

Glossary

This glossary contains many of the commonly used terms in literary analysis and appreciation that may come your way in the A1 programme. Don't learn them off by heart, but try to become familiar with as many as you can so as to have greater control and understanding in your reading and writing. The most important thing is to see how the terms function, and to become alert to these effects in your reading. As far as possible, illustrations are drawn from this Guide. How many of these do you already know? How many would you feel comfortable applying in your work? Chapters One, Two, and Three, contain further discussion of terms.

P =
important
for poetry
creativity.
* =
generally
important
✓ =
important
in some
cases.

- ✓ **Alienation:** This term, from Marxism, suggests that under Capitalism we live estranged from our true human natures.
- * **Allegory:** A story of some complexity that corresponds to another situation on a deeper level. *Animal Farm* is about a community of animals, but reflects the Russian Revolution and satirises Communism. The dual perspective, the link between animal story and political story gives it its interest and wit.
- P **Alliteration:** Repetition of an identical consonant sound at the beginning of stressed words, usually close together ("So dawn goes down to day": Frost) Look at the effect alliteration creates. It may for example draw together *unlike* ideas for contrast, or suggest meaning through the sound effect (as in the Frost line, suggesting depressing inevitability), or link *similar* things for emphasis. Used in both poetry and prose.
- * **Allusion:** A reference to an event, person, place, work of literature etc. that gives additional layers of meaning to a text or enlarges its frame of reference. Look at the biblical allusion to the "whited sepulchre" in the Conrad essay sample, Chapter Two of this Guide.
- * **Ambiguity:** (Distinguish this from ambivalence). Where language and tone are (usually deliberately), unclear and may have two or more interpretations or meanings. Look at the discussion of Banquo's speech in Chapter Four of this Guide.
- ✓ **Ambivalence:** Where the writer's attitude to, for example, a character or event is not clear-cut, but may seem to hold at least two responses (Marlow's attitude to Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* - both understanding and critical?).
- * **Antithesis:** Contrasting ideas by balancing words of opposite meaning and idea ("And wretches hang, that jury men may dine": Alexander Pope).
- P **Apostrophe:** An exclamatory passage where the speaker or writer breaks off in the flow of a narrative or poem to address a dead or absent person, a particular audience, or object (often personified). Gaev in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* addresses a bookcase at length, symbol of his past and the family home.
- P **Assonance:** Repetition of similar vowel sounds close to one another ("Down some profound dull tunnel" Wilfred Owen). Can create atmosphere in descriptive poetry. Sound this aloud to hear the effect.
- * **Atmosphere:** Often confused with 'mood', it refers specifically to *place*, a setting, or surroundings. ("There was a holiday atmosphere in the town".)
- ✓ **Bathos:** A sudden descent from the sublime or serious, to the ridiculous or trivial. "His pride and his bicycle tyre were punctured in the first hour".
- ✓ **Bildungsroman:** German term for a novel focusing on the development of a character from youth to maturity. (Joyce: *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a famous example of a male; *Jane Eyre* of a female.)
- P **Blank verse:** Unrhymed poetry not broken into stanzas, keeping to a strict pattern in each line, usually in iambic pentameter. Used by Shakespeare, epic poets, and much of Frost. It is close to the rhythm of speech. (Chapter Four: Orals - "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown".) Sound it out to find the pattern of those five stressed syllables, but observe how close to speech rhythms it is.
- P **Caesura:** A break or pause *within a line* of poetry by comma or full stop or unmarked pause, used for emphasis, or to change direction or pace. Quite frequently used, so worth knowing. (Look at the "Black Lace Fan" in the Commentary Chapter: "He was always late. That evening he was later".)
- ✓ **Caricature:** An exaggerated representation of a character often by emphasising a small number of features, usually for comic and satiric purposes. Jane Austen and Dickens frequently use this.

