

**allusion:** A reference in a work of literature to something outside the work, especially to a well-known historical or literary event, person, or work. Allusions can also include references to mythology, art, and culture. Lorraine Hansberry's title *A Raisin in the Sun* is an allusion to a phrase in a poem by Langston Hughes. When T. S. Eliot writes, "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," he is alluding to the lines "Let us roll all our strength and all / Our sweetness up into one ball" in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." In *Hamlet*, when Horatio says, "ere the mightiest Julius fell," he is alluding to the death of Julius Caesar.

**attitude:** The disposition toward or opinion of a subject by a speaker, author, or character. For example, Hamlet's attitude toward Gertrude is a mixture of affection and revulsion, changing from one to the other within a single scene. Jane Austen's attitude toward Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* combines respect for his wit and intelligence with disapproval of his failure to take sufficient responsibility for the rearing of all of his daughters.

**details (also choice of details):** Details are the individual items or parts that make up a larger picture or story. Chaucer's "Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* is celebrated for its successful use of just a few details to bring the characters to life. The miller, for example, is described as being brawny and big-boned, able to win wrestling contests or to break a door with his head, and having a wart on his nose on which grew a "tuft of hairs red as the bristles of a sow's ears."

**devices of sound:** The techniques of deploying the sound of words, especially in poetry. Included among devices of sound are rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia. These are defined later under metrical terms. These devices are used for many reasons, including to create a general effect of pleasant or of discordant sound, to imitate another sound, or to reflect a meaning.

**diction:** Word choice. Nearly all essay questions on a passage of prose or a poem will ask you to talk about

diction or about "techniques" that include diction. Any of the words that are important to the meaning and the effect of a passage can be used effectively in your essay. Often several words with a similar effect are worth discussion, such as George Eliot's use in *Adam Bede* of "sunny afternoons," "slow waggons," and "bargains" to make the leisure of bygone days appealing. These words are also details.

**figurative language:** Writing that uses figures of speech, such as metaphor, simile, and irony (as opposed to literal language, or that which is actually or specifically denoted). Figurative language uses words to mean something other than their literal meaning. "The black bat night has flown" is figurative, with the metaphor comparing a black night to a black bat. "Night is over" says the same thing without figurative language. No real bat is or has been on the scene, but night may be described like a bat because it is dark.

**imagery:** The images created by a literary work; the sensory details of a work; the figurative language of a work. Imagery has several definitions, but two are paramount: one is the visual, auditory, or tactile images evoked by the words of a literary work, and the second is the images that figurative language evokes. When an AP question asks you to discuss the images or imagery of a work, you should take careful note of the sensory details and the metaphors and similes of a passage. Some diction (word choice) is also imagery, but not all diction evokes sensory responses.

**irony:** A figure of speech in which the intended meaning and the actual meaning differ, characteristically using praise to indicate blame or using blame to indicate praise; a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement of its own obvious meaning. The term irony implies a discrepancy. In verbal irony (saying the opposite of what one means), the discrepancy is between statement and meaning. Sometimes, irony may simply understate, as in "Men have died from time to time . . ." When Mr. Bennet, who loathes Wickham, says he is perhaps his "favorite" son-in-law, he is using irony.

**metaphor:** A figurative use of language in which a comparison is expressed without the use of a comparative term like “as,” “like,” or “than.” A simile would say, “Night is like a black bat;” a metaphor would say, “the black bat night.” When Romeo says, “It is the east, and Juliet is the sun,” he uses metaphor to compare her window to the east and Juliet to the sun.

**narrative techniques:** The methods involved in telling a story; the procedures used by a writer of stories or accounts. Narrative technique is a general term (like “devices,” or “resources of language”) that asks you to discuss the procedures used in the telling of a story. Examples of the techniques you might use are point of view, manipulation of time, dialogue, or interior monologue.

**omniscient point of view:** The vantage point of a story in which the narrator can know, see, and report whatever he or she chooses. The narrator is free to describe the thoughts of any of the characters, to skip about in time or place, or to speak directly to the reader. Most of the novels of Austen, Dickens, and Hardy employ the omniscient point of view.

**point of view:** Any of several possible vantage points from which a story is told. The point of view may be omniscient, limited to several characters, or to just a single character. And there are additional possibilities. The teller may use the first person (as in *Great Expectations* or *Wuthering Heights*) or the third person (as in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or *A Tale of Two Cities*). Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* uses the point of view of all the members of the Bundren family, and others as well, in the first person, while in *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Lockwood tells us the story that Nelly Dean tells him, a first-person narration reported by a second first-person narrator.

**resources of language:** A general phrase for the linguistic devices or techniques that a writer can use. A question calling for the “resources of language” invites a student to discuss the style and rhetoric of a passage. Such topics as diction, syntax, figurative language, and imagery are all examples of resources of language.

