

IN-CLASS Version



English IB & 12

GUIDE TO EXAMINABLE TERMS AND DEVICES IN LITERATURE

1. ACTIVE VOICE: In the active voice, the subject and verb relationship is straightforward: the subject is a be-er or a do-er and the verb moves the sentence along. Example: The executive committee approved the new policy. (see: **PASSIVE VOICE**)

2. PASSIVE VOICE: In the **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence is neither a do-er or a be-er, but is acted upon by some other agent or by something unnamed. Example: I think I was bitten by something. Example: Shakespeare is known as the greatest British author.

3. ALLEGORY: A story in which character, actions or settings represent abstract ideas. An allegory is a story with two meanings – a literal one and a symbolic one. Example: William Golding's Lord of the Flies, Dante's Divine Comedy, or George Orwell's Animal Farm.

4. ALLUSION: a reference to a person, place or event outside of the work in which it appears. Example: “Bellona’s Bridegroom” is a reference to Roman mythology in Macbeth. Bellona was a Roman goddess of war.

5. ALLITERATION: repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Example: *I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas* (“The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, T.S. Eliot)

CONSONANCE: the repetition of similar consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of a group of words. Example: “And all the air a solemn stillness holds.”

6. ASSONANCE: the sequential repetition of vowel sounds, particularly in stressed syllables. Example: “Full fathom five thy father lies”

7. ALLUSION: a reference to a person, place or event outside of the work in which it appears. Example: “Bellona’s Bridegroom” is a reference to Roman mythology in Macbeth. Bellona was a Roman goddess of war.

8. ANALOGY: A special form of comparison that is used for a specific purpose: to explain something abstract or difficult to understand by showing its similarity to something concrete or easy to understand. Example: explaining the working of a computer in order to facilitate the understanding of how a human brain functions

9. ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE: unreliable evidence based on personal observations and experiences that have not been proven

10. ANTAGONIST: a person or force against the protagonist. Example: In the novel, Fahrenheit 451, the antagonist is the government.

11. PROTAGONIST: the central or main character of a literary work. Example: Romeo in Romeo and Juliet

12. ANTITHESIS: A set of contrasting words, ideas, phrases or sentences expressed in a balanced grammatical structure (Parallelism) Example: “To err is human, to forgive divine.” OR “Success makes men proud; failure makes them wise.”

13. APOSTROPHE: The direct addressing of a dead or absent person, an abstract quality, or something non-human. Example: Burns “To A Mouse”, Lord Byron’s “Apostrophe to the Ocean”, John Donne’s lines “Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/Mighty and dreadful”, Canada’s National Anthem “O Canada”

14. ARCHAIC LANGUAGE: words and phrases that were used regularly in a language, but are now less common are *archaic*. Example: ‘thou’

15. ASIDE: in drama, lines spoken by a character directed only to the audience.

Example:

Macbeth. “The Prince of Cumberland!/That is a step/On which I must fall down, or else o'er-leap,/For in my way it lies.” (I, iv, 47-49)

16. ATMOSPHERE/MOOD: the emotional climate established usually at the start of a literary work

17. AUDIENCE: a group of listeners, readers or spectators

18. AUTOBIOGRAPHY: a personal account of one's own life. Example: Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt

19. BIOGRAPHY: a detailed account of a person's life written by another person. Example: Faulkner: A Biography, written by his friend Joseph Blotner

20. BALLAD: a narrative poem, usually simple and meant to be sung Example: Coleridge's “The Ancient Mariner”

21. BIAS: a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgement

22. BLANK VERSE: verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. It approximates the natural rhythms of English speech. Example: Shakespearean plays are all written in blank verse.

23. CACOPHONY/DISSONANCE: is harsh, discordant sounds frequently used for poetic effect (opposite of euphony) Example: the following lines from Browning's "Meeting at Night" combines the image of flames and rhythms and explosive consonants to produce a cacophonous effect: *A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch/And blue spurt of a lighted match*

24. EUPHONY: words combined to produce soothing, flowing, pleasant sounds. (Opposite of cacophony). Example: O star (the fairest one in sight)

26. CHARACTER TYPES:

Round: a character whose various traits contribute to a 'complexity' of character. Too rich to be reduced to a simple formula, these characters are often more difficult to 'figure out'.

Flat: a character with only one or two character traits (usually a minor character in the piece of literature) Example: Martha in Kurt Vonnegut's story 'Harrison Bergeron'. She is "dim-witted" in all she does in the story.

