

## Rhetorical Terms List for Summer Reading

### AP English Language and Composition

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**Purpose:** Knowing these terms will allow you to discuss an author's work at a more sophisticated level as you discuss how an author achieves his or her purpose. As you read your summer selection, use this list to help identify the author's use of rhetorical devices to help convey their message to the audience. **You will be expected to know these terms.**

**Allusion** – A direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art. Allusions can be historical, literary, religious, topical, or mythical. There are many more possibilities, and a work may simultaneously use multiple layers of allusion. Allusion is used to lend authority to an idea, to make association with something the reader knows to create a memorable phrase.

**Ex.** "Plan ahead: it wasn't raining when Noah built the ark" - Richard Cushing

**Analogy** - A similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them. An analogy can explain something unfamiliar by associating it with or pointing out its similarity to something more familiar. Analogies can also make writing more vivid, imaginative, or intellectually engaging.

**Ex.** He that voluntarily continues ignorance is guilty of all the crimes which ignorance produces, as to him that should extinguish the tapers of a lighthouse might justly be imputed the calamities of shipwrecks." - Samuel Johnson

**Anecdote** – A short narrative detailing particulars of an interesting episode or event. The term most frequently refers to an incident in the life of a person. Used to provide a concrete example or to humanize an abstract concept.

**Antithesis (an-tih-theh-sis)** – Figure of balance in which two contrasting ideas are intentionally juxtaposed, usually through parallel structure; a contrasting of opposing ideas in adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences. Antithesis creates a definite and systematic relationship between ideas.

**Ex.** "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose" – Jim Elliot

"That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind" - Neil Armstrong

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools" – Martin Luther King Jr.

**Colloquialism** (kuj-loh-kwee-uhl-izm) - The use of slang or informalities in speech or writing. Not generally acceptable for formal writing, colloquialisms give a work a conversational, familiar tone. Colloquial expressions in writing include local or regional dialects.

**Diction** – Related to style, diction refers to the writer's word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness. For the AP exam, you should be able to describe an author's diction (for example, formal or informal, ornate or plain) and understand the ways in which diction can complement the author's purpose. Diction, combined with syntax, figurative language, literary devices, etc., creates an author's style.

**Expletive (ek-spli-tiv)** - Figure of emphasis in which a single word or short phrase, usually interrupting normal speech, is used to lend emphasis to the words on either side of the expletive.

**Ex.** *in fact, of course, to be sure, indeed, I suppose, I hope, you know, you see, clearly, in any event, in effect, certainly, remarkably.*

**Euphemism (yoo-fuh-miz-uhm)** - From the Greek for "good speech," euphemisms are a more agreeable or less offensive substitute for a generally unpleasant word or concept. The euphemism may be used to adhere to standards of social or political correctness or to add humor or ironic understatement.

**Ex.** Saying "earthly remains" rather than "corpse" is an example of euphemism.

**Extended metaphor** – A metaphor developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout the work.

**Figurative language** – Writing or speech that is not intended to carry literal meaning and is usually meant to be imaginative and vivid.

**Figure of speech** – A device used to produce figurate language. Many compare dissimilar things. Figures of speech include apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, personification, simile, synecdoche, and understatement.

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**Hyperbole** (hahy-pur-buh-lee) – A figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement. Hyperboles often have a comic effect; however, a serious effect is also possible. Often, hyperbole produces irony. It is used to provoke a response, to cast something in a strong light.

**Ex.** “So first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” - Franklin D. Roosevelt

This stuff is used motor oil compared to the coffee you make, my love.

**Imagery** - The sensory details or figurative language used to describe, arouse emotion, or represent abstractions. On a physical level, imagery uses terms related to the five senses; we refer to visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, or olfactory imagery. On a broader and deeper level, however, one image can represent more than one thing. For example, a rose may present visual imagery while also representing the color in a woman’s cheeks and/or symbolizing some degree of perfection (It is the highest flower on the Great Chain of Being). An author may use complex imagery while simultaneously employing other figures of speech, especially metaphor and simile. In addition, this term can apply to the total of all the images in a work. Pay attention to *how* an author creates imagery and to the effect of this imagery.

**Irony/ironic** - The contrast between what is stated explicitly and what is really meant. The difference between what appears to be and what actually is true. In general, there are three major types of irony used in language; (1) In a *verbal* irony, the words literally state the opposite of the writer’s (or speaker’s) true meaning. (2) In *situational* irony, events turn out the opposite of what was expected. What the characters and the readers think ought to happen. (3) In *dramatic* irony, facts or events are unknown to a character in a play or piece of fiction, but know to the reader, audience, or other characters in the work. Irony is used for many reasons, but frequently, it’s used to create poignancy or humor.

**Juxtaposition** (juh-k-stuh-puh-zish-uhn) - When two words, phrases, images, ideas are placed close together or side by side for comparison or contrast. It often calls attention to extremes.