**rhetorical techniques:** The devices used in effective or persuasive language. The number of rhetorical techniques, like that of the resources of language, is long and runs from apostrophe to zeugma. The more common examples include devices like contrast, repetition, paradox, understatement, sarcasm, and rhetorical question.

**satire:** Writing that uses ridicule to arouse a reader’s disapproval of the subject. Satire is usually comedy

that exposes errors with an eye to correct vice and folly. A classical form, satire is found, for instance, in the verse of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, the plays of Ben Jonson and Bernard Shaw, and the novels of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Joseph Heller.

**setting:** The background of a story; the physical location of a play, story, or novel. The setting of a narrative normally includes both time and place. The setting of *A Tale of Two Cities* is London and Paris at the time of the French Revolution, but the setting of *Waiting for Godot* is indeterminate; it is impossible to pin down specifically.

**simile:** A directly expressed comparison; a figure of speech comparing two objects, usually with “like,” “as,” or “than.” It is easier to recognize a simile than a metaphor because the comparison is explicit: my love is like a fever; my love is deeper than a well; my love is as dead as a doornail. The plural of “simile” is “similes,” not “similies.”

**strategy (or rhetorical strategy):** The management of language for a specific effect. The strategy or rhetorical strategy of a poem is the planned placing of elements to achieve an effect. For example, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29, “When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,” spends the first nine lines describing the speaker’s discontent, then three describing the happiness that the thought of the loved-one brings, all in a single sentence. The effect of this contrast is to intensify the feelings of relief and joy in lines 10–12. The rhetorical strategy of most love poems is deployed to convince the loved-one to return the speaker’s love. By appealing to the loved-one’s sympathy (“If you don’t return my love, my heart will break.”), or by flattery (“How could I not love someone as beautiful as you?”), or by threat (“When you’re old, you’ll be sorry you refused me.”), the lover attempts to persuade the beloved to love in return.

**structure:** The arrangement of materials within a work; the relationship of the parts of a work to the whole; the logical divisions of a work. The most common principles of structure are series (A, B, C, D, E), contrast (A versus B, C versus D, E versus A), and repetition (AA, BB). The most common units of structure are play (scene, act), novel (chapter), and poem (line, stanza).

**style:** The mode of expression in language; the characteristic manner of expression of an author. Many elements contribute to style, and if a question calls for a discussion of style or of “stylistic techniques,” you can discuss diction, syntax, figurative language, imagery, selection of detail, sound effects, and tone, using the ones that are appropriate. Notice that there are

several phrases used in the essay questions that invite you to choose among several possible topics: “devices of style,” “narrative techniques,” “rhetorical techniques,” “stylistic techniques,” and “resources of language” are all phrases that call for a consideration of more than one technique but do not specify what techniques you must discuss. Usually one of the two essay questions on a set passage will use one of these phrases, while the other question will specify the tasks by asking for “diction, imagery, and syntax” or three or four similar topics.

**symbol:** Something that is simultaneously itself and also a sign of something else. Winter, darkness, and cold are real things, but in literature they are also likely to be used as symbols of death. A paper lantern and a light bulb are real things, but in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, they are also symbols of Blanche’s attempt to escape from reality and reality itself. Yorick’s skull is a symbol of human mortality, and Melville’s white whale is certainly a symbol, but exactly what it specifically symbolizes has yet to be agreed upon.

**syntax:** The structure of a sentence; the arrangement of words in a sentence. A discussion of syntax in your essay could include such considerations as the length or brevity of the sentences, and the kinds of sentences. Sentence types can include questions, exclamations, declarative sentences, and rhetorical questions; periodic or loose sentences; and simple, complex, or compound sentences. Syntax is often addressed on the AP English Language and Composition Exam. It has also been used frequently in recent essay questions on the AP English Literature and Composition Exam.

**theme:** The main thought expressed by a work. Essay questions may ask for discussion of the theme or

themes of a work or may use the words “meaning” or “meanings.” The open question frequently asks you to relate a discussion on one subject to the “meaning of the work as a whole,” or to its “significance to the work as a whole.” When preparing the novels and plays you might use on the open question, be sure to consider what theme or themes you would write about if you were asked to talk about the “meaning of the work.” The question is much harder to answer for some works than others, and all great literature has meanings. It may be difficult to determine the one meaning of *Hamlet*, *Wuthering Heights*, or *Waiting for Godot*. But you will probably have much less trouble defining a theme in works like *Brave New World* or *Animal Farm*. In any case, when discussing theme, try to word it in universal terms about humanity, and not specific terms about only the characters in the text. Notice the difference between writing “Hamlet cannot readily accept what he has to do since it is not in his nature,” and “People who are forced to complete actions that they would normally abhor must undergo intense self-scrutiny.” The first sentence merely describes character; the second addresses theme.

