

16. *In the Waiting Room*, Elizabeth Bishop
17. *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, John Keats
18. *Sunday Morning*, Wallace Stevens
19. *The Colonel*, Carolyn Forché
20. Any Shakespearean sonnet

Basic Elements of Language

Chapter
8

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OVERVIEW

This chapter has two main purposes. The first is to fill in the gaps in terminology between fiction/drama and poetry. There are certain terms that are vital to all areas of writing. The term “metaphor” is one of them. But there are other terms that are more specific to a genre or purpose, such as rhyme scheme for poetry or soliloquy for drama. This chapter aims to define more terms that you may need to know for the exam.

The second purpose of this chapter is to give you a basic understanding of rhetoric and why it is important on the AP Lit exam. The AP English Language and Composition exam is the full-fledged test of your rhetorical skills, but there are some questions on the AP English Literature and Composition exam that have to do with argument and persuasion. The terms and concepts in this chapter focus on the uses of language, aspects of argument, and elements of linguistic style.

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

Rhetoric is the use of language to persuade. In more general terms, rhetoric is the effective use of language for a variety of purposes. If you intend to study for the AP English Language and Composition exam, you will become much more intimately familiar with rhetoric and rhetorical devices. For now, though, it is enough to recognize a few basic aspects.

You may be presented with an argument in a variety of genres: essay, poem, narrative prose, even an excerpt from a novel. For example, a poet may argue that time is short, so it is best to love while we can, as in Marvell's poem *To His Coy Mistress*. Marvell's poem is an excellent example of a highly structured argument in poetic form.

A variety of questions regarding rhetoric are typically found on the AP Lit exam. Some common types are listed below:

- The question asks you to determine the primary rhetorical effect, purpose, or function of a passage or section.
- The question asks you to identify the central rhetorical strategy used in the passage. See more on rhetorical strategies below.
- The question asks you to determine the purpose, function, or rhetorical purpose of a sentence, phrase, clause, or word.
- The question asks you to determine the effect of a rhetorical shift.

KEY TERMS

1. **abstraction:** a concept or idea without a specific example; idealized generalities
2. **abstract noun:** ideas or things that can mean many things to many people, such as peace, honor, etc.
3. **analogy:** compares two things that are similar in several respects in order to prove a point or clarify an idea
4. **antecedent:** that which comes before; the antecedent of a pronoun is the noun to which the pronoun refers (you may be expected to find this relationship)
5. **antithesis:** the opposite of an idea used to emphasize a point; the juxtaposition of contrasting words or ideas. Example: *To err is human; to forgive, divine.*
6. **catalog (list):** Walt Whitman used catalogs or lists of like elements in his poems; lists of details can reinforce a concept. Inductive arguments build to a conclusion based on the collective impression of lists (facts).
7. **circumlocution:** to write around a subject; to write evasively; to say nothing
8. **double entendre:** a phrase or saying that has two meanings, one being sexual or provocative in nature
9. **euphemism:** a kinder, gentler, less crude or harsh word or phrase to replace one that seems imprudent to use in a particular situation
10. **ethos:** a speaker or writer's credibility; his or her character, honesty, commitment to the writing

11. **hyperbole**: an exaggeration or overstatement—saying more than is warranted by the situation in order to expose reality by comparison; also, one of the main techniques in satire
12. **juxtapose (juxtaposition)**: to place side by side in order to show similarities or differences
13. **lists**: see catalog
14. **oxymoron**: a figure of speech in which two contradictory elements are combined for effect, such as “deafening silence”
15. **paradox**: the juxtaposition of incongruous or conflicting ideas that reveal a truth or insight
16. **parody**: a humorous imitation of an original text meant to ridicule, used as a technique in satire
17. **parallel structure**: equal or similar grammatical or rhetorical elements used side by side or in succession, generally for emphasis
18. **pathos**: the quality in literature that appeals to the audience’s emotions
19. **repetition**: any of a variety of devices that emphasize through repetition: one example of a repetition device is *anaphora*, which is the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences
20. **rhetoric**: the use of language for persuasion (in our context, persuasive writing)
21. **rhetorical strategy**: various strategies and appeals that writers use to persuade. The main appeals are to logic/reason, to needs, to tradition, to emotion, and to ethics/fairness.