Static: a character who does not change during the events of the plot

Dynamic/developing: a character who, by the end of the story, has changed (look for motivation, epiphany)

Stock/stereotype: an easily recognizable character or one who evokes a fixed mental picture in the reader. Example: the wicked witch – instead of taking a fresh, open-minded approach to this character, the reader has a fixed image of a witch -- warts, belligerent attitude etc.

Foil: A character used to 'show up' or highlight some feature of the main character. The **character foil** is the exact opposite of the main character and therefore serves to magnify certain characteristics of the main character. Example: In Hamlet, Laertes is a foil to Hamlet. Laertes' rash, impetuous actions serve to emphasize Hamlet's thoughtful procrastinations.

27. CHARACTERIZATION: The method a writer uses to reveal the personality of a character in a literary work. Methods of revealing a character may include (1) what the character says about himself or herself; (2) what others reveal about the character; and (3) the character's own actions.

28. CARICATURE: The use of exaggeration or distortion to make a figure appear comic or ridiculous Example: emphasizing the blunt, square chin of Jay Leno

29. CAUSE AND EFFECT: an essay pattern of development. The **cause/effect** essay explains why or how some event happened, and what resulted from the event. This essay is a study of the relationship between two or more events or experiences.

30. CHORUS: In Greek drama the **chorus** is a group of actors who comment on the action in choral odes separating the play's episodes. The chorus usually expresses traditional attitudes, or the probable views of the audience. Chorus can also be used as a synonym for **refrain**, meaning the repeated lines or stanzas.

31. CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER: arranged in, or according to, the order of time

32. CLICHÉ: an overly used or stereotyped expression or phrase. Example: ‘Last, but not least’, or “The dawn of a new era”

33. CLIMAX: the point of greatest intensity or suspense in a story. This is the crucial part of the story or drama, the part that determines the outcome of the conflict.

34. COLLOQUIAL: a conversational expression or a word or phrase found in everyday speech. Example: ‘the boss’ instead of ‘the employer’; ‘the kid’ instead of ‘the child.’ The use of colloquialism is one of the hallmarks of an informal style of writing. Colloquial language can also include non-literal expressions such as “*It’s raining cats and dogs.*”

35. COMPARE/CONTRAST: To compare two things means to offer points of similarity

and differences; to contrast means to discuss ONLY the differences between things, people or ideas. Also, C/C is a pattern of essay development.

36. CONFLICT: (internal/external) the struggle between two opposing forces or characters in a literary work. These may be categorized as either external or internal.

37. CONNOTATION/DENOTATION: Connotation is considered the emotions and/or associations aroused by the word; denotation is the literary or dictionary definition of the word. Example: the denotation of the colour red reveals the location of this colour on the colour wheel; the connotation of red may include the feelings of anger or passion.

38. COUPLET: Two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme. Example: William Blake's

"The Tiger": "*Tiger, tiger burning bright
In the forest of the night*"

A couplet written in iambic pentameter, such as the final two lines from Shakespearean sonnets is called an **HEROIC COUPLET**. Example:

 "*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*"
 (Sonnet 18)

39. DÉNOUEMENT: the outcome of a plot when conflicts are resolved or unravelled and misunderstandings are set straight. It follows the climax, and is a part of the falling action of a story.

40. DICTION: choice of words. A writer is acutely aware of the level of language chosen. These levels include: jargon, cliché, vernacular, colloquial, slang, euphemism, formal, informal, and dialect. There is *no* single, correct diction in the English language; instead, a writer chooses different words or phrases for different contexts. Example: To a friend –‘a screw up’; to a child – ‘a mistake’; to the police – ‘an accident’; to an employer – ‘an oversight’. All of these expressions mean the same thing -- that is, they have the same denotation-- but a speaker would not likely switch one for the other in any of the three situations

41. DILEMMA: a special type of conflict between two undesirable/unfavourable options

42. DIRECT PRESENTATION: an author (the narrator or other characters) **tells** his reader directly what the character is like, by exposition or analysis. Example: in Graham Greene's "The Destroyors", the narrator reveals the character of Trevor: “He never wasted a word even to tell his name until that was required of him by the rules... T. was giving his orders with decision...”

INDIRECT PRESENTATION: the author shows without comment a characters' words and actions, implying rather than describing their traits character in a literary work.

