

Analysing Text



Key Terms

Accent

The way words are pronounced, according to either the location or social class of the speaker. Accents can vary widely from region to region.

e.g. In Manchester, bath is pronounced 'bæth', while in Sussex it is pronounced 'barth'.

Active Voice

The active voice is used when the subject of the sentence is doing something (rather than having something done **to** it). The opposite of active voice is passive voice, where the subject of the sentence has something done **to** it, rather than doing something itself.

e.g.

Active voice: Sarah ate the cake.

Passive voice: The cake was eaten by Sarah.

Adjective

A word that describes a noun.

e.g. brown, beautiful, loud

Adverb

A word that modifies (describes) a verb, adjective or other adverb.

e.g.

He ran **quickly**.

The bang was **really** loud.

The weather report is **almost always** wrong.

Allegory

A text in which the story and characters symbolise something else; its meaning is deeper than it appears on the surface.

e.g. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an allegory for the Russian Revolution.

Alliteration

The sound at the start of a word is repeated, either in sequence or throughout a sentence.

e.g. 'Fair is **f**oul and **f**oul is **f**air.' (William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*)

Allusion

To make a passing reference to an event, an artistic work or a person, leaving the reader to make the connection.

e.g. The twins were about as caring as the two ugly sisters.

Analogy

To compare something to something else, in order to explain or comment on it.

e.g. 'This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is' (John Donne, *The Flea*)

Anapest

In poetry, a metrical foot or unit that consists of two short (unstressed) beats followed by one long (stressed) beat.

e.g. "Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house..." (Clement Clarke Moore, *A Visit from St Nicholas*.)

Anaphora

The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of clauses for effect.

e.g. '**Mad** world! **Mad** kings! **Mad** composition!' (William Shakespeare, 'King John')

Antagonist

The person working against the protagonist or the central character in a story; their enemy.

e.g. In *Othello*, Iago is the antagonist.

Anecdote

A small story, usually telling of someone's personal experiences.

e.g. That reminds me of the time I met a man with a wooden leg on the pier at Blackpool, who told me...

Antihero

A protagonist or central character in a story who lacks the qualities we would usually associate with a hero.

e.g. Macbeth is an antihero because he allows his ambition to overtake his sense of what is morally right.

Antithesis

A person, idea or thing that is the complete opposite of something else.

e.g. His actions were the antithesis of selfishness.

Antonym

A word that means the opposite of another word.

e.g. Good is the antonym of bad.

Apostrophe

When someone who is absent or non-existent is addressed.

e.g. Justice, you have departed from this world.

Assonance

Where a vowel sound is repeated over several words.

e.g. **Lou** and **Sue** found the **room cool**.

Authorial Intrusion

When a writer steps away from the story to address the reader directly.

e.g. 'Although I am not disposed to maintain that being born in a workhouse is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred.' (Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*)

Authorial Mediation

When an author comments on, tempers or manipulates how information is given to the reader, so that they can put their own view (or the view of the narrator) across.

e.g. 'What do you want?' **he asked cautiously, aware that he could be in grave danger.**

Caesura

A strong pause in a line of verse, breaking up the rhythm. A caesura is annotated using two vertical lines: | |

e.g. 'To err is Human; | | to Forgive, Divine.' (Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*.)

Cliché

A phrase or idea that is so overused that it lacks deep thought.

e.g. She is as pretty as a picture.

Cohesion

A sense of something being whole or complete.

e.g. The repetition of the opening line at the end gives a sense of cohesion.

Colloquial

Relaxed, informal language.

e.g. He **did a runner** from the shop.

Comparative

An adjective that compares something to something else.

e.g. He was **taller** than his brother.

Connotation

An implied meaning or idea that goes beyond surface meaning.

e.g. The colour red has the connotation of danger.

Consonance

When consonant sounds are repeated over a phrase.

e.g. The addled adults ducked under the door.

Dialect

The words and speech patterns associated with a particular region.

e.g. A bread roll is known as different things in different dialects, including a 'batch', a 'barm' and a 'cob'.

Direct Address

When the writer explicitly speaks to the reader.

e.g. Do you know what it is like to be hungry?

Direct Speech

Where the speaker's exact words are used, rather than a rephrasing of them.

e.g.

Direct speech: 'I'm hungry', he said.

Indirect speech: He said that he was hungry.

Discourse marker

A word or phrase that signposts the direction a text is taking, but which, of itself, does not significantly add to the meaning.

e.g. On the other hand, so, moreover

Dramatic irony

When the audience is aware of events that the characters on stage don't know about.

e.g. In *An Inspector Calls*, Mr Birling talks about how unsinkable the Titanic is. This is an example of dramatic irony because the audience knows that the Titanic will, in fact, sink.

