

Rhetorical Terms for Style Analysis

(Many definitions come from AP English Language and Composition, published by Research & Education Association, and Subjects/Strategies: A Writer's Reader by Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa)

The following terms of analysis may be of use to you on the AP Language and Composition test. The AP test does not test students on their knowledge of any specific terms, but you can use them in your own analysis in your essays, and there is the possibility that some of them may appear in the essay prompts or questions on the multiple choice question section of the test. Terms appearing in **bold type** appeared in essay questions between 1987 and 1993, and terms appearing in *italics* appeared on multiple-choice questions during approximately the same time period.

1. abstract language – Language describing ideas and qualities rather than observable or specific things, people, or places.
2. *allegory* – A story, fictional or nonfictional, in which characters, things, and events represent qualities or concepts. The interaction of these characters, things, and events is meant to reveal an abstraction or a truth. The characters and other elements may be symbolic of the ideas referred to.
3. alliteration – the repetition of initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables
4. **allusion** – an implied or indirect reference to a person, event, thing, or a part of another text. Most allusions are based on the assumption that there is a body of knowledge that is shared by the author and the reader and that therefore the reader will understand the author's referent. Allusions to biblical figures and figures from classical mythology are common in Western literature for this reason.
5. ambiguity – allows for two or more simultaneous interpretations of a word, phrase, action, or situation, all of which can be supported by the context of a work. Artful language may be ambiguous. Unintentional ambiguity is usually vagueness.
6. analogy – an inference that if two or more things agree with one another in some respects they will probably agree in other respects
7. anaphora – Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row. This is a deliberate form of repetition and helps make the writer's point more coherent.
8. *anecdote* – a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident. Anecdotes are often inserted into fictional or non-fictional texts as a way of developing a point or injecting humor.
9. antecedent – the noun referred to by a pronoun that takes its place
10. *antithesis* – opposition, or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction: "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Barry Goldwater

11. **aspects of style/stylistic devices** – the means by which a writer or speaker effects the individuality of his or her expression
12. **attitude** – the mental position a writer or speaker expresses in his or her expression; a writer’s attitude reflects his or her opinion of a subject.
13. **audience** – An audience is the intended readership for a piece of writing.
14. **balance** – Construction in which both halves of the sentence are about the same length and importance.
15. *chronological narration* – narrating an event in keeping with the sequence of events in time
16. **circumlocution** – the use of an unnecessarily large number of words or an indirect means of expression to express an idea so as to effect an evasion in speech.
17. **cliché** – An expression that has become ineffective through overuse.
18. **coherence** – The quality of good writing that results when all sentences, paragraphs, and longer divisions of an essay are naturally connected.
19. *colloquial* – of or relating to informal conversation; conversational. Colloquial expressions are informal (as chem, gym, come up with), and are acceptable in formal writing only if they are used purposefully.
20. **conceit** – an extended, elaborate, or surprisingly unusual metaphor
21. **concrete language** – Language that describes specific, observable things, people, or places, rather than ideas or qualities.
22. *controlling metaphor* – a metaphor that runs through an entire work and determines the form or nature of that work.
23. *damning with faint praise* – “Well, you will probably do okay on the AP test”
24. **description** – Description is one of the four basic types of prose (narration, exposition, and argument are the other three). Description tells how a person, place, or thing is perceived by the senses. Objective description reports these sensory qualities factually, whereas subjective description gives the writer’s interpretation of them.
25. **descriptive detail** – a detail that is intended to render a clear image or impression in a reader’s mind
26. **diction** – the selection of words in oral or written discourse
27. *ellipsis* – the omission of one or more words that must be supplied to make a construction grammatically complete.
28. **epigraph** – A quotation or aphorism at the beginning of a literary work suggestive of theme.
29. **example** – An individual instance taken to be representative of a general pattern. Arguing by example is considered reliable if examples are demonstrably true or factual as well as relevant.
30. **exemplification** – Exemplification is a type of exposition (definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect analysis are others). With exemplification the writer uses examples – specific facts, opinions, samples, and anecdotes or stories – to support a generalization, to make it more vivid, understandable, and persuasive.

