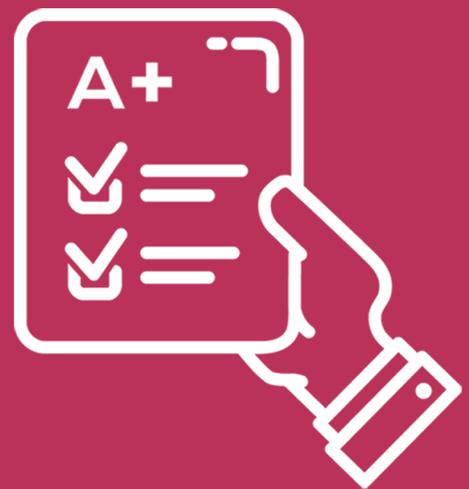


# The Ultimate List of English Literary Techniques

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**140+ Literary Device Definitions and Examples to  
Help You Analyse Any Written, Poetic, Visual,  
Film and Theatrical Text**

SECOND EDITION  
Krystal Kovacs, Founder of *Tutornova*



# Hello

and welcome to the coolest and most comprehensive study guide for literary techniques that you've ever laid your eyes on.

We've made it *print friendly*, so print it off and get highlighter happy! Use this list as a quick reference guide when analysing texts for your assessments or to study before your next English exam, so you're well prepared to analyse unseen texts.

These techniques and devices may have been created by a bunch of old dead guys, but they're what make great storytelling, well, great! Without them, we wouldn't have such a rich catalog of literature to draw from and continue reading to this day.

If that doesn't excite you, or if you feel like you're having a tough time keeping these definitions straight, try to find examples of them in the music that you listen to and the television shows and movies that you watch today. It'll make them stick in your head, and they'll be much easier to recognise later.

Deciphering a text may seem intimidating, but this book contains the tools to help you work your way through it with as much ease as possible. The definitions in this book are straightforward, and the examples are clear and relevant. It'll be no time at all before you can pick up any book or view any image and point out dozens of devices without even breaking a sweat.

Best of luck! See you on the other side.

P.S. To give you a little extra assistance, any words that you see mentioned in an explanation that are found somewhere else in this book have been marked in **bold**.

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## **CHAPTER 1:**

# **Written Techniques**

# Written Techniques

Many of the techniques in this category will often be found across different mediums. Don't second-guess yourself if you think you've found an **allusion** in a poem or **foreshadowing** in a play. You're probably right!

## **Allegory**

Definition: An allegory is a text that has a second meaning beyond its literal one. Allegories are often used to explain morals or political situations.

Example: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an allegorical novel about communism. All of the animals on the farm represent different members of a communist society.

Quick Clue: Can you interpret a deeper meaning for the whole story? If so, it's probably an allegory.

## **Alliteration**

Definition: Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of multiple words in a sentence or group of sentences.

Example: Susan Smith saw some sneaky squirrels snatching her snacks, so she sought out Sheriff Sanders to spy on several suspicious squirrely suspects.

Quick Clue: If the sentence that you're reading sounds a bit like a tongue-twister, it's definitely using alliteration.

## **Allusion**

Definition: An allusion is an indirect reference to something else. Authors often allude to things like culture, politics, history, and other works of literature.

Example: Charlie lies so often that I'm surprised his nose isn't a foot long by now! This sentence is an allusion to the story of Pinocchio, whose nose grew every time he told a lie.

Quick Clue: Do you recognise a reference as being familiar? Congratulations, you caught an allusion!

## **Anaphora**

Definition: Anaphora is the repetition of or a word or phrase at the beginning of multiple lines or sentences. Authors use this to create a dramatic significance for what they're saying.

Example: I remember when we met. I remember our first date. I remember our first kiss. I remember saying, "I do."

Quick Clue: Do you see the same few words repeated with a different set of words following them? If so, that's anaphora.

## **Anastrophe**

Definition: Anastrophe is inversion of certain words in a sentence. This usually happens with the subject, verb, and object.

Example: Pretty much all of Yoda's speech pattern is anastrophe. "Judge me by my size, do you?"

Quick Clue: If the sentence makes sense but the words are in a slightly different order than what's considered to be a normal speech pattern, it's anastrophe.

## **Antagonist**

Definition: The antagonist is the force that comes into **conflict** with the main character, the **protagonist**. The antagonist can be a person, a group of people, or something less concrete, like the weather or society.

Example: In *The Hunger Games*, President Snow and the rest of the Capitol are the antagonist to Katniss because they represent everything that she fights against.

Quick Clue: If the main character is fighting against something, it's likely the antagonist.

