of omitting conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses. In a list, it gives a more extemporaneous effect and suggests the list may be incomplete. For example, "He was brave, fearless, afraid of nothing."

Bildungsroman—A novel or story whose theme is the moral or psychological growth of the main character.

Catharsis—Purification or cleansing of the spirit through the emotions of pity and terror as a witness to a tragedy.

Chiasmus—Figure of speech by which the order of the terms in the first of parallel clauses is reversed in the second. “Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the Church?”*-- T. S. Eliot*,

Colloquialism—Ordinary language; the vernacular. For example, depending on where in the United States you live, a sandwich is called a sub, a grinder, or a hero.

Connotation—What is implied by a word. For example, the words sweet, gay, and awesome have connotations that are quite different from their actual definitions.

Consonance—The repetition of two or more consonants with a change in the intervening vowels, such as pitter-patter, splish-splash, and click-clack.

Contradiction—A direct opposition between things compared; inconsistency.

Denotation—The dictionary definition of a word; the direct and specific meaning.

Dialect—A regional speech pattern; the way people talk in different parts of the country or world. It is a form of regionalism in writing and is often referred to as colloquial language or a colloquialism. The effect lends authenticity to a piece of writing that relies on culture as an important element of the purpose.

Diction—An author's choice of words to convey a tone or effect.

Didactic—Intended for teaching or to teach a moral lesson.

Elegy—Poem or prose lamenting the death of a particular person. Perhaps the most famous elegy is Thomas Grey's poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."

Ellipsis—Three dots (no more!) that indicate a word or words have been left out of a quotation. They can also be used to create suspense.

Epanalepsis—Like chiasmus, this figure of speech repeats the opening word or phrase at the end of the sentence to emphasize a statement or idea.

Epigraph—Quote set at the beginning of a literary work or at its divisions to set the tone or suggest a theme.

Epiphany—A sudden or intuitive insight or perception into the reality or essential meaning of something usually brought on by a simple or common occurrence or experience.

Epistolary—A piece of literature contained in or carried on by letters.

Epistrophe—A minor device, it is the ending of a series of lines, phrases, clauses, or sentences with the same word or words.

Epitaph—A piece of writing in praise of a deceased person.

Euphemism—Substitution of a milder or less direct expression for one that is harsh or blunt. For example, using "passed away" for "dead."

Expletive—A single word or short phrase intended to emphasize surrounding words. Commonly, expletives are set off by commas. Examples: in fact, of course, after all, certainly.

Eulogy—A speech or writing in praise of a person or thing; an oration in honor of a deceased person.

Foil—A person or thing that makes another seem better by contrast.

Foreshadow—To hint at or present things to come in a story or play.

Genre—Term used to describe literary forms, such as tragedy, comedy, novel, or essay.

Hyperbole—An overstatement characterized by exaggerated language.

Imagery—Sensory details in a work; the use of figurative language to evoke a feeling, call to mind an idea, or describe an object. Imagery involves any or all of the five senses.

Invective—The use of angry and insulting language in satirical writing.

Irony—There are three types of irony: verbal, dramatic, and situational. Verbal irony is a contrast between what is said and what is meant. Dramatic irony is a contrast between what the audience knows and what the character knows. Think of scary movies. Situational irony is a contrast between what happens and what was expected to happen. It is that twist at the end of a story.

Isocolon—Parallel structure in which the parallel elements are similar not only in grammatical structure, but also in length. For example, "An envious heart makes a treacherous ear".

Juxtaposition—Placing of two items side by side to create a certain effect, reveal an attitude, or accomplish some other purpose.

Litotes—Form of understatement in which the negative of the contrary is used to achieve emphasis and intensity.

Malapropism—Word play in which one word is mistakenly substituted for another that sounds familiar.

Metaphor—A comparison of an unknown to a known that seeks to clarify the understanding of the unknown.

Metonymy—The name of one thing is substituted for another that is very closely related. *The White House made an announcement to the public.*

Mood—The feeling or ambience resulting from the tone of a piece as well as the writer/narrator's attitude and point of view. The effect is created through descriptions of feelings or objects that establish a particular feeling such as gloom, fear, or hope.

Motif—Recurrent device, formula, or situation that often serves as a signal for the appearance of a character or event.