31. exposition – Exposition is one of the four types of prose (with narration, description, and argument). The purpose of exposition is to clarify, explain, and inform. The methods include process analysis, definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect analysis.
32. fiction – A product of a writer’s imagination, usually made up of characters, plot, setting, point of view, and theme. Fiction is often described as lies told with the consent of the reader.
33. **figurative language** – A word or words that are inaccurate literally, but describe by calling to mind sensations or responses that the thing described evokes. Figurative language may be in the form of metaphors or similes, both of which are non-literal comparisons.
34. focus – Focus is the limitation that a writer gives his or her subject. The writer’s task is to select a manageable topic given the constraints of time, space, and purpose.
35. generalization – When a writer bases a claim upon an isolated example or asserts that a claim is certain rather than probable. Sweeping generalizations occur when a writer asserts that a claim applies to all instances instead of some.
36. hyperbole – Conscious exaggeration used to heighten effect. Not intended literally, hyperbole is often humorous.
37. idiom – An idiom is a word or phrase that is used habitually with a particular meaning in a language. For example, catch cold, hold a job, make up your mind, and give them a hand are all idioms.
38. *idiomatic* – expressions or constructions whose meaning cannot be deduced by knowledge of meaning the words employed or rules of grammar, as they are cultural and not formal features of a language; “the dollar is burning a hole in my pocket” or “he was *on* a rampage, and he went *off*”
39. image – A word or words, either figurative or literal, used to describe a sensory experience or an object perceived by the senses. An image is often a concrete representation.
40. **imagery** – instances of writing that enable a reader to create a visual image of what the writer is describing
41. **intended and probable effects (on the audience)** – analysis of the writer or speaker’s intended or possible rhetorical effect upon an audience
42. invective – an example of denunciatory, angry, and/or insulting language
43. inversion – Variation of the normal word order (subject first, then verb, then complement) which puts a modifier or the verb as first in the sentence. The element that appears first is emphasized more than the subject.
44. *inverted syntax* – switching of the customary word order, for example placing an adjective after the noun it modifies; “He was a man, tough”
45. *ironic mockery* – damning with praise
46. irony, dramatic – when a reader is aware of a reality that differs from a character’s perception of reality
47. irony, situational – when an event turns out to be the opposite of what is expected

48. irony, verbal – the use of words to express something opposite of their literal meaning
49. **juxtaposition** – the act or instance of placing two or more things side by side
50. metaphor – a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things and so changes our apprehension of either or both
51. metonymy – The rhetorical or metaphorical substitution of a one thing for another based on their association or proximity. “The crown will find an heir.”
52. mood – An atmosphere created by a writer’s diction and the details selected. Syntax is also a determiner of mood because sentence strength, length, and complexity affect pacing.
53. moral – The lesson drawn from a fictional or non-fictional story.
54. narration – One of four basic types of prose (with description, exposition, and argument). To narrate is to tell a story, to tell what happened. Although narration is most often used in fiction, it is also important in nonfiction, either by itself or in conjunction with other types of prose.
55. objectivity – A writer’s attempt to remove himself or herself from any subjective, personal involvement in a story. Hard news journalism is frequently prized for its objectivity, although even fictional stories can be told without a writer rendering personal judgment.
56. onomatopoeia – the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (as in *buzz* or *hiss*)
57. organization – It is the thoughtful arrangement and presentation of one’s points or ideas. Possible ways of organization include: chronologically, simplest to most complex, or most familiar to least familiar, least important to most important.
58. *oxymoron* – A rhetorical antithesis. Juxtaposing two contradictory terms, like “wise fool” or “eloquent silence.”
59. *paradox* – A seemingly contradictory statement which is actually true. This rhetorical device is often used for emphasis or simply to attract attention.
60. *parallel structure* – see parallelism
61. parallelism – Sentence construction which places in close proximity two or more equal grammatical constructions. Parallel structure may be as simple as listing two or three modifiers in a row to describe the same noun or verb; it may take the form of two or more of the same type of phrases (prepositional, participial, gerund, appositive) that modify the same noun or verb; it may also take the form of two or more subordinate clauses that modify the same noun or verb. Or, parallel structure may be a complex blend of single-word, phrase, and clause parallelism all in the same sentence.
62. parody – An exaggerated imitation of a serious work for humorous purposes. The writer of a parody uses the quirks of style of the imitated piece in extreme or ridiculous ways.
63. *periodic sentence structure* – if your main point is at the end of a long sentence, you are writing a periodic sentence; i.e., “Considering the free health care, the cheap tuition fees, the low crime rate, the comprehensive social programs, and the wonderful

winters, I am willing to pay slightly higher taxes for the privilege of living in Canada”