* **Colloquial:** Everyday speech and language as opposed to literary or formal register. The inclusion of the odd colloquial word or phrase in an otherwise formal work can be striking. Look at *The Horse's Mouth*, in the Commentary Chapter where literary and colloquial registers mix.

Conceit: A witty thought or idea or image, a fanciful or deliberately far-fetched comparison, as found in 16th and 17th century English poetry. Donne compares two lovers to the points of a mathematical compass.

Concrete: (As in concrete detail). Refers to objects or aspects that may be perceived by the senses.

* **Connotation:** An association that a word may suggest. Very useful word when discussing diction.

P **Consonance:** Where the final consonants are the same in two or more words close together, as in Macbeth's "poor player/That *struts and frets* his hour upon the stage".

Contradiction: (Distinguish from 'paradox'). Stating or implying the opposite of what has been said or suggested.

P **Couplet (rhyming couplet):** Two consecutive rhyming lines of verse. May clinch or emphasise an idea (*Nature's first green is gold/ Her hardest hue to hold* : Frost)

✓ **Defamiliarization:** The technique of making the familiar seem new and strange, and thus making us see more vividly. Coined by the Russian "Formalists". This may be done through point of view, as in *Gulliver's Travels*.

* **Denouement:** Literally, from the French, 'unknotting'. How the ending of a novel or play turns out, how the plot is unravelled or revealed.

* **Diction:** The writer's choice of words or vocabulary. You will need this word.

✓ **Didactic:** Describes the tone or intention to preach a (usually) moral, political or religious point. It usually has a negative connotation.

* **Dramatic Irony:** A very powerful tool especially in drama, used for tragic or comic purposes. Where a character (or characters) is/are unaware of something that the audience/reader and possibly other characters on stage are aware of.

✓ **Elegy:** A mournful lament for times past or the dead. It has a particular poetic form but the term can be used more generally. "Elegiac" describes a meditative mood in prose or verse, reflecting on the past.

P **End-stopped line:** A line of poetry where the meaning pauses or stops at the end of the line ("Nature's first green is gold": Frost) A statement or idea can stand out clearly, and provide a pause for reflection.

P **Enjambement:** The opposite of the above. The sense flows over from one line to another, perhaps even to the next stanza. This can reflect a build-up of emotion or create dramatic effect (see the final stanza of "Dulce Et Decorum Est", Chapter Four: Orals). From the French for "leg".

P **Epigram:** A concise, pointed, witty statement. 'Epigrammatic' style in prose or poetry has those qualities. Oscar Wilde is a master of epigram: "The truth is rarely pure and never simple".

* **Form:** A word that often crops up and seems vague, but is important. It is the shape of a work, the arrangement of its parts, the patterns, divisions and structures used. In poetry there are traditional, metrical and rhyming 'forms' (ode, ballad, sonnet, etc.), and modern, non-metrical forms. If you want to know what these are, consult further resources for this.

P **Free verse:** Verse written without any fixed or traditional structure in metre or rhyme. Commonly used since the early 20th century. It is very flexible because it follows the speech rhythms of the language.

* **Genre:** A specific type or kind of literature, such as drama, prose, poetry, essay, autobiography.

✓ **Grain:** ('Reading against the grain'). A reader can go acceptingly along with assumptions and values in a text, or go 'against the grain', resisting and questioning values and assumptions in that text, as Feminist critics often advocate when reading books by male authors. It can also apply to a number of other situations including, for example, the reading of books written in the colonial period.

P **Hyperbole:** A deliberate exaggeration for various effects, comic, tragic, etc. When Frost writes that the beauty of Spring "is only so an hour", he emphasises the tragic brevity of life.

✓ **Iambic:** This you *must* know. The 'iamb' is a metrical measure, or foot, in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable ("He *claps*"). Iambic pentameter (five iambs in a line) is the commonest metrical pattern in English poetry, including Shakespeare. ("Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown": Macbeth. Sound it out to find those five stresses.) Note that you can have other kinds of iambic line such as the four-iamb line, called tetrameter (see "The Eagle" in Chapter One).