Onomatopoeia—A word capturing or approximating the sound of what it describes, such as buzz or hiss.

Oxymoron—A figure of speech that combines two apparently contradictory elements, as in "jumbo shrimp" or "deafening silence."

Paradox—A statement that seems contradictory, but is actually true.

Parallelism—Recurrent syntactical similarity where several parts of a sentence or several sentences are expressed alike to show that the ideas in the parts or sentences equal in importance. It also adds balance, rhythm, and clarity to the sentence. For example, "I have always searched for, but never found the perfect painting for that wall."

Parody—A satirical imitation of a work of art for purpose of ridiculing its style or subject.

Paraprosdokians—A figure of speech in which the latter part of the sentence, phrase, or larger discourse is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes the reader or listener to re-frame or re-interpret the first part. It is usually used for humorous (sarcastic) or dramatic effect. *That costs an arm and two legs.*

Parentheticals—Phrases, sentences, and words inside parentheses. Pay attention to this information in rhetorical analysis as it serves a purpose. Ask, “Why is that information included?” and “Is there some pattern to the use of parentheticals?”

Personification—Treating an abstraction or nonhuman object as if it were a person by giving it human qualities.

Perspective—A character's view of the situation or events in the story.

Point of view—The view the reader gets of the action and characters in a story.

Polysyndeton—The use of consecutive coordinating conjunctions even when not needed. The effect is to render the reader somewhat breathless.

Propaganda—Information or rumor deliberately spread to help or harm a person, group, or institution.

Prose—The ordinary of form of written language without metrical structure, as distinguished from poetry or verse.

Protagonist—The chief character in a work of literature.

Pun—A play on words that calls humorous attention to a particular point in an argument.

Realism—The literary practice of attempting to describe life and nature without idealization and with attention to detail.

Repetition—A form of rhetorical emphasis that calls attention to a particular word, phrase, or image for a specific purpose.

Rhetorical device—Particular use of word patterns and styles used to clarify, make associations, and focus the writing in a piece of literature. Some rhetorical devices are expletives, parallelism, metaphor, analogy, assonance, etc.

Rhetorical Question—A question whose answer is assumed. It is used to force the reader to respond in a predetermined manner or to provoke thought.

Rhetorical Shift—This occurs when the author significantly alters his or her diction, syntax, or both.

Sarcasm—A sharp caustic remark. A form of verbal irony in which apparent praise is actually bitterly or harshly critical. For example, a coach saying to a player who misses the ball, "Nice catch."

Satire—A literary style used to make fun of or ridicule an idea or human vice or weakness.

Simile—A known is compared to an unknown using the words like or as.

Synecdoche—A part is used for the whole. *Lend me your ear.*

Syntax—The way words are put together to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. It is sentence structure and how it influences the way a reader perceives a piece of writing.

Theme—The basic message or meaning conveyed through elements of character and conflict; the main idea or meaning.

Thesis—Focus statement of an essay; premise statement upon which the point of view or discussion in the essay is based.

Tone—The attitude a literary work takes towards its subject and theme. It reflects the narrator's attitude.

Tricolon—A sentence with three equally distinct and equally long parts. Despite the misleading name, these parts are separated by commas-not colons (insert eye roll).

Verisimilitude—Authenticity of a work.

Zeugma—Grammatically correct linkage of one subject with two or more verbs or a verb with two or more direct objects. The linking shows a relationship between ideas more clearly. For example:

Bob exceeded at sports; Jim at academics; Mark at eating. Uhmm…isn’t that a tricolon? Kind of, but zeugma is a more specific way to describe this compound sentence.

**Argumentation Devices**

Claim— It is a statement of truth, at least to the person making the argument.

Premise—Another word for claim.

Anthithesis—A claim that is made in opposition to another claim.

Appeals—Rhetorical arguments in which the speaker: either claims to be an expert or relies on information provided by experts (appeal to authority), attempts to affect the listener's personal feelings (appeal to emotion), or attempts to persuade the listener through use of deductive reasoning (appeal to logic).

* Logos—Appeal to logic.
* Ethos—Ethical appeal that serves to establish credibility of the speaker/writer.
* Pathos—Appeal to emotions.

