**AP Terms**

These terms will be of use to you in answering the multiple-choice questions, analyzing prose passages, and composing your essays. You are required to know each word on this list and be able to apply each in context.

* Absolute: A word free from limitations or qualifications (“best,” “all,” “unique,” “perfect”)
* Abstract: words or phrases denoting ideas, qualities, and conditions that exist but cannot be seen. Love, for example, is an abstract term; so are happiness, beauty, and patriotism. The opposite of abstract terms are concrete ones.
* Allegory: The device of using character and/or story elements symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning. In some allegories, for example, an author may intend the characters to personify an abstraction like hope or freedom. The allegorical meaning usually deals with moral truth or a generalization about human existence.
* Alliteration: The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words (as in “she sells sea shells”). Although the term is not frequently in the multiple-choice section, you can look for alliteration in any essay passage. The repetition can reinforce meaning, unify ideas, supply musical sound, and/or echo the sense of the passage.
* 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.
* Ambiguity: the multiple meanings, either intentional or unintentional, of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage.
* 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 familiar. Analogies can also make writing more vivid, imaginative, or intellectually engaging.
* Anaphora: repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses (Example: “In books I find the dead as if they were alive; in books I foresee things to come; in books warlike affairs are set forth; from books come for the laws of peace.”)
* Anecdote: A brief narrative that focuses on a particular incident or event. An anecdote will be related in some way to the topic presented and can provide laughter, truth, character features, or caution.
* Antecedent: The word, phrase, or clause referred to by a pronoun. The AP language exam occasionally asks for the antecedent of a given pronoun in a long, complex sentence or in a group of sentences. Example from the AP exam:
  + “But it is the grandeur of all truth which can occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds; **it** exists eternally, by way of germ of latent principle, in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never to be planted.”

The antecedent of “it” (bolded) is…? [answer: “all truth”]

* Antithesis: the opposition or contrast of ideas; the direct opposite.
* Aphorism: A terse statement of known authorship which expresses a general truth or a moral principle. (If the authorship is unknown, the statement is generally considered to be a folk proverb.) An aphorism can be a memorable summation of the author’s