

What Are Literary Devices?

Literary devices are techniques used by writers to enhance or elaborate on some element of the literary work. There are a large number of different literary devices; some are used primarily in poetry, while others are used in [prose](#) writing.

How and When to Use Literary Devices

What are literary devices used for? Literary devices can add additional layers of meaning to a writer's work, and writers typically take great care in selecting literary devices to include in their work. Occasionally, however, a scholar may identify a literary device that the writer did not intend to include in a literary work. For example, a scholar or careful reader may see some object in a work as symbolic, though the writer may have never considered it to be so.

Identifying literary devices can help students gain a better understanding of a work of literature, thereby helping them to write stronger essays [analyzing literature](#). Viewing literary devices examples can aid readers in identifying these techniques encountered in reading.

Common Literary Devices

Writers use many different types of literary devices, but some are more common than others. This section discusses five commonly used literary devices: diction, imagery, metaphor, point of view and structure.

The best writers use literary devices in original ways, and every writer can attempt to add meaning by finding an unusual and appropriate way to include one or more literary devices. For example, a short story may benefit from the writer's experimentation with different ways to structure the narrative. Rather than starting at the beginning of the story, the story could be structured to begin in the middle of the action. A good writer might be willing to try rearranging the order of events to find the most effective way to tell the story.

Diction

Diction simply means word choice. Writers are able to choose words that have different connotations to achieve exactly the meaning they wish to convey. For example, the words *famous*, *celebrity*, and *notorious* all mean *well-known*, but a writer might choose to describe a well-known criminal as *notorious* because the word's connotation is a bit darker than its synonyms.

Imagery

Imagery is the use of words to paint a picture for the reader. Most of the time, readers will encounter [visual imagery](#) in literary works, though imagery can depict any of the five senses. For example, the well-known poem "[The Red Wheelbarrow](#)" by [William Carlos Williams](#) contains a vivid description of a red wheelbarrow. "So much depends", the poem says, "upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain beside the white chickens." The imagery in this poem is clear and striking, and the poem effectively paints a picture with words.

Metaphor

A **metaphor** is a direct comparison. Metaphors differ from similes. While both are types of comparison, a **simile** is an implied comparison that uses the words *like* or *as*. A well-known example of metaphor appears in William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. Shakespeare says, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."



Point of View

Point of view, sometimes abbreviated as POV, in literature refers to the primary speaker or viewpoint of the work.

First person POV uses **first-person pronouns** such as *I*, *me*, or *my*. First person point of view is typically used for memoir writing or stories in which the speaker is the main witness to the action. An example of first person point of view occurs in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. The narrator says, "Many years after the war Jimmy Cross came to visit me at my home in Massachusetts, and for a full day we drank coffee and smoked cigarettes and talked about everything we had seen and done so long ago, all the things we still carried through our lives." The use of first-person pronouns indicate that this passage uses first person point of view.



Writers use a literary device called imagery to create vivid pictures in the minds of readers.

Second person POV uses some form of the word *you*, which is a **second person pronoun**. This point of view is less commonly found than first or third person **point of view in literature**. An example of a work that uses **second person point of view** is Rudyard Kipling's "If". The poem provides advice for living to someone, the *you* of the poem. "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you," the poem begins.

Third person POV occurs in a story told by an observer using **third-person pronouns** such as *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*. This point of view is exemplified by a passage from Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path". "She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock."

Structure

Structure refers to the way a literary work is organized. Some writers play around with structure. For instance, in "A Rose for Emily" William Faulkner switches between past and present events. Writers usually present narrative prose in chronological order, but the unusual structure of Faulkner's well-known short story allows him to reveal information to the reader in such a way that the ending is all the more shocking and horrifying.

Other types of works, such as plays and poetry, have other types of structure. Plays usually rely on acts and scenes to provide structure to the work, while poetry is sometimes structured in stanzas of related ideas.

Literary Devices in Poetry

Literary devices in poetry also aid the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the poem. There are a number of literary devices that are common in various styles of poetry, and this section includes ten of the most commonly used. These are caesura, end-stopped lines, enjambment, internal rhyme, meter, slant rhyme, acrostics, anapest, and ekphrasis.