Ellipsis

The omission of a word or phrase from a text, indicated by the use of three dots: ... This is often used to show a pause or a thought left hanging, or to indicate that something does not need to be said explicitly.

e.g. The door swung slowly open...

Emotive Language

Words designed to provoke an emotional response in the reader.

e.g. The cat was **ravenous**, **begging** for even a **scrap** of food.

End-stopped line

A line of poetry which ends with a final punctuation mark, such as a full stop.

e.g. 'O rose, thou art sick!' (William Blake, *The Sick Rose*)

Enjambment

When a line of verse continues onto the next line without a break.

e.g.

'Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters!'

(William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*)

Eulogise

To speak or write with praise about something or someone.

e.g. 'Earth has not anything to show more fair' (William Wordsworth, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*)

Euphemism

A reference to something unpleasant or negative that is made in a way that is less distressing or harsh.

e.g. '**Passed away**' is a euphemism for 'died'.

Extended Metaphor

A metaphor that is continued beyond a simple phrase or sentence.

e.g. The classroom was a jungle. Students hooted insults at each other over their desks, while the teacher stalked between the chairs, a tiger on the prowl. At the back of the room, two boys swung, monkey-like, on their chairs. All were baking in the stifling, tropical heat of an unventilated classroom at the height of the British summer.

First Person

A narrative style in which the story is told from the narrator's point of view, using 'I', 'me' and 'my'.

e.g. This is the story of my life.

Foreshadowing

A hint for the reader of something that will happen further on in the story.

e.g. 'I turned my eyes—a little dimmed by looking up at the frosty light – towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck.' (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*)

Flashback

While the writer recounts their story, they go back to the past to tell the reader about something that happened before the story started.

e.g. It was three years before these events that I had been walking down the High Street and had seen a robbery...

Genre

A type or category of literature (can also be used to refer to other forms of art, such as music).

e.g. science fiction, adventure, romance.

Gerund

A verb that is used as a noun.

e.g. **Walking** is my favourite form of exercise.

Homophone

A word that sounds like another word but has a different spelling and meaning.

e.g. **One** of the students **won** the race.

Hyperbole

An exaggeration of the importance or dramatic impact of something.

e.g. I have **a ton of homework** to do; I'll be studying for the rest of my life.

Iambic Pentameter

A line of verse that has five 'feet' or units, each consisting of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable.

e.g. 'When I do count the clock that tells the time' (William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 12*)

Idiom

A phrase that has a meaning which is not necessarily literal, but the meaning of which is obvious to the speaker.

e.g. That exam was **a piece of cake**.

Imagery

The use of words or phrases to conjure up particular pictures in the mind of the reader.

e.g. The woman was a cat, stalking her prey with calm cunning.

Imperative

A command.

e.g. Buy it now.

Indirect Speech

Where the words of the speaker are reported without being directly quoted.

e.g.

Direct speech: 'I'm hungry', he said.

Indirect speech: He said that he was hungry.

Irony

When what is said is opposite to what is meant or expected.

e.g. The letter complaining about the poor manners of the staff was filled with swear words.

Juxtaposition

Placing two very different things next to each other to highlight their differences.

e.g. A ballerina sitting in a mechanic's workshop.

Litotes

Using a negative to reinforce a positive; a deliberate understatement.

e.g. **I won't be sorry** to see the back of him.

Metaphor

A figure of speech that describes something by saying it is something else.

e.g. His face was a beetroot.

Metonymy

A figure of speech in which something is referred to by something which represents it.

e.g. **Downing Street** refused to confirm the rumours.

Narrative Perspective

The point of view from which a narrative is related. This could be third person omniscient (where we see events from different characters' points of view), third person limited (where we only see events from one character's point of view), or first person (where the narrator is 'me' and events are told from 'my' point of view only).

e.g.

I was confused about what Ayla wanted. (First person narrative)

Harry was confused about what Ayla wanted. (Third person limited)

Harry was confused about what she wanted. Ayla felt pleased he had not guessed her secret. (Third person omniscient)

Non-sequitur

A jump from one subject to another, completely unrelated, subject.

e.g. I like apples. My brother has chickenpox.

Noun

The name of a person, place or thing.

e.g. Helen, Birmingham, table

Noun phrase

The set of words that accompany a noun and give more information about it.

e.g. **The hardest-working of the three sisters** went to university.