22. **satire**: type of literature that exposes idiocy, corruption, or other human folly through humor, exaggeration, and irony
23. **understatement**: saying less than is warranted by the situation in order to emphasize reality
24. **verb phrase**: the verb and its object and modifiers
25. **vernacular**: the ordinary, everyday speech of a region

BASIC RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

Entire books have been written on this subject, but you don’t have the time or the need to read one of those. Instead, know these basic strategies and you will do well.

BASIC APPEALS:

A writer can appeal to readers’

- **needs** (hierarchy of needs: shelter, esteem, etc.)
- **sense of tradition** (we’ve always done it this way)
- **ethics** (sense of fairness, right or wrong)
- **emotions** (pull at the heartstrings)
- **logic/reason** (suggest what is logical and support it with a reasoned argument)

There are also appeals to

- **authority** (stating facts, expert opinion, statistics)
- **accepted values** (success, freedom, equality, etc.)

STYLISTIC DEVICES EFFECTIVE WRITERS USE:

- evocative or emotive language
- lists of relevant details
- figurative language, especially to get readers to see things in a fresh way
- imagery, appeals to senses and draws readers in to the text
- repetition, used for emphasis
- parallel structure, used for emphasis
- irony, gets us to see the truth
- analogy, shows logical relationships

MODES/FORMS OF RHETORIC

- cause and effect
- problem and solution
- narrative
- description
- definition
- humor
- satire

THE VERBS OF RHETORIC

The questions and prompts in the AP Lit exam are loaded with a variety of verbs. It is important to know what each means, as subtle differences may be important in understanding the question or your task.

Allege: to assert but without proof; allegations require proof

Analyze: to break apart; to look at component parts of a text in order to understand an aspect of the whole

Argue: to defend a claim, to provide evidence for an assertion

Assert: to formally declare as true

Broach: to bring up a topic for discussion

Characterize: to depict something in a certain way; to give specific characteristics of someone or something

Claim: to make a statement of “fact,” something you intend to prove.

Clarify: to draw distinctions, to make more evident, to lessen confusion

Discuss: to consider in writing a variety of possible views (ways of interpretation) on a topic

Dramatize: to give a story to a situation, to add vivid details, such as imagery, figurative language, etc.

Emphasize: to give added importance or weight to something

Establish: to set a foundation for, to base a claim on an observation

Imply: to state indirectly; to have a logical consequence

Indicate: to be a signal of; to state or express

Observe: to take notice of, and thereby, it is implied, to draw conclusions.

Paraphrase: to put into more common, less complex (or technical) language

Propose: to suggest a plan or a solution to a problem

Rebuff: to reject

Suggest: to offer a perspective, a solution, a way of thinking about something for consideration

Support: to give reasons and examples for a statement of fact or a claim.

A QUESTION OF GRAMMAR

The AP Lit exam is not a grammar test. It is a literary analysis test. However, your ability to control the conventions of good writing is expected. Also, there tend to be a few questions that ask about relationships between words or parts of sentences. These types of questions test your ability to read and comprehend complex poetry and prose.

Examples:

1. The question asks you to identify what a phrase or clause modifies.
2. The question asks you to make a grammatical connection, such as "The word or phrase refers to . . ."
3. The question asks you to find a word's antecedent.

Hopefully, none of the terms in the preceding questions trouble you, but if so, here are some definitions.

PHRASE:

- A phrase is a group of related words that does not contain a subject and verb. There are a variety of phrase types, but it is unlikely that you will be asked to identify phrase types.

CLAUSE:

- An independent clause is also called a main clause or, more commonly, a sentence. An independent clause has a subject and a verb and can stand independently.
- A subordinate or dependent clause has either a subject or a verb and cannot stand independently.

MODIFIERS:

- *Modifies* means to add meaning to, such as adjectives modifying nouns (*blue dress*) or adverbs modifying verbs (*walked slowly*)

ANTECEDENT:

- *Antecedent* means that which comes before. Pronouns have antecedents: "Laura found her hat on the top shelf." Laura is the antecedent of the pronoun *her*.



The AP Lit exam also tests your ability to write complex or sophisticated prose when writing your essays. When you write, you'll need to consider the types of sentences and how you vary them, the vocabulary you use, including the kinds of verbs you use, and much more. See Chapter 15 for tips on writing well.