## **Anthropomorphism**

Definition: Anthropomorphism is when plants, animals, or other non--human objects have human characteristics. The difference between this and **personification** or **pathetic fallacy** is that anthropomorphic beings are actual living characters.

Example: *Toy Story* is a film about a group of toys that walk, talk, and interact with each other. They are still anthropomorphic even though they don't move when real humans are around.

Quick Clue: If there's a non--human character in your story that acts just as we humans do, he or she (or it) is anthropomorphic.

## **Antimetabole**

Definition: Antimetabole is the repetition of a set of words in reverse order for a dramatic effect. Although they may use a similar grammatical structure, the difference between this and **antithesis** is that antimetabole repeats the exact same words.

Example: Ask not what your group project can do for you... ask what you can do for your group project.

Quick Clue: Does the second half of the sentence just about mirror the first half? If so, it's antimetabole.

## **Antithesis**

Definition: Antithesis is a figure of speech that sets two opposing words or ideas against

each other in a parallel grammatical structure. Although they may seem similar, the difference between this and **antimetabole** is that antithesis uses different words.

Example: We must work together as a team or we will face defeat alone.

Quick Clue: Do you see one or more pairs of opposites pitted against each other? If so, that's antithesis.

### **Aphorism**

Definition: An aphorism is a common phrase or saying that suggests something wise and truthful. Aphorisms are often sprinkled throughout a text and offered as advice or wisdom from sage characters.

Example: Dying is easy. Living is hard. Calculus is harder.

Quick Clue: Is it a phrase that sounds a bit clever and witty and seems to share some useful tips for life? It might be an aphorism.

### **Archetype**

Definition: An archetype is a basic idea of a character, situation, or symbol that can be found throughout many works of literature. Common archetypes include the hero/heroine, mentor, and outcast; the quest, initiation, and fall from grace; and the magic weapon, unhealable wound, and crossroads.

Example: The Joker, the Cheshire Cat, and Bugs Bunny all fall under the trickster archetype because they love to cause mischief and create chaos for other characters.

Quick Clue: If you can think of a million other examples of characters with similar traits or situations that follow the same series of events, it's probably because it's an archetype.

### **Assonance**

Definition: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds within sentences. Along with **consonance**, it is a common technique within lines of poetry.

Example: John thought he lost his mom's frog, Bob.

Quick Clue: If the vowel sounds rhyme but the endings don't, it's assonance.

### **Asyndeton**

Definition: Asyndeton is the absence of conjunctions in a sentence in places where they would normally be.

Example: I came, I saw, I ate twelve burritos, I immediately regretted it. Oops.

Quick Clue: Is there a distinct lack of conjunctions in the sentence? It's asyndeton.

### **Bildungsroman**

Definition: A bildungsroman is a story that follows the main character as he or she grows up and changes. It is also known as a coming--of--age story.

Example: Famous examples of bildungsroman include everything from *Great Expectations* to *American Pie*. It all works as long as the main character goes on some sort of journey of self--development.

Quick Clue: If the **protagonist** ages and matures in a significant way in the story, you can call it a bildungsroman.

### **Catharsis**

Definition: A character goes through catharsis during an experience that cleanses him or her of negative emotion and leaves that character feeling fresh and renewed.

Example: You might experience catharsis by ugly--crying during a sappy romantic film like *The Notebook* or *The Fault in Our Stars* after a breakup.

Quick Clue: Did the character seem to be purged of hopelessness, fear, or despair? He or she likely went through catharsis.

### **Character, dynamic**

Definition: A dynamic character is one who experiences some sort of change or growth throughout the course of the text. This is the opposite of a **static character**.

Example: Rob starts off as being extremely an extremely greedy person, but by the end, he learns the value of charity and how to be generous and giving.

Quick Clue: Is the character different in some way compared to when the story began? He or she is dynamic. Virtually all main characters are dynamic because one of the main points of following a **plot** is to see the **protagonist** experience development in some way.

### **Character, flat**

Definition: A flat character is one who shows only one personality trait. This person is probably just a side character and will most likely seem like a caricature of the one trait that he or she displays. He or she is the opposite of a **round character**.

Example: Kate likes to complain. Every single time we see her, she is miserably whining about something. Complaining about the situation is literally the only thing that we ever witness her do.

Quick Clue: Does the character seem very one--dimensional? He or she is probably flat. Typically, only secondary or tertiary characters will be flat because there is nothing interesting about a main character who does not show a depth to his or her personality.

### **Character, round**

Definition: A round character is one who displays multiple personality traits. He or she is fleshed out and has a depth that a **flat character** does not.

Example: Michelle goes to art school. She is passionate about her projects but

# END OF SAMPLE

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