**Metaphor** – A figure of speech using implied comparison of seemingly unlike things or the substitution of one for the other, suggesting some similarity. Metaphorical language makes writing more vivid, imaginative, thought provoking, and meaningful.

**Metonymy** (mi-ton-uh-mee) – A term from the Greek meaning “changed label” or “substitute name.” Metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of one object is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. A news release that claims “the White House declared” rather than “the President declared” is using metonymy. The substituted term generally carries a more potent emotional response.

**Onomatopoeia** (on-uh-mat-uh-pee-uh) – A figure of speech in which natural sounds are imitated in the sounds of words. Simple examples include such words as *buzz*, *hiss*, *hum*, *crack*, *whinny*, and *murmur*. If see examples of onomatopoeia in an essay passage, note the effect.

**Oxymoron** – From the Greek for “pointedly foolish,” an oxymoron is a figure of speech wherein the author groups apparently contradictory terms to suggest a paradox. Simple examples include “jumbo shrimp” and “cruel kindness.” This term does not usually appear in the multiple-choice questions, but there is a chance that you might find it in an essay. Take note of the effect that the author achieves with this term.

**Paradox** – A statement that appears to be self-contradictory or opposed to common sense but upon closer inspection contains some degree of truth or validity. It is used to point out an apparent contradiction.

**Parallelism** – Also referred to as parallel construction or parallel structure, this term comes from Greek roots meaning “beside one another.” It refers to the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to give structural similarity. This can involve, but is not limited to repetition of a grammatical element such as a preposition or verbal phrase. A famous example of parallelism begins Charles Dickens’s novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity . . .” The effects of parallelism are numerous, but frequently they act as an organizing force to attract the reader’s attention, add emphasis and organization, or simply provide a musical rhythm.

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**Pedantic** (*puh-dan-tik*) - An adjective that describes words, phrases, or general tone that is overly scholarly, academic, or bookish.

**Personification** – A figure of speech in which the author presents or describes concepts, animals, or inanimate objects by endowing them with human attributes or emotions. Personification is used to make these abstractions, animal, or objects appear more vivid to the reader.

**Repetition** - The duplication, either exact or approximate, of any element of language, such as a sound, word, phrase, clause, sentence, or grammatical pattern.

**Rhetorical Question [erotesis]** – posing a question that is not answered by the writer because its answer is obvious or obviously desired, and usually just a yes or no answer would suffice. It is used for effect, emphasis, or provocation, or for drawing a conclusionary statement from the fact at hand.

**Ex.** We shrink from change; yet is there anything that can come into being without it? What does Nature hold dearer, or more proper to herself? Could you have a hot bath unless the firewood underwent some change? Could you be nourished if the food suffered no change? Do you not see, then, that change in yourself is the same order, and no less necessary to Nature? --Marcus Aurelius

**Sarcasm** – From the Greek meaning “to tear flesh,” sarcasm involves bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something. It may use irony as a device, but not all ironic statements are sarcastic, that is, intended to ridicule. When well done, sarcasm can be witty and insightful; when done poorly, it’s simply cruel

**Synecdoche** (*si-nek-duh-kee*) – is a type of metaphor in which the part stands for the whole, the whole for a part, the genus for the species, the species for the genus, the material for the thing made, or in short, any portion, section, or main quality for the whole or the thing itself (or vice versa).

**Ex.** Farmer Joes has two hundred head of cattle [whole cattle], and three hired hands [whole people]. If we had some wheels [whole vehicle], I'd put on my best threads [clothes] and ask for Jane's hand [hopefully her whole person] in marriage.

**Syntax** – The way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax is similar to diction, but you can differentiate them by thinking of syntax as the groups of words, while diction refers to the individual words. In the multiple-choice section, expect to be asked some questions about how an author manipulates syntax. In the essay section, you will need to analyze how syntax produces effects.

**Tone** – Similar to mood, tone describes the author's attitude toward his material, the audience, or both. Tone is easier to determine in spoken language than in written language. Considering how a work would sound if it were read aloud can help in identifying an author's tone. Some words describing tone are *playful, serious, businesslike, sarcastic, humorous, formal, ornate, sardonic, and somber*.

**Understatement** – The ironic minimizing of fact, understatement presents something as less significant than it is. The effect can frequently be humorous and emphatic. Understatement is the opposite of hyperbole.

**Ex.** The 1906 San Francisco earthquake interrupted business somewhat in the downtown area.  
Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse. – Jonathan Swift

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Information in handout compiled from the following resources:

- \* *Essential Literary Terms with Exercises* – Sharon Hamilton
- \* *A Handbook of Rhetorical Devices* – Robert A. Harris [<http://www.virtualsalt.com/rhetorichtmj>]
- \* *American Rhetoric: Rhetorical Figures in Sound* [<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/rhetoricaldevicesinsound.htm>]
- \* “Glossary of Terms” – V. Stevenson