**tone:** The manner in which an author expresses his or her attitude; the intonation of the voice that expresses meaning. Tone is described by adjectives, and the possibilities are plentiful. Often a single adjective will not be enough, and tone may change from chapter to chapter or even line to line. Tone is the result of allusion, diction, figurative language, imagery, irony, symbol, syntax, and style, to cite only the relevant words on this list. In the Wordsworth passage on the 1992 exam, the tone moves from quiet to apprehensive to confident to exuberant to terrified to panicked to uncertain to restive in only twenty-five lines.

**allegory:** A story in which the people, things, and events have another extended, frequently abstract, meaning. Examples of allegory are Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Spenser's "The Faerie Queene," and Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

**ambiguity:** Multiple meanings that a literary work may communicate, especially when two meanings are incompatible.

**\*apostrophe:** Direct address, usually to someone or something that is not present. Keats's "Bright star! Would I were steadfast" is an apostrophe to a star, and "To Autumn" is an apostrophe to a personified season.

**\*connotation:** The implications of a word or phrase, or the emotions associated with it, as opposed to its exact meaning (denotation). The word *Peking* and the word *Beijing* both refer to a city in China, but to a modern reader, the associations of the two words are far different.

**\*convention:** A device of style or subject matter that is used so often that it becomes a recognized means of expression. For example, a character observing the literary conventions for an impassioned lover cannot eat or sleep, and he grows pale and lean. Romeo, at the beginning of the play, adheres to these conventions, while an overweight lover in Chaucer is a conscious mocking of the convention.

**\*denotation:** The specific, literal meaning of a word to be found in a dictionary, as opposed to connotation.

**didactic:** Explicitly instructive. Pope's "Essay on Man" is didactic; so are the novels of Ayn Rand.

**digression:** The inclusion of material unrelated to the actual subject of a work. The interpolated narrations appearing in the novels of Cervantes or Fielding may be called digressions, and *Tristram Shandy* includes a digression on digressions.

**epigram:** A pithy saying, often employing contrast. The epigram is also a verse form, which is usually brief and pointed.

**euphemism:** A figure of speech utilizing indirection to avoid offensive bluntness, such as "deceased" for "dead" or "remains" for "corpse."

**grotesque:** Characterized by distortions or incongruities. The fiction of Poe and Flannery O'Connor is often described as grotesque.

**\*hyperbole:** Deliberate exaggeration, overstatement. As a rule, hyperbole is self-conscious, with the intention of not being accepted literally. "The strongest man in the world" and "a diamond as big as the Ritz" are hyperbolic statements.

**jargon:** The specialized language of a profession or group. The term jargon often has pejorative associations, with the implication that jargon may be evasive, tedious, and unintelligible to outsiders. The writings of the lawyer and the literary critic are both susceptible to jargon.

**\*literal:** The precise, explicit meaning; accurate to the letter; a matter of fact, as opposed to figurative language.

**lyrical:** Songlike; characterized by emotion, subjectivity, and imagination.

**\*oxymoron:** A combination or juxtaposition of opposites; a union of contradictory terms. Romeo's line "feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health" includes four examples of the device.

**parable:** A story designed to suggest a principle, to illustrate a moral, or to answer a question. Parables are allegorical stories.

**\*paradox:** A statement that seems to be self-contradictory but is, in fact, true. The figure in Donne's holy sonnet that concludes I never shall be "chaste except you ravish me," and the third witch claiming "Fair is foul and foul is fair" in *Macbeth* are good examples of the device.

**parody:** A composition that imitates the style of another composition, normally done for comic effect. Fielding's *Shamela* is a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*. A long-running contest for parodies of Hemingway's writing draws hundreds of entries each year.

**\*personification:** A figurative use of language that endows the nonhuman (ideas, inanimate objects, animals, abstractions) with human characteristics. Keats personifies the nightingale, the Grecian urn, and autumn in his major poems.

**\*reliability:** A quality of some fictional narrators in whose word the reader can place his trust. There are both reliable and unreliable narrators, that is, tellers of a story who should or should not be trusted. Most narrators are reliable (Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, Conrad's Marlow), but some are clearly not to be trusted (Poe's unnamed narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the protagonists in several novels by Nabokov). And there are some about whom readers have been unable to decide (James's governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, John Dowell in Ford's *The Good Soldier*).

**\*rhetorical question:** A question asked for effect, not in expectation of a reply. A reply is not expected because the question presupposes only one possible answer. The lover of Suckling's "Shall I wasting in despair / Die because a lady's fair?" has already decided the answer is no.

**\*soliloquy:** A speech in which a character who is alone speaks his or her thoughts aloud. A monologue also has a single speaker, but the monologist speaks to others who do not interrupt. Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" and "O! what a rogue and peasant slave am I" are soliloquies. Browning's "My Last Duchess" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" are monologues, but in his "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," the hypocritical monk cannot reveal his thoughts to others.