43. EDITORIAL: writing that expresses opinions intended to persuade viewers and listeners by taking a side. Example: the “Letters to the Editor” section of local and national newspapers

44. ELEGY: a formal poem of lament and consolation concerning a person’s death or reflections on death in general. Example: Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” or Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard”.

45. EPIC: A long narrative poem telling about the deeds of a great hero and reflecting the values of a society. Example: Homer’s The Odyssey or The Iliad

46. EPIPHANY: A moment of illumination or sudden realization

47. EPIGRAM: very short, light-hearted and witty poem, sometimes lightly satirical or in the form of a brief narrative. Many of Alexander Pope’s couplets are epigrammatic. Example: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

48. EUPHEMISM: a deliberate softening of a harsh truth. Example: The old man passed away. (rather than "died")

49. ESSAY: A short literary composition on a single subject, usually presenting the personal views of the author. Types of essay patterns include:

- **PERSONAL:** usually about the writer's life and written in the first person. This is an essay which emphasizes a personal, subjective view.
- **ARGUMENTATIVE:** states and defends a position on an issue
- **EXPOSITORY:** shares, explains, suggests, or explores information, emotion, and ideas
- **PERSUASIVE:** Persuasive writing is emotionally charged and attempts to **convince** the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid. only one side of the issue is presented.
- **DESCRIPTIVE:** has one, clear dominant impression and involves the reader so he or she can actually visualize the things being described. It is essential to use specific, concrete and sensory details.
- **NARRATIVE:** tells a story. This essay type includes all the conventions of storytelling: plot, character, setting, climax, and ending. It is usually filled with details that are carefully selected to explain, support, or embellish the story.
- **COMPARE AND CONTRAST:** similarities and differences. This essay may be developed point by point of comparison or contrast, or whole by whole.

50. EXPERT TESTIMONY: Facts, statistics or opinions given by someone who has expertise in the field that he/she is commenting on

51. EXTENDED METAPHOR: a metaphor that is found throughout the poem.
Example: Earle Birney compares an earlier Canada (1950-1960s) with an adolescent school boy throughout his poem “Canada: A Case History”.

52. FABLE: A fable is a short story with a didactic purpose--illustrating a moral or general truth about human nature, frequently allegorical, in nature, and often ending with an epigram. Animals speak and act like humans. Example: Aesop’s The Fox and the Grapes.

53. FALLING ACTION: what happens after the peak/climax of a story

54. FARCE: farce is a "low" form of comedy that appeals to the audience on a purely emotional level through absurdly exaggerated character types and spectacle Example: In Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, Malvolio, a very prude, self-important character, is convinced to wear funny clothing and act like a fool.

55. FREE VERSE: poetry without a regular pattern of rhyme or rhythm

56. IAMBIC PENTAMETER: a common meter in poetry consisting of an unrhymed line with five feet or accents, each foot containing an unaccented syllable and an accented syllable/
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the East and Juliet the Sun.

57. IDIOM: a manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language. It is often an expression whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up. Example: “back seat driver”, “keep an eye on the children for me”.

58. INDETERMINATE ENDING: no conclusion is arrived at and the reader must form his/her own opinion. Example: “The Lady or the Tiger” by Frank Stockton

59. INTERIOR MONOLOGUE: a form of stream-of-consciousness writing that represents the inner thoughts of a character. Example: Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is an example of a series of interior monologues.

It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking--one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping; like Septimus himself. She was falling asleep.

60. IRONY: (Greek *eirōneia*, from *eirōn* dissembler)

the recognition of incongruity between reality and appearance.

- **Situational irony** is the difference between what is intended and what actually occurs;
- **Verbal irony** is the difference between what is meant and what is said (“Nice weather!”);
- **Sarcasm** is when what is said has a human target (“Nice head!”);
- **Dramatic irony** is when a character in a play unwittingly makes a remark which the audience/reader knows to be fateful or true.

61. JARGON: words or expressions dealing with technical peculiarities of a given field which requires specialized vocabulary. It is used by a particular group or profession.

Example: a teacher talking about having a “learner focussed conversation”; the baseball term ‘catbird seat’ meaning a desirable or auspicious place or position

62. JUXTAPOSITION: when a writer places two things close together or side by side in order to contrast the two, to show unlikeness or differences, to emphasize the opposite qualities of the two. Example: “He slouched alertly”, shows the character being both attentive and non-attentive.

