

Literary and rhetorical terms:

Learn the meanings and examples of these terms which we will use in our discussions and critical analyses . . . Some of these you will recognize from English classes.

Allegory: a story used to represent some larger concept outside the tale

Alliteration: a series of words which begin with the same letter sound (consonance, assonance)

Anaphora: repetition of the same word; emphatic and / or emotional

Anastrophe: placement of a preposition after (instead of before) it

Antithesis: placement of words of opposite meaning placed in direct proximity (oxymoron)

Aposiopesis: sudden breaking off of a thought, as though the speaker couldn't finish

Apostrophe: direct address of a person (place or thing) not present in the scene described

Asyndeton: absence of connectives where expected, between words, phrases or clauses

Chiasmus: arrangement of paired words such that they form an "X": ABBA order

Ecphrasis: story-within-a-story, digression; an epic device

Ellipsis: absence of a word which can be understood from the sense, or is commonly left out

Enjambment: continuation of (usually grammatically-necessary) word or words into another line, can add suspense

Euphemism: talking around an idea to deemphasize or make the idea more polite

Hendiadys: use of two words similar in meaning in proximity to emphasize a single idea

Hyperbaton: suspension or separation of words normally placed together

Hyperbole: overexaggeration

Hysteron proteron: inversion of natural order or sense as when time is inverted (put on your shoes and socks)

Irony: a gap between what is said / written and its meaning (sarcasm is a form)

Litotes: an assertion made by denying its opposite; double negative

Metaphor: an indirect comparison in which something is described as (not “like”) something else

Metonymy: use of one word to suggest another

Onomatopoeia: sound which echoes meaning (like “babbling brook”)

Oxymoron: conjunction of contradictory terms (almost exactly)

Periphrasis: a long-way-around of saying something (remember the future periphrastics?)

Personification: human characteristics ascribed to non-human animals or other entities

Polyptoton: repetition of words easily identifiable from the same root with variations in form

Polysyndeton: excessive or overuse of connectives

Praeteritio: emphasis by means of statement of intended (pretended) omission (“We won’t even mention what you and your brother did to the living room”)

Prolepsis: flash-forward, anticipation

Simile: direct comparison using “like” or “as”

Synchysis: interlocked word order; ABAB pattern

Syncope or syncopation: contraction or shortening of a word’s usual form

Synechdoche: a part used to indicate the whole (e.g., tecta, “roof” for domus, “house”)

Tmesis: Separation of the parts of a compound word by one or more intervening words

Transferred epithet: also hypallage. Use of a modifier with a word which it does not logically describe, in proximity to the word which it naturally does describe

Tricolon (crescens): grouping of words, phrases or clauses in threes, often increasing in length

Zeugma: a single word used both literally and figuratively at the same time