**\*stereotype:** A conventional pattern, expression, character, or idea. In literature, a stereotype could apply to the unvarying plot and characters of some works of fiction (those of Barbara Cartland, for example) or to the stock characters and plots of many of the greatest stage comedies.

**sylogism:** A form of reasoning in which two statements are made and a conclusion is drawn from them. A syllogism begins with a major premise ("All tragedies end unhappily.") followed by a minor premise ("Hamlet is a tragedy.") and a conclusion (Therefore, "Hamlet ends unhappily.").

**thesis:** The theme, meaning, or position that a writer endeavors to prove or support.

**\*alliteration:** The repetition of similar or identical consonant sounds, normally at the beginning of words. "Gnus never know pneumonia" is an example of alliteration, because despite the spellings, all four words begin with the "n" sound.

**\*assonance:** The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds. "A land laid waste with all its young men slain" repeats the same "a" sound in "laid," "waste," and "slain."

**ballad meter:** A four-line stanza rhymed abcb in which lines one and three have four feet and lines two and four have three feet.

O mother, mother make my bed.  
O make it soft and narrow.  
Since my love died for me today,  
I'll die for him tomorrow.

**\*blank verse:** Unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Men called him Mulciber; and how he fell  
From heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove  
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements: from morn  
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve.

Blank verse is the meter of most of Shakespeare's plays, as well as that of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

**dactyl:** A metrical foot of three syllables, including an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables.

**\*end-stopped:** A line with a pause at the end. Lines that end with a period, comma, colon, semicolon, exclamation point, or question mark are end-stopped lines.

**\*free verse:** Poetry that is not written in a traditional meter but is still rhythmical. The poetry of Walt Whitman is a well-known example of free verse.

**\*heroic couplet:** Two end-stopped iambic pentameter lines rhymed aa, bb, cc, usually containing a complete thought in the two-line unit.

When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,  
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,  
This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,  
And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

**hexameter:** A line containing six feet.

**\*iamb:** A two-syllable foot with an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. The iamb is the most common foot in English poetry.

**internal rhyme:** Rhyme that occurs within a line, rather than at the end.

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the friends, that plague thee thus!—  
Why look'st thou so?"—With my crossbow  
I shot the Albatross.

Line three contains the internal rhyme of "so" and "bow."

**onomatopoeia:** The use of words whose very sound suggests their actual meaning. Examples include "buzz," "hiss," and "honk."

**\*pentameter:** A line containing five feet. The iambic pentameter is the most common line used in English verse that was written before 1950.

**rhyme royal:** A seven-line stanza of iambic pentameter rhymed ababbcc, which was used by Chaucer and other medieval poets.

**\*sonnet:** A poem written in iambic pentameter, normally composed of fourteen lines. The conventional Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet is rhymed abba, abba, cde, cde; the English, or Shakespearean, sonnet is rhymed abab, cdcd, efef, gg.

**\*stanza:** A repeated grouping of three or more lines, usually with the same meter and rhyme scheme.

**terza rima:** A three-line stanza rhymed aba, bcb, cdc. For example, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is written in terza rima.

**\*tetrameter:** A line of four feet.

**antecedent:** That which has gone before, especially the word, phrase, or clause to which a pronoun refers. In the sentence “The witches cast their spells,” the antecedent of the pronoun “their” is the noun “witches.”

**clause:** A group of words containing a subject and its verb that may or may not form a complete sentence. In the sentence “When you are old, you will be beautiful,” the first clause (“When you are old”) is a dependent clause and not a complete sentence. “You will be beautiful” is an independent clause that could stand alone.

**ellipsis:** A phrase that omits some words that would be necessary for a complete construction, yet which is still understandable. “If rainy, bring an umbrella” is clear though the words “it is” and “you” have been left out.

**imperative:** The mood of a verb that gives an order. “Eat your spinach” uses an imperative verb.

**modify:** To restrict or limit in meaning. In the phrase “large, shaggy dog,” the two adjectives modify the noun; in the phrase “very shaggy dog,” the adverb “very” modifies the adjective “shaggy,” which modifies the noun “dog.”

**parallel structure:** A similar grammatical structure within a sentence or within a paragraph. Winston Churchill’s “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields” speech and Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech each make deft use of parallel structure.

**periodic sentence:** A sentence that becomes grammatically complete only at the end. This is opposed to a loose sentence, which is grammatically complete before the period. Following are (1) a periodic and (2) a loose sentence.

1. When conquering love did first my heart assail, /  
Unto mine aid I summoned every sense.
2. Fair is my love, and cruel as she’s fair.

Periodic sentences complete the important idea at the end, while loose sentences put the important idea first. Neither is an inherently better sentence. Good writers use both.

**syntax:** The structure of a sentence.