63. LEGEND: A traditional story or collection of related stories popularly regarded as true but actually containing a mixture of fact and fiction. Example: *The Legend of King Arthur* is largely fictional, though historians say some aspects of the stories are based in historical fact.

64. LYRIC: a relatively short, non-narrative type of poetry that presents a personal, often intense display of thoughts or emotions. Example: Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” or Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach”

65. METRE: the organization of speech rhythms (verbal stresses) into regular patterns, in terms of both the arrangement of stresses and their frequency of repetition per line of verse.

66. METONYMY: a term is substituted for another term with which it is closely associated. Example: (“crown” or “sceptre” stands duty for “monarch”, or the ‘bottle’ represents “alcoholism”)

67. MOOD: the feeling or emotional state created in the reader’s mind by an author’s descriptive details (see: **ATMOSPHERE**)

68. MYTH: can be a falsehood widely believed, or a story that was or is part of the beliefs of a cultural group, and which explains the nature of the world and social

conventions as the result of the influence of supernatural beings. Example: "the myth of progress"

69. NARRATOR: the person who tells the story. Example: The narrator in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is the Duke.

POINT OF VIEW: the perspective from which a story is told

- **First person**-- a story told in the first person using "I"
- **Omniscient** -- "all knowing". A story told in the third person. The reader is given insight into the thoughts and feelings of several of the characters in the piece of literature
- **Limited omniscient** -- a story told in the third person. The reader is given insights into the thoughts of only one or two of the characters in the story
- **Objective** -- a story told in the third person. The reader has to interpret the character's actions/speech and uncover their meaning. This is a neutral point of view; the story is developed mostly through dialogue.

70. NOSTALGIA: when a writer evokes a yearning for the return of past circumstances, events, etc [New Latin (translation of German *Heimweh* homesickness), from Greek *nostos* a return home + -algia]

71. OBJECTIVE: (language, tone etc) not influenced by the emotions or prejudices. It is based on observed facts.

SUBJECTIVE (language, tone etc.): words chosen to suggest feelings or intuitions of the writer.

72. OCTAVE: An eight line poem or stanza. Usually the first eight lines of a Petrarchan sonnet are referred to as the octave.

73. ODE: An ode is a long lyric poem which deals with a serious subject in an elevated style. Odes are written for a special occasion to honour a person or a season or to commemorate an event. Example: Robert Burns' "Ode to a Mouse"

74. ONOMATOPOEIA: use of words whose sounds seem to imitate the sounds associated with the action involved. Example: the buzzing bees

75. PARADOX: A statement which reveals a truth though it seems at first to be self-contradictory. Example: Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities opens with the line: "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*"

76. PARALLELISM: the use of words, phrases, clauses or sentences that are similar in grammatical structure. Example: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (Tennyson's "Ulysses")

77. PARODY: A literary work that imitates the style of another literary work. A parody can be simply amusing or it can be mocking in tone, such as a poem which exaggerates the use of alliteration in order to show the ridiculous effect of the overuse of alliteration. Example: a serious news report written in the style of a disc jockey's script

78. PASTORAL: the pastoral is a poem which idealizes the peaceful and simple lifestyle of shepherds or people of the countryside who live close to nature. Example: Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"

79. PATHOS: In a work of literature, the quality that arouses the reader's feelings of pity, sorrow or compassion. Example: one scene with pathos is Act IV, scene ii, of Macbeth when Lady Macduff and her son are brutally murdered.

80. PERSONIFICATION: a figure of speech in which inanimate (non-living) objects, animals or abstract ideas are given human qualities: Example: Shelley's poem "To a Cloud" personifies the cloud.

*"I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
From the seas and the streams;"*

81. PRO AND CON ARGUMENT: a stylistic device used to advance the information in a non-fiction passage. The benefits and disadvantages of an issue are revealed.

82. PROPAGANDA: ideas spread deliberately to further one's own cause

83. PROVERB: a pithy saying that had gained credence through widespread or frequent use. Most proverbs express some basic truth or practical precept. A proverb which describes a basic rule of conduct may also be known as a "maxim". If a proverb is distinguished by particularly good style it may be known as an aphorism.

84. PURPOSE: the reason(s) for which the text has been written. Some of the main purposes of writing are to inform; to persuade; to entertain; to convey a personal experience; to rouse to action.