Idyll/Idyllic: Refers to innocent simple life in idealised rural setting. An "idyllic" childhood or country scene or experience has those untroubled, and simple qualities. Useful adjective.

- * **Imagery:** Used frequently –another word you need. It means concrete descriptions (images) we can see and sense in works of literature. Wilfred Owen (Chapter Four: Orals) describes a dying soldier with “white eyes writhing in his face”. We see (whites of eyes rolling, his face) and feel (“writhing”) the agony.
- ✓ **Interior monologue:** See Chapter Two, novel section, for definition
- ✓ **Internal rhyme:** Where there are rhymes within a line instead of, or as well as, at the ends of lines.
- * **Irony:** A difficult term to define, often used wrongly, and an effect that is often missed when analysing literature. It means a gap or mismatch between what is being said, and what is intended, perhaps between the way a character or group sees him/her/itself, and the way the author wishes us to see him/her/it. (See the analysis of the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* in Chapter Two of this Guide). A powerful tool for a writer as it exposes hypocrisies and lack of awareness. (Distinguish from dramatic irony.)
- p **Lyric:** Originally a song performed to a lyre (early harp); now, a songlike poem expressing personal feeling. A common form. Prose can be lyrical too, expressive of feelings.
- * **Metaphor:** You can't get far without this. A comparison of two things without using a comparing word such as “like”. To see a striking similarity between two normally unlike things can be an indicator of originality. It provides richness of sensation and meaning. The comparison may be implied rather than spelt out. Wilfred Owen's description of the dying soldier “guttering” is comparing him implicitly with a candle flame on the point of going out.
- p **Metre:** The organization of lines of verse into regular patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables to achieve a rhythmic effect. Seems frightening and complicated, but a good resource book or teacher can make it clear. Helpful to understand the essentials, but not mandatory.
- Mimesis:** A term not so commonly used, but it describes an interesting and common effect: the use of words that suggest movement, shape, size, texture (smooth, rough, soft). Wilfred Owen's description of the gas attack: “An ecstasy of fumbling/ Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time” has a *mimetic* effect, suggesting panic and confusion of movement.
- * **Mood:** (Often confused with atmosphere and tone) Refers to people as in “the mood of the audience was sombre”. Describes a person's (a character's or the narrator's) frame of mind or state of feeling. It may also indicate the emotional response the author hopes to evoke in the mind of the reader.
- ✓ **Monologue:** Speech, usually of some length, by a single speaker. Distinguish from soliloquy. A ‘dramatic monologue’ (usually a whole poem) has a listener present and reveals the character of the speaker in a striking way. (Some of Browning's and Frost's poems)
- * **Motif:** Often used synonymously with the German *leitmotif*, meaning recurrent elements (images, ideas) in a work. These are not as significant as themes but have a cumulative effect like a refrain, and can assume symbolic importance. Candles and fire in *Great Expectations* could be seen in this way.
- * **Omniscient Narrator:** It literally means ‘all-knowing’, describing one who stands outside and can see into all characters and happenings, like Jane Austen.
- p **Onomatopoeia:** The effect of words that imitate the sound of things (“hiss”, “crash”).
- * **Oxymoron:** Where two words of opposite meaning are joined – “An open secret”. It can suggest something quite complex or provocative.
- * **Paradox:** (Distinguish this from contradiction and oxymoron). Seemingly contradictory statement, but on reflection, it makes sense, contains its own resolution or truth (‘Nature's first green is gold’: Robert Frost. Green can't be gold literally, but the earliest signs of life in spring may be precious, like gold).
- * **Parody:** Usually comic imitation of another work. Distinguish from *pastiche* (an option in World Literature 2)
- ✓ **Pastiche:** A literary work composed in the style of a well-known author.
- ✓ **Persona:** The identity or character assumed by the author in a work of literature
- * **Personification:** Where human feelings or sensations are attributed to an inanimate object. Human qualities may also be given to abstract ideas.
- * **Plot:** (Distinguish from story, which lists the events of a narrative in chronological order). Plot refers to the events of a narrative in the order the author has *chosen* to present them. Chronology may be distorted for particular effects, as in flashbacks or flash forwards. A novel may begin with the ending of the story, for example.
- * **Point of view:** A key concept in literature especially the novel, but can be confusing. It is The angle from which the narrative is seen or told. Who sees? Who speaks? The point of view may shift in a work (see Chapter Two and Three for more).

