



LITERARY TERMS

When you read, if you recognize and analyze the "Big Five" literary terms, you will have no problem determining meaning from a work of literature.

1. **DICTION** – an author's _____ of words; we choose different words or phrases for different contexts; an author's selection of words carry particular connotations or nuances (shades of meaning)
 - The **denotative** meaning of a word is the _____ of a word; many words have more than one denotative meaning.

Example: He is a **snake**.

If you look up the word *snake* in a dictionary, you will discover its **denotative** meanings:

 - has a long, thin body and no arms or legs
 - a bad person who tells lies and betrays other people
 - a long thin tool that is used to clear out blocked pipes
 - The **connotative** meaning of a word refers to the _____ that are connected to a certain word or the emotional suggestions related to that word. The **connotative** meanings of a word exist together with the denotative meanings.

Example: He is a **snake**. What are the connotations of **snake**?

Words have positive, negative, and neutral connotations.

Example: Neutral = slim Negative = scrawny Positive = svelte

Your task in diction analysis is two-fold: (1) analyze how the author's word choice, or diction, contributes to the message, attitude (tone), and overall effect of the passage and (2) choose your own words carefully so that your own writing is characterized by clarity, vividness, and your own unique style. For example, consider whether the verb "said" adequately serves your purpose when you want your reader to understand that the speaker "muttered." Deliberately choosing between the two words shows your command of language and ensures that your diction contributes to your purpose and meaning.

Example: Aaron Rodgers, the Green Bay Packers quarterback, still has some of his football scholarship rejection letters from college. One letter from a coach at Purdue states, "Good luck with your attempt at a college football career." What word in the sentence helps you understand the attitude of the Purdue coach? What is the coach's attitude?

Practice: Think about the following passage where Scout introduces the reader to the town of Maycomb, Alabama, in the 1930s. In addition to providing information about time and place, physical descriptions of a place can create a mood for the story. How would you describe the feeling or mood set by Lee in the beginning of the book? What specific words/diction contribute to that mood? Circle them.

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oak on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o' clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum. People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. (Lee 5).

2. **DETAILS** – the who, what, when, where, why, and how that contribute to attitude (tone) and meaning; an author's selection of detail refers to the way the author adds facts or elaboration; details have no particular connotations – it is what it says. To add detail, an author might provide a description or list events, places, people, or objects.

The author's choice to use detail must be intentional. Your task in detail analysis is to recognize detail within a passage and consider the author's purpose for including that detail. You should (1) read the passage carefully; (2) identify the author's selection of detail; (3) then ask "why" the author is including those particular details.

Example: Standing in the doorway, the woman saw that the room was the same, the comfortable chair just as she remembered, the familiar picture of sunflowers over the sofa, the old wooden coffee table, and as always, the lamp without a bulb.

Question: What is the author's purpose for listing the furniture in the room? **Answer:** *To reveal all that the woman sees as she surveys the room, unchanged since she was last here. This detailed information is possibly being used to set up the woman's feelings or reactions when she sees that all is the same as it was previously.*

Question: What details does the author select to show this? **Answer:** *the chair – "just as she remembered"; the picture – "familiar"; the coffee table – "old"; and the lamp – "as always."*

Practice: Read the following passage in which the author uses detail to describe the home and way of life of the Ewells, a description that also reveals the attitude(s) of the town toward this family. Identify the attitudes and how the author uses detail to convey those attitudes. Underline the details.

Every town the size of Maycomb had families like the Ewells. No economic fluctuations changed their status – people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings.

Maycomb's Ewells lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin. The cabin's plank walls were supplemented with sheets of corrugated iron, its roof shingled with tin cans hammered flat, so only its general shape suggested its original design: square, with four tiny rooms opening on to a shotgun hall, the cabin rested uneasily upon four irregular lumps of limestone. Its windows were merely open spaces in the walls, which in the summertime were covered with greasy strips of cheesecloth to keep out the varmints that feasted on Maycomb's refuse (Lee 193-94).

3. **IMAGERY** - descriptive language that appeals to one or more of the five _____: taste, _____, _____, _____, and _____. The purpose of imagery is to evoke with words an experience you remember or one you can imagine. The image makes an experience vivid by alerting the senses through sensory language. The connotations of the language may bring to mind an experience involving one or more of the senses.

Example: A passage that speaks of "eating roasted marshmallows with the outside crunchy and the inside creamy, melt-in-your-mouth sweet" may conjure up pleasant memories from childhood.

As you read, consider how the author appeals to a particular sense and how the connotations of his or her language create vivid images. Pay close attention to how the imagery is used and under what context it is being used. Ask yourself (1) what effect does the imagery have on the passage? (2) how does the use of imagery create meaning in the passage? (3) what attitude (tone) or mood does the imagery convey? (4) how does the use of imagery enhance or highlight the passage's theme?

Practice: Underline the imagery in the following passage. Explain how the imagery contributes to Scout's fear of Boo Radley:

Every night-sound I heard from my cot on the back porch was magnified three-fold; every scratch of feet on gravel was Boo Radley seeking revenge, every passing Negro laughing in the night was Boo Radley's insane fingers picking the wire to pieces; the chinaberry trees were malignant, hovering, alive (Lee 62).

4. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE – explores interesting _____ between one thing and another.

Figurative language is often recognized as a comparison. What qualifies as figurative language?

Practice: Below are a few examples of figurative language. Jot down the definitions below.

- i. Metaphor –
- ii. Simile –
- iii. Personification –
- iv. Hyperbole –
- v. Irony–

Practice: Now match the correct comparison with the example provided.

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|--------------------|-------|--|
| a. Metaphor | _____ | "A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer" (Lee 6). |
| b. Simile | _____ | "Miss Caroline apparently thought I was lying. 'Let's not let our imaginations run away with us dear,' she said. 'Now you tell your father not to teach you any more. It's best to begin reading with a fresh mind'" (Lee 19). |
| c. Personification | _____ | "The Radley place fascinated Dill. In spite of our warnings, it drew him as the moon draws water..." (Lee 8). |
| d. Hyperbole | _____ | "The old house was the same, droopy and sick, but as we stared down the street we thought we saw an inside shutter move" (Lee 16). |
| e. Irony | _____ | "Then I heard Atticus cough. I held my breath. Sometimes when we made a midnight pilgrimage to the bathroom we would find him reading" (Lee 57). |

Beyond mere identification, however, when you analyze figurative language, it is important to consider the **effect** of that figurative language. Simply labeling literary devices or figures of speech is not the same as analyzing their use. Once you have identified a particular figure of speech, it is time to move on to analyzing the purpose that figure of speech serves in a particular piece of writing. Ask yourself (1) what would have been lost had the author not chosen to use figurative language; (2) what does his or her use of figurative language contribute to your understanding of the work you are analyzing?

Practice: Read the passage below. Underline the figurative language. How does the use of figurative language reveal the town's attitude toward Boo Radley?

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions. A Negro would not pass the Radley Place at night, he would cut across to the sidewalk opposite and whistle as he walked. The Maycomb school grounds adjoined the back of the Radley lot; from the Radley chickenyard tall pecan trees shook their fruit into the schoolyard, but the nuts lay untouched by the children: Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked (Lee 9).

5. SYNTAX – the _____ of a sentence; look for sentence length, sentence variation, punctuation, and word order.

Key Questions:

- How does syntax contribute to and enhance the meaning and effect of language?
- How does syntax contribute to tone?

The first step in analyzing syntax is to look at the *whole passage*, not just individual words or even individual sentences. Syntax analysis is based on what the sentences do and how they work together with other sentences in the passage. Read the complete passage first, and then reread, looking for any noteworthy uses of sentence structure. You'll find that simply by reading, your writing will improve. As you pay attention to the way great writers use sentence structure and punctuation, experiment with syntax in your own writing. Syntax is a powerful tool for expressing your voice.

Here are the different things to consider about syntax:

Sentence Length:

- **Long, medium, short**—how do the different lengths of sentences impact the work as a whole?
- **Short lines** often take longer to read and focus attention on individual words and ideas. Short, clipped phrases, sentences, and clauses tend to create a feeling of quickness, decisiveness, and speed to a piece. It is important to be aware of the content of a piece and look for connections to syntax. Pay attention to how pacing relates to the action and purpose of a particular piece.
- **Longer lines** sometime create a fast, racing feeling. Long, convoluted sentences, especially with subordinate clauses at the beginning, tend to slow the pace of a piece. Often they are connected to a contemplative section, a heavy or serious subject and the writer wants to emphasize it. Sometimes, however, they are placed in a piece for the purpose of demonstrating the ramblings of a character, the ludicrousness of an idea, or the ridiculousness of a situation. Watch for occasional satire or irony in these long sentences.
- **Writers vary sentence length** to forestall boredom and control emphasis. A **short sentence** following a much longer sentence shifts the reader's attention to the meaning and importance of the short sentence.
- **Intentional/Rhetorical Fragment:** Example: *The lion is a wild animal. Really wild.*
You have been told never to use sentence fragments in your writing. That's certainly true in very formal writing, but expert writers know how to use sentence fragments and often do. At its best, a sentence fragment is used for emphasis, to point out the importance of an idea, as in the example above. The fragment *really wild* makes the reader stop and think about just how *wild* the lions are. Sentence fragments are powerful in writing, but only if you do not overuse them.

Types of sentences			
declarative	The king is sick.	makes a statement	assertive
imperative	Cure the king!	gives a command	authoritative
interrogative	Is the king sick?	asks a question	questioning
exclamatory	The king is dead; long live the king!	makes an exclamation	emotional

Sentence Structure
Simple Sentence = 1 independent clause
Compound Sentence = 2 independent clauses (joined by a coordinate conjunction or by a semicolon)
Complex Sentence = 1 independent clause & 1 or more subordinate clauses (uses AAWWUBBIS)
Compound-Complex Sentence = 2 or more independent clauses & 1 or more dependent clause

Periodic sentence: Periodic sentences delay closure and carry high tension and interest. The reader must wait until the end of the sentence to understand the meaning.