85. PUN: A play on words wherein a word is used to convey two meanings at the same time. The line below, spoken by Mercutio in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, is an example of a pun. Mercutio has just been stabbed, knows he is dying and says: "*Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.*" Mercutio's use of the word "grave" renders it capable of two meanings: a serious person or a corpse in his grave.

86. QUATRAIN: a stanza or poem of four lines, usually with alternate rhymes.

87. REFRAIN: a word, phrase or line repeated regularly in a poem, usually at the end of stanzas. Example: Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" the line "*Quoth the Raven nevermore*"

88. RESOLUTION: the final working out of a story's problems or conflicts

89. RHETORICAL QUESTION: A **rhetorical question** implies that the answer is obvious--the kind of question that does not need actually to be answered. Example: Iago uses rhetorical question for sinister ends, persuading Othello that his loving wife is a whore. Iago hints with questions ("Honest, my lord?" "Is't possible, my lord?"), encouraging Othello to view his own unjustified suspicions as foregone conclusions.

90. RHYME: the repetition of sounds in two or more words that appear close to each other

RHYME SCHEME: a particular pattern of rhyme in a poem. Example: Shakespearean sonnets have the same rhyme scheme of : abab cdcd efef gg

91. RHYTHM: the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables

92. RISING ACTION: a set of conflicts and crises that constitute the part of the play's or story's plot leading up to the climax

93. SATIRE: a blend of wit, irony and humour to reveal and criticize a person, idea, or subject

94. SESTET: is a six-line poem or stanza. Usually the last six lines of a Petrarchan sonnet are referred to as the sestet.

95. SLANG: generally implies playful, informal speech. It is language that is inappropriate for formal writing and can be considered a more extreme form of colloquialisms. Example: 'That's cool', or 'loonie' referring to the \$1.00 Canadian coin.

96. SOLILOQUY: In drama, soliloquy is the convention whereby characters speak their thoughts aloud while alone, thus communicating to the audience their mental state, intentions, and motives (as in Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy).

97. SONNET: a fourteen line lyric poem, with a particular rhyme scheme. Example: the Prologue to Romeo and Juliet is an Elizabethan/Shakespearean sonnet

98. SPEAKER: the person from whose point of view the poem or story is told

99. STANZA: a group of lines in a poem

100. STYLE: an author's particular or unique way of writing determined by such elements as diction, syntax, imagery

101. STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A narrative technique designed to give the impression of an ever-changing series of thoughts, emotions, images, and memories of the writer or character. This variant of the limited third-person point of view relates only what is experienced by a character's mind from moment to moment, presenting life as an internal monologue. Example: the last section of James Joyce's Ulysses

102. SYMBOL/SYMBOLISM: the use of something concrete (tangible, visible) such as an object, person, place, event to stand for an abstraction or a more complicated idea
Example: in Romeo and Juliet, the lark symbolizes the approaching morning; the nightingale symbolizes the past evening

103. SYNECDOCHE: In synecdoche, a part is used to signify the whole. Example: a ship's captain calls out, "All hands on deck!" (in which "hand" signifies the entire sailor). If we saw three enemy sails (the sails represent the ship).

104. THEME: a general insight about life that a writer wishes to express. It is a generalization abstracted from a literary work's details, language, characters and action.
Example: Appearances can be very different from reality

105. THESIS: the point a writer is arguing. While the topic is the subject, the thesis defines the writer's position on that subject. One way to develop a thesis statement is to ask questions about the topic and to focus on a central issue or problem that the topic raises. The answer to this question will be the thesis.

106. TONE: the attitude a writer takes toward his/her subject. Example: amused, mocking, angry, indignant, sympathetic, approving, cynical, scathing, indifferent

107. TRAGIC HERO: A tragic hero possesses a tragic flaw that will cause his demise. He is a person of noble birth or high authority, doomed to make a serious error in judgment.

Example: Macbeth, in Shakespeare's Macbeth has 'vaulting ambition' as his tragic flaw.

108. TRAGEDY: a play in which the protagonist meets an unhappy or disastrous end
Example: Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy.

109. VOICE: an author's distinct way of expressing his/her thoughts and feelings. The author's "voice" is what the reader "hears" when reading a literary work.

110. WIT: refers to language that is ingeniously amusing through a surprising and imaginative turn of phrase.

111. WISTFUL: characterized by melancholy, longing, or yearning. When a narrator is pensive, especially in a melancholy way.