Onomatopoeia

A language feature in which a word sounds like the thing it is describing.

e.g. Crash, sizzle, crunch

Oxymoron

A language feature in which two contradictory ideas are placed together for effect.

e.g. 'O loving hate' (William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*.)

Paradox

An idea or concept which seems impossible because it contradicts itself.

e.g. This statement is false.

Passive Voice

When the subject of the sentence has something done **to** it, rather than doing something itself. The opposite of passive voice is active voice, where the subject of the sentence is doing something (rather than having something done **to** it).

e.g.

Active voice: Sarah ate the cake.

Passive voice: The cake was eaten by Sarah

Pathetic Fallacy

When human emotions are attributed to the natural world.

e.g. The sun shone its friendly beams on our faces.

Personification

When an inanimate object is given human qualities.

e.g. **The floorboards groaned** under the weight of the box.

Preposition

A part of speech that indicates the position (either in time or space) or relationship between other words.

e.g.

I came to class **after** him.

The book was **for** George.

Pronoun

A word used instead of a noun, usually to avoid repetition.

e.g. Amir went to the canteen. **He** was hungry.

Protagonist

The leading character in a text.

e.g. Viola is the protagonist in *Twelfth Night*.

Repetition

When a word or phrase is repeated within a text for effect.

e.g. The rain fell in **grey** slants onto the **grey** pavement, soaking the **grey** commuters with **grey** faces and **grey** suits.

Pronoun

A word used instead of a noun, usually to avoid repetition.

e.g. Amir went to the canteen. He was hungry.

Rhetorical Question

A question which doesn't require an answer, intended to make the reader think about an issue.

e.g. Do you really think that this is acceptable?

Rhyme

Two or more words with a similar sound.

e.g. 'slink' and 'pink'

Rhythm

The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables which gives words and lines a beat.

e.g. The line 'This is the Night Mail, crossing the border / Bringing the cheque and the postal order' has a regular rhythm that sounds like a train travelling along tracks.

Rule of Three

Listing something using three items or three words.

e.g. Dogs are always **likeable, loving and loyal**.

Satire

When a particular group or character trait is mocked or ridiculed, either throughout a text or in a single statement. Satire is often directed at politics and politicians.

e.g. 'The emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us, there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown.' (Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*)

Second person

A narrative that is told using 'you' – directly addressing the reader.

e.g. You need to understand why this happened.

Semantic field

When words within a text all relate to a particular topic or theme.

e.g. They **stood to attention**, while the teacher surveyed the new **recruits** before her; a regiment of students with pristine **uniforms** glistening in the midday sun. She dismissed them and they marched inside, ready to face the **battlefield** before them.

Sibilance

The repetition of an 's' or 'sh' sound in close proximity within a text.

e.g. The sleeping sisters succumbed to slumber.

Simile

A language feature in which something is described by using 'like' or 'as' to compare it to something else.

e.g.

His face was **like a beetroot**.

His face was **as purple as a beetroot**.

Stanza

Formal word for a verse of poetry.

e.g. The poem is written in three stanzas.

Structure

The way a text is put together. At a simple level, this can be the order of words, sentences and paragraphs, but it can also refer to the order in which the narrative, ideas, arguments and concepts are introduced to the reader.

e.g. The novel follows a simple structure, narrating the events surrounding the accident chronologically.

Superlative

An adjective that describes something as the most or highest degree of that particular quality.

e.g. He was the **fastest** runner in the race.

Symbol

An object or action in a piece of writing that represents something else, often a concept or idea.

e.g. A cabin on a mountain could symbolise freedom or escape.

Synonym

A word that has a very similar meaning to another word.

e.g. 'Hungry' is a synonym for 'starving'.

Tautology

Where a concept or idea is unnecessarily repeated in a different way.

e.g. There was a **smelly odour** in the room.

Term of endearment

An affectionate, informal way of referring to someone.

e.g. my dear, mate, love

Term of address

The words used to refer to a person.

e.g. Your Highness, boy, Miss

Third person

The narrator uses 'he', 'she' and 'it', rather than 'I'.

e.g. He awoke one morning to find the world had changed.

Topic sentence

A sentence, usually found at the very beginning of a paragraph, which explains what that paragraph will be about – what its topic will be.

e.g. **I believe that school uniform is far too expensive.** The cost of a new uniform in Year 7 is over £100, and even then...

Verb

A word that conveys an action or a state.

e.g. to **run**, to **be**

Verisimilitude

The addition of detail to a story or account to make it sound more truthful.

e.g. The inclusion of forensic detail in a whodunit gives it verisimilitude.