* Protagonist: Main character in a work

p Quatrain: Stanza or group of four lines that can have different rhyme schemes. Shakespeare's sonnets often contain three quatrains and a couplet.

Refrain: Repetition in a work of literature of a phrase or lines.

Rhythm: Distinguish this from metre, which has to do with the *technical, identifiable* organization of lines into units of stressed and unstressed syllables. Rhythm applies to both prose and poetry and has to do more generally with the flow of sound created by stressed and unstressed syllables. (Steady, irregular?)

* Satire: Exposing and ridiculing of human follies in a society, sometimes with the aim to reform, sometimes predominantly to deflate. May be gentle, comic, biting or bitter, or a combination. Chaucer, Swift, Jane Austen and Dickens use this tool memorably.

* Setting: Context in which a work of literature takes place: geographical, social, historical, generalized, conventional, symbolic, etc. See Chapter Two for more details.

* Simile: Where a comparison is made explicit with 'as' or 'like' (distinguish from metaphor). Can make descriptions vivid and unusual. Dickens is a master of the simile.

Skaz: (From the Russian). A technique of narration that mirrors oral narration with its hesitations, corrections, grammatical mistakes, interactions, etc. *Catcher in the Rye* uses this, but also *Huckleberry Finn*, amongst others.

✓ Soliloquy: A speech by a character alone on stage, thinking aloud, revealing thoughts and emotions, or communicating directly with the audience. Powerful tool for revealing psychological complexity, used often by Shakespeare.

p Sonnet: A fourteen-line rhyming poem often in iambic pentameter. Rhyme schemes and organization of lines vary, depending on the type of sonnet (for example, Shakespearean), but often set out as a block of 8 lines (octave) and six lines (sestet). (*Petrarchan or Italian*)

p Stanza: The blocks of lines into which a poem is organized. In traditional forms of poetry each stanza follows a scheme governing metre, lines and rhymes.

Story: (Distinguish this from plot). The events of a narrative in the chronological order in which they actually happened.

✓ Stream of consciousness: (See Chapter Two) The impression of a random stream of thoughts.

* Style: Necessary concept to know and use, but tricky to define and discuss. It has to do with the distinctive traits in an author's work, the 'how' of writing. It concerns theme, diction (emotional, abstract, poetic), sentence construction, imagery, sound, etc.

* Subtext: Ideas, feelings, thoughts, not dealt with directly in the text but existing underneath. Quite a useful concept especially when reading plays, as characters don't always express their real thoughts.

* Symbol: Objects that represent or evoke an idea or concept of wider, abstract significance, as roses represent love, walls divisions.

p Syntax: (See the discussion in Chapter One of this Guide) The grammatical structure of words in a sentence. The normal order of words can be slightly displaced to create a particular effect, without losing the sense. Macbeth: "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown".

* Theme: Central ideas or issues, often abstract (for example racial injustice) explored or illustrated in a text. Can also refer to an argument raised or pursued in a text, like a thesis.

* Tone: (Distinguish from mood, above.) The *technique* of writing to convey the attitude of the writer towards his/her subject. Created through aspects of language like diction, syntax, rhythm, which will suggest a 'tone of voice'. Emotional meaning. See discussion on Wilfred Owen in Chapter One.

Trochee/ trochaic: The reverse of iambic, as in: "Mary had a little lamb". It may be used as a contrast within an iambic line, to stress an idea (as at the beginning of lines two and three of "The Eagle", Chapter One, where it emphasises the visual image).

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