64. **persona** – A writer often adopts a fictional voice to tell a story. Persona is usually determined by a combination of subject matter and audience,
65. **personification** – Figurative language in which inanimate objects, animals, ideas, or abstractions are endowed with human traits or human form.
66. **point of view** – the vantage point from which a story or argument is told or made
67. **process analysis** – Process analysis is a type of exposition (with definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect analysis). Process analysis answers the question, “how,” and explains how something works or gives step-by-step directions for doing something.
68. **purpose** – Purpose is what the writer wants to accomplish in a particular piece of writing.
69. **rhetorical devices** – the diction, syntax, figurative language, detail, or other formal features of writing by which a writer creates his or her meaning and effect
70. **rhetorical purpose** – the objective governing the choice of the various rhetorical features of a piece of writing; why the writer chose *this* word or *that* metaphor, etc.
71. **rhetorical question** – a question not intended to be answered, but rather to evoke a line of questioning or theme; “what is the meaning of life?”
72. **rhetorical strategy** – the means by which a writer creates his or her expression of meaning through the choice of diction, syntax, figurative language, detail, or other formal features of writing
73. **rhetoric** – the art of speaking or writing effectively; all of the means at a writer or speaker’s disposal for writing or speaking effectively
74. **sarcasm** – a sharp, caustic expression or remark; a bitter gibe or taunt; different from irony which is more subtle
75. **sardonic** – disdainfully or skeptically humorous; derisively mocking
76. **satire** – through the exaggeration of mistaken beliefs or actions to the point where they are obviously ridiculous, satire aims to correct, by exposure or ridicule, deviations from normal conduct or reasonable opinion
77. **sequence** – Sequence refers to the order in which a writer presents information. See also organization.
78. **shift in point of view** – a change in perspective from one character to another, or one perspective to another; analogous to a cut to a different camera angle in film
79. **simile** – a figure of speech that use like or as to make a comparison between two unlike things and so changes our apprehension of either or both
80. **slang** – Slang is unconventional, very informal language of particular subgroups in our culture. It is acceptable in formal writing only if it is used purposefully.
81. **spatial description** – description of physical space
82. **speaker** – the author of a piece of writing as he or she presents him or herself in the writing

83. **specific/general** – General words name groups or classes of objects, qualities or actions. Specific words name individual objects qualities or actions within a class or group. Good writing judiciously balances the general with the specific.
84. **strategy** – A strategy is a means by which a writer achieves his or her purpose. Strategy includes the many rhetorical decisions that the writer makes about organization, paragraph structure, syntax, and diction.
85. **style** – The choices in diction, tone, and syntax that a writer makes. In combination they create a work’s manner of expression. Style is thought to be conscious and unconscious and may be altered to suit specific occasions. Style is often habitual and evolves over time.
86. **stylistic, narrative, and persuasive devices** – rhetorical elements of a sample of writing, the inclusion of which determine the style, effect the narration, or create the persuasive appeal of the piece
87. **synecdoche** – The rhetorical or metaphorical substitution of a part for the whole, or vice versa. “All hands on deck.”
88. **syntactic fluency** – Ability to create a variety of sentence structures, appropriately complex and/or simple and varied in length.
89. **syntax** – Syntax refers to the way in which words are arranged to form phrases, clauses, and sentences as well as to the grammatical relationship among the words themselves.
90. **theme** – The central idea of a work of fiction or nonfiction, revealed and developed in the course of a story or explored through argument.
91. **tone** – A writer’s attitude toward his or her subject matter revealed through diction, figurative language, and organization on the sentence and global levels.
92. **trope** – words used with a decided change or extension in their literal meaning; the use of a word in a figurative sense
93. **unity** – A work of fiction or nonfiction is said to be unified if all parts are related to one central or organizing principle.
94. **wit** – the quickness of intellect and the power and talent for saying brilliant things that surprise and delight by their unexpectedness; the power to comment subtly and pointedly on the foibles of the passing scene.