EX: As long as we ignore our children and refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care, we will fail to solve the problem of school violence.

Loose sentence: In contrast, sentences that reach closure early relieve tension and allow the reader to explore the rest of the sentence without urgency.

EX: We will fail to solve the problem of school violence as long as we ignore our children and refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care.

Balanced sentence has phrases or clauses with similar structures, meaning, or length.

EX: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Juxtaposition is a poetic and rhetorical device that places normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases next to one another, often creating a surprising and witty effect: the juxtaposition of a MacDonald's billboard and a weight loss billboard would create irony.

Punctuation: Why is the writer using a colon, a dash, a semi-colon, etc?

- The semicolon gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence. The semicolon shows equal importance to all clauses, and the reader should pay attention to them all.
- The colon tells the reader that something important will follow. The semicolon shows equal importance, while the colon throws the emphasis onto what comes after it.
- A dash marks a sudden change in thought or tone, sets off a brief summary, or sets off a parenthetical part of the sentence.

Clauses: Which clause is subordinate; which clause is independent? Why has the writer used a series of short clauses?

Word Order: Typical English syntax develops a sentence in this order: **subject, predicate, object**. So, writers often change this order to create effect and emphasis on ideas.

EX: Pizza I want – not soup!

Repetition: Purposeful repetition of a word, phrase, or clause emphasizes the repeated structure and focuses the reader's attention on its meaning. Other types of repetition repeat parallel grammatical forms such as infinitives, gerunds, and prepositional phrases. This kind of repetition balances parallel ideas and gives them weight.

Word Omission: Sometimes writers will use ellipses... to omit words. Always ask ...why?

Capitalization: When writers capitalize words in weird places, ask..."why?"

Italics: Words are usually italicized to create emphasis.

Practice: Read Scout's words as she describes her desire for a twirling baton so she can one day join the Maycomb County High School band. Why would Harper Lee use run-on sentences (comma splices). Describe the effect the commas create: **I had long had my eye on that baton, it was at V. J. Elmore's, it was bedecked with sequins and tinsel, it cost seventeen cents" (100).**

Practice: The following passage is from Chapter 17 toward the beginning of Tom Robinson's trial when Atticus is questioning Mr. Ewell. Why do you think *ran* and *running* are repeated so many times in such a short passage? Describe the effect this repetition creates.

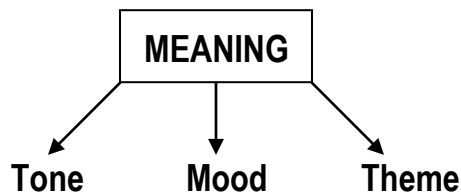
"Mr. Ewell," Atticus began, "folks were doing a lot of running that night. Let's see, you say you ran into the house, you ran to the window, you ran inside, you ran to Mayella, you ran for Mr. Tate. Did you, during all this running, run for a doctor?" (Lee 175).

THE BIG FIVE HELP US DETERMINE THE FOLLOWING:

6. POINT OF VIEW – perspective of the narrative voice

- _____ → the character telling the story speaks as though it has happened to him or her personally; uses personal pronouns (“I”, “me”, “my”, etc.)
- _____ → the author tells the story as though he or she knew everything about the actions, thoughts, and feelings of **all of the characters**
- _____ → the author tells the story as though he or she can only perceive the thoughts and feelings of **one of the characters**

Practice: “When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow” (Lee 3). What point of view is *To Kill a Mockingbird*? _____



7. TONE - the author's _____, stated or implied, toward a subject. Some possible attitudes: pessimistic, optimistic, respectful, enthusiastic, playful, sarcastic, bitter, critical, and joyful. It's easy to identify tone in spoken language. If your mother says, “Don't use that tone of voice with me!” you know exactly what she means. You also understand her tone all too well: she is angry with you. We understand tone in speech by listening not only to words but to the way words are said and facial expressions of those who say them. It's harder to understand and create tone in writing since you can't depend on vocal and facial expressions. But it can be done. Just as we understand tone in speech from *what* is said and *how* it's said, the same is true in writing. An author creates tone in writing through all of the elements in the Big 5:

- diction
- detail
- figurative language
- imagery
- syntax

Your task with tone: 1) look for tone while you read; 2) practice explaining how you know the tone of the passage; 3) practice writing passages in which you create a certain tone (see your list of tone words)

Practice: Look back at your practice with **details** (“Every town the size of Maycomb”). What is the tone of the first paragraph: a) sympathetic b) judgmental c) objective d) forgiving e) humorous

8. MOOD – is the general _____ created by the author's words. The mood is often suggested by descriptive details. The mood can be mysterious, romantic, suspenseful, joyful, etc.

Practice: Look back at your practice with **diction** (“Maycomb was an old town”) and identify the mood: _____

9. THEME – a _____ truth; the concept or underlying meaning of a literary work.

Practice: What theme or thematic concept can be found in this explanation from Atticus regarding Scout's feelings about her teacher Miss Caroline: “**You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it**” (Lee 33). _____