Caesura

Caesura is a pause or a stop within a line of poetry. A well-known example of caesura is Hamlet's lament in William Shakespeare's play by the same name. "To be, or not to be--that is the question." The pause before the word *that* is one example, and the pause after the first *to be* is another caesura.

End-Stopped Line

An **end-stopped line** occurs when a line of poetry ends at a standard grammatical break such as a sentence or a phrase containing a complete thought. Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" begins with several end-stopped lines, including the first line: "I came to explore the wreck."

Enjambment

Enjambment, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite of end-stopped lines. It refers to a line of poetry which does not end at the close of a standard grammatical break; instead, the thought is carried over from one line to the next. Enjambment occurs in these lines from *Macbeth*: "The raven himself is hoarse/That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan/Under my battlements."

Internal Rhyme

Internal rhyme occurs when a line in the middle of a metrical line of poetry is rhymed with a word in the line that follows it or even within a single line. This type of rhyme differs from **end rhymes**, in which the rhyming words appear at the end of a metrical line of poetry. Internal rhyme occurs with the words *remember*, *December*, and *ember* in these two lines from "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. "Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;/And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor."

Meter

Meter is simply the rhythm of a line of poetry, created by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. One of the most common poetic meters is iambic pentameter, which William Shakespeare commonly used

in his plays. The term **iambic** indicates that a line contains an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The word *below* is an example of **iambic meter**. Iambic pentameter means the poem contains five of these iambic units in a single line. This example from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is written in iambic pentameter. "So foul and fair a day I have not seen."

Blank verse is an unrhymed poem that uses iambic pentameter. Ballad meter is a **quatrain**, or four lines of poetry, in which the first and third lines of the quatrain have four accented syllables, while the second and fourth lines have three accented or stressed syllables. These four lines from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* exemplify ballad meter. "The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,/Merrily did we drop/Below the kirk, below the hill,/Below the lighthouse top."

Rhyme

Rhyme occurs when words sound alike, and poems often have a specific rhyme scheme or pattern of rhyming lines. The words *see* and *tree* rhyme in the opening lines of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees". "I think that I shall never see/A poem as lovely as a tree."

Slant Rhyme

Slant rhyme refers to words that have similar but not identical sounds, as would be found in traditional rhyming lines. Slant rhyme is sometimes called half rhyme or imperfect rhyme. Examples of **slant rhymes** can be found in many of Emily Dickinson's poems. For example, she writes, "Hope is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul,/And sings the tune without the words,/And never stops at all." In this case, the words *soul* and *all* are examples of slant rhyme.

Acrostic

In an **acrostic poem**, the first letters of the lines spell out a word or words that contribute to the theme or message of the poem. For example, in the poem titled "Georgiana Augusta Keats" poet John Keats uses the first letter of each line to spell out the name *Georgiana Augusta Keats*. "Kind sister! aye, this third name says you are;/Enchanted has it been the Lord knows where;/And may it taste to you like good old wine,/Take you to real happiness and give/Sons, daughters and a home like honied hive."

Anapest

A poem using **Anapest**, a type of poetic meter, will contain two unstressed (unaccented) syllables followed by a stressed (accented) syllable. This meter differs from iambic meter, in which a metrical foot will contain an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. **Dactyl**, another type of meter, is one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. Anapest and dactyl, then, are exact opposites. Anapest is used in "The Destruction of Sennacherib", a well-known poem by Lord Byron. "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,/And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold."

Ekphrasis



When writers include a description of a visual work of art, they are using a technique called ekphrasis.

enhance or elaborate on some element of the literary work. Learning to identify and understand literary devices is a great help in analyzing works of literature.

Common literary devices are:

- **diction**
- **imagery**
- **metaphor**
- **point of view**
- **structure**

Literary devices in poetry include:

- **caesura**
- **end-stopped line**
- **enjambment**
- **internal rhyme**
- **meter**

Ekphrasis is a literary device that refers to a literary work containing a description of a work of visual art. John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" features a description of fate of two lovers depicted on an urn, a work of visual art. In the poem, the lovers are frozen in position on the urn, unable to reach each other.

Literary Devices List

While we have seen some common literary devices, this section will list a few of the less common.