Logical Reasoning

* Deductive Reasoning—A form of logical argumentation that relies on claims or premises. Watch out for fallacies in the claims.
* Syllogism—A form of logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more premises that are asserted or assumed to be true. In its most basic form, it is a three-part argument in which two premises lead to a truth.
* Inductive Reasoning—A form of logical reasoning that relies on the use of examples as evidence. This is used in science as example after example are used to reach a conclusion. This fails and becomes a cause and effect argument if the examples used are not proven or flimsy at best.

Fallacy—Failure of logical reasoning. Fallacies are used to make an argument reasonable, but falsely so. In literary analysis, it is critical for the reader or listener to recognize fallacies.

* Ad Hominem—An attack on the person instead of the issues at hand. This is a very common fallacy. Don’t fall for it.
* Argument from Ignorance—An argument stating that something is true because it has never been proven false. *No one has proven that Bigfoot does not exist, therefore he does.*
* Bandwagon: Also called *vox populi*, this is the “everyone is doing it” fallacy. Politicians use this all the time and it is insulting. Don’t use it with your parents!
* Begging the Question—This argument occurs when the speaker states a claim that has a vague element that needs to be defined or specified. A bandwagon argument begs to specify who “everybody” is. Don’t do this! Parents fact-check.
* Cause and Effect—Another FALLACY, this is also known by the name *post hoc ergo propter hoc (*Latin for “after this, therefore because of this”)*.* Such an argument fails when there is a false cause. Think of global warming. Is this being used to mislead as to the cause of global warming? Have greenhouse gases been proven as the cause of global warming? If so, what kind of reasoning was used? Deductive or inductive? If they have not been proven as the cause, this is a cause and effect argument that fails.
* False Analogy—An argument using an inappropriate metaphor that renders the argument invalid.
* False Dilemma—This is also known as the either/or fallacy. The suggestion is made that the problem or debate only has two solutions.
* Non Sequitur—This literally means “it does not follow.” It is an argument by misdirection and is logically irrelevant.
* Poisoning the Well—A person or character is introduced with language that suggests that he or she is not at all reliable before the listener/reader knows anything else about him.
* Red Herring—An argument that distracts the reader by raising issues that are irrelevant to the case. It is this lack of relevance that makes it a fallacy or failure of logical reasoning.
* Slippery Slope—This fallacy argues that one thing inevitably leads to another. Politicians use this form of exaggeration. Example: *We cannot allow insurgents into the border towns or they will control the entire country by next winter.* There is always a “begging the question” in there.
* Straw Man—This occurs when a person is engaging in an argument and defines his opponent’s argument when the opponent is not present. This sets up the opponent’s argument for an easy attack.

**Grammar**

* Gerund—Verbs that end with –ing that serve as a noun.
* Infinitive—The word “to” plus a verb that usually functions as a noun. *To be or not to be, that is the question.*
* Participle—Verbs that function as adjectives to modify nouns or pronouns. These verbals usually end with –ing or –ed.
* Phrase—A grouping of words that define or clarify, but cannot stand alone as a sentence because there is no verb.
* Predicate—A formal term for the verb that conveys the meaning or carries the action of the sentence.
* Predicate Adjective—An adjective that follows a linking verb and modifies the subject.
* Predicate Nominative—A noun or pronoun that uses a linking verb to rename the subject.
* Subordinate Conjunction—A conjunction that makes an independent clause a dependent clause. Since, when, if, which, and although are all common examples of subordinate conjunctions, but there are many, many more.

**Sentence Types**

* Complex Sentence—A sentence structure that is a combination of a dependent clause and an independent clause.
* Compound Sentence—Two independent clauses joined by a conjunction or a semi-colon.
* Compound-Complex Sentence—A combination of a compound and complex sentence.
* Declarative Sentence—A basic statement or assertion.
* Dependent Clause—This contains a noun and a verb, but is set up with a subordinate conjunction.
* Exclamatory Sentence—A sentence that conveys excitement or force.
* Interrogative Sentence—You don’t know that?
* Loose Sentence—A sentence that does not end with the completion of its main clause, but continues with one or more subordinate clauses or other modifiers.
* Periodic Sentence—A sentence with several dependent clauses that precede the independent clause. Think of it this way, the independent clause appears right before the period of the sentence. For example: Just as he bent to tie his shoe, a car hit him.
* Simple Sentence— An independent clause; it has a subject and a verb.