

Key Terms Senior Students Need to Know and Use

Aa

Allegory: Allegory is the use of characters, incidents and sometimes setting which have a meaning at more than one level. It can be seen as an extended metaphor. An allegory invites the reader to make intertextual connections between texts, these can be at different levels such as political, cultural or historical.

Alliteration: The repeated use of the same sound at the beginning of two or more words which are close to each other. It helps the poet to create effect.

Allusion: An allusion is a reference to another text, person, place or event. Usually used to clarify an idea or enhance meaning. (Use “allude to”.)

Ambiguous: Words or phrases with more than one meaning can be said to be ambiguous.

Anachronism: An anachronism is something that is out of the context of the time frame in the text. Seen in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* when Brutus asked Cassius for the time, Cassius replies “The clock has stricken three.” Mechanical clocks were not invented until 1 400 years later than the time portrayed.

Anecdote: An anecdote is a small story that illustrates a point.

Antagonist: The character or agent in a narrative text (novel, play, film) who opposes the main character (protagonist).

Antithesis: Setting up an opposition of contrasting ideas in a phrase or sentence. Eg. “help yourself, and heaven will help you.”

Aphorism: A short pithy statement such as “knowledge is power”, often used for effect.

Archetypes: Characters or ideas that share a recognisable pattern. Eg. Heroes fight for a good cause.

Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds to create a particular effect, usually in poetry.

Atmosphere: The mood created by the language of a text. (A good term to use in Area of Study.)

Attitude: Literally this means orientation, the manner in which something is positioned (a physical or mental position). (Use when writing about film, drama or visual texts.)

Avant-garde: Those in the front. In literature this is applied to those making bold experiments or pushing know boundaries.

Axiom: A basic principle – often taken as given, not requiring proof.

Bb

Bathos: An attempt at passionate or lofty writing that overshoots the mark and produces, instead, a comic or trivial effect.

Bias: A leaning to one side because more weight is placed on that side.

Black comedy: A form of humour recognisable by its cynicism and sense of bitter disillusionment.

Bowlerise: To take out of the text everything that might offend delicate taste.

Cc

Cadence: The natural sound of language. The cadence arises from the pattern of stressed and unstressed sounds and the rising and falling tones inherent in the structure of sentences.

Camera position: The physical location of the camera at the time of shooting, including the focus, framing and angle of the shot.

Caricature: In literature, this term means the depiction of a character which exaggerates one or two of their qualities for the purpose of making fun of them.

Catharsis: The release of emotions experienced by an audience towards the end of a tragedy.

Cliché: A phrase or expression that is overused.

Colloquial language: In the manner of everyday speech. A colloquial style is casual, relaxed, neither slang nor formal language.

Context: The surrounding circumstances. These circumstances affect the way a text is constructed and received.

Conventions: Widely accepted techniques or devices that audiences may expect to find in a text of a particular genre. These vary according to the genre. eg. The conventions of film: there is one main plot sometimes with several subplots, flashbacks in time can be used to reveal the past, the film can show what is happening in several places at once.

Dd

Descriptive language: A loose term, often used to label language that creates a vivid picture of a scene, object or person.

Diatribes: A stinging attack on a thing or person couched in cutting or even abusive language.

Digression: Ideas or material not directly relevant to the main thread of an argument or narrative.

Ee

Elegy: A poem that laments the death of a relative, friend or famous figure.

Emotive language: Words or phrases that evoke an emotional response and strongly position readers in relation to a subject. The opposite is referential language meaning words that are justified by their truth.

Empathy: The involuntary association of a reader with a character or object in a text causing a physical reaction in the reader.

Euphemism: A phrase or word substituted for one which is considered tasteless or blunt. Eg. To pass away instead of die.

Ff

Fallacy: An error arising from faulty reasoning.

Figurative language: Language that exceeds the literal meanings of words to achieve a special meaning or effect. Some of the most common are similes, metaphors, idioms, proverbs and personification.

Gg

Genre: This term comes from the French and means 'type'. Texts are often categorised according to their features.

Hyperbole: A figure of speech that presents an overstatement of exaggeration for emphasis.

Hypothesis: A proposition or idea put forward as a starting point for investigation.

Ii

Ideology: A way of thinking about the world and people, including beliefs, values and attitudes.

Idiom: Phrases that mean something other than the logical or grammatical meaning that one would normally expect from that combination of words. For example: 'neither here nor there', 'give us a break', 'no worries', 'don't let the cat out of the bag' etc.

Imagery: There are three separate kinds of imagery:

1. The picture conjured by a text in a reader's imagination.
 2. The appeals made to our sense in a text – they are sight (visual imagery), hearing (auditory imagery), touch (tactile imagery), smell (olfactory imagery), taste (gustatory imagery) and sense of movement (kinaesthetic imagery).
 3. The figurative language used in a text, that is, the similes, metaphors, personification, etc.
- There are different types of imagery including: visual, aural, kinaesthetic and tactile.

Inference: The process of drawing a conclusion from data or evidence.

Irony: The condition created by the difference between what is stated and what is actually the case.

Ji

Jargon: Originally, unintelligible or secret language, now used disparagingly to describe the special vocabulary of particular trades or professions such as journalists, lawyers, sailors, computer specialists, skateboarders, surfers etc. People not connected with that industry could have difficulty understanding what is meant.

Juxtaposition: Setting one thing beside another, usually to act as a contrast.

Mm

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another.

Metre: The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in verse.

Mood: The 'atmosphere' of a poem, drama and narrative. Writers can create a particular mood of atmosphere by carefully choosing words and rhythms to suit the message of the text, be it happy, sad, reverent or whatever.

Montage: The placing of one (or more) camera shot next to another to create a particular response in the viewer.

Oo

Onomatopoeia: A figure of speech in which the sound of the word is an echo of its sense, eg: whoosh, splat, pop, bang.

Oxymoron: A figure of speech in which two opposites are combined for a striking effect.

Pp

Paradigm: The group from which items (or words) that are alike or connected in some way, can be chosen.

Parody: An imitation of another text in order to send it up or make it appear ridiculous.

Pathos: The feeling of pity and sorrow evoked by tragedy.

Personification: A figure of speech that gives human qualities to objects or ideas. Eg. 'The leg of a chair', 'the eye of the storm' or 'the head of the river'.

Persuasive Language: A way of writing or speaking that seeks to convince an audience of a particular idea or attitude by using a range of techniques.

Predictions: Informed guesses about what might happen in the future.

Preface: An introduction to a long work in which the author often gives the reader hints or guidelines on how to read the main text.

Premise: A starting point or idea.

Prologue: The opening section of a literary work – often found in a play or long poem.

Propaganda: Texts devoted to the purpose of spreading a particular idea of belief.

Protagonist: The main character or hero in a story.

Proverb: A short, concise saying that sums up a general truth or belief.

Pun: A play on words that sound identical or similar but which are very different in meaning. The effect is usually comical.

Rr

Realism: An attempt to represent the real world in text.

Rhetoric: The art of using language to persuade an audience.

Rhetorical Question: A question that does not require an answer.

Rhythm: The sense of movement of beat pattern in the syllables or words in a text.

Ss

Sarcasm: The use of praise in a tone that clearly implies criticism, for example: 'Well done! This is the second time you've turned up to class on time this year!'

Satire: A style of writing that uses humour and exaggeration to criticise human foibles.

Sensory Imagery: An attempt to stimulate one of the body's five senses in the description of an object, person or scene.

Setting: The place and context in which the events of a story occur.

Simile: A figure of speech in which one object is compared to another in one particular aspect. This comparison is set up by using 'like' or 'as ___ as'.

Slang: A register of language associated with a particular location or occupation, more localised, more colourful, often considered more common than colloquial or formal language.

Stereotypes: Models or templates for a particular kind of character.

Style: The way a writer uses language.

To specify a writer's style you need to examine the tone, imagery, diction and other techniques and devices used in the text. Sometimes it may be useful to classify a writer's style by one of these methods:

- according to the period in which the text is written (such as Romantic, Augustan, metaphysical, etc.)
- according to the kind of language used (such as journalistic, scientific, poetic, didactic, etc)
- according to the level of language used (slang, colloquial, formal).

Symbol/Symbolism: An object that stands for something else.

Synthesis: Bringing things together to form a whole.

Tt

Tautology: The error of defining an idea in its own terms.

Techniques: In the study of texts this refers to the devices and methods used in the construction of texts.

Theme: The central idea of a text.

Tone: This is similar to mood; it is the way the text sounds to you, the impression you get from the 'voice'. A tone may be angry, bitter, apologetic, reflective, sad and so on. In a poem the rhythm and language create tone and thus suggest how it should be read.

Vv

Verisimilitude: Likeness to the truth.

Vernacular: The language of your native country.

Ww

Wit: The ability to express a fine idea with precision and perhaps humour.