- **Hyperbole** is an **exaggeration** that is not intended to be understood literally. For instance, Romeo says, "The brightness of Juliet's cheek would shame those stars" in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
- **Onomatopoeia** is a literary device in which a word's sound echoes its meaning. Alfred Noyes uses onomatopoeia to describe the sound of horses' hooves in "**The Highwayman**." *Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it?" he writes, using the word tlot to mimic the sound of the horses*

Lesson Summary

Literary devices are techniques used by writers to

- rhyme
- slant rhyme
- acrostic
- anapest
- ekphrasis

1. What is the difference between a metaphor and simile?

A metaphor is a comparison between objects, where as a simile is a comparison between people.

A simile is a metaphor that uses the words 'like' or 'as.'

There is no difference.

A metaphor is used in fiction and a simile used in poetry.

2. When an author includes a quotation from another literary piece at the beginning of her work, this is called a(n) ____.

allusion

epitaph

epigraph

simile

3. Which of the following demonstrates a first-person point-of-view?

You walked home from the store.

I walked home from the store.

None of these are correct.

Jeremy walked home from the store.

4. What is the primary purpose of literary devices?

A. To confuse the reader

B. To enhance or elaborate on some element of the literary work

- C. To simplify the text
- D. To shorten the length of a literary work

5. What does diction refer to in literature?

- A. The structure of a sentence
- B. The rhythm of a poem
- C. The choice of words by a writer
- D. The use of metaphors

6. Which of the following is an example of imagery?

- A. "The bright sun warmed the sand."
- B. "Life is like a box of chocolates."
- C. "She sang softly, like a whisper."
- D. "The story unfolded in a linear structure."

7. A metaphor is different from a simile because it:

- A. Is a direct comparison
- B. Uses the words like or as
- C. Is used only in poetry
- D. Compares two unrelated things

8. Which point of view uses first-person pronouns like I, me, or my?

- A. First person

- B. Second person
- C. Third person
- D. Omniscient

9. What literary device is being used when a line in poetry ends at a natural grammatical break?

- Enjambment
- Caesura
- C. End-stopped line
- D. Internal rhyme

10. Which of the following best defines enjambment in poetry?

- A. A pause within a line
- B. The continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line
- C. The repetition of sounds at the end of words
- D. A line that completes a full thought

11. What is the primary function of meter in poetry?

- A. To create visual imagery
- B. To establish the poem's rhythm
- C. To organize the poem into stanzas
- D. To rhyme words at the end of lines

12. Which literary device is an exaggeration not meant to be taken literally?

- A. Metaphor
- B. Onomatopoeia
- C. Hyperbole
- D. Imagery

13. What is an example of slant rhyme?

- A. Moon and June
- B. Cat and Bat
- C. Soul and All
- D. Tree and See

14. 'Tlot-tlot' in 'The Highwayman' is an example of which literary device?

- Metaphor
- Imagery
- Onomatopoeia
- Alliteration

15. What is the effect of using first person point of view in a narrative?

- It creates a sense of detachment from the story.
- It allows the author to present multiple perspectives.
- It provides a personal, intimate experience of the story.

It offers an unbiased viewpoint.

1. What is the difference between a metaphor and simile?

1. A metaphor is a comparison between objects, where as a simile is a comparison between people.

2. A simile is a metaphor that uses the words 'like' or 'as.'



3. There is no difference.

4. A metaphor is used in fiction and a simile used in poetry.

2. When an author includes a quotation from another literary piece at the beginning of her work, this is called a(n) _____.

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2. epitaph

3. epigraph



4. simile

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1. You walked home from the store.

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3. None of these are correct.

4. Jeremy walked home from the store.

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3. It provides a personal, intimate experience of the story.



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Literary Devices | Definition, Types & Examples - Essay

1. "Examine the significance of literary devices in shaping the reader's experience and understanding of literary work. Choose two literary devices discussed in the text (such as metaphor, imagery, point of view, or diction) and analyze how they contribute to the depth and richness of a narrative. Provide examples from well-known literary works to support your analysis." Summarize

2. "Discuss the importance of structure in a literary work and how it can influence the reader's interpretation and engagement with the story. Focus on one specific type of structure (such as chronological, non-linear, or point of view shifts) and evaluate its effectiveness in creating suspense, developing characters, or enhancing the thematic elements of the story. Use examples from literature to illustrate your points, considering works that either adhere to traditional structures or innovate with unique structural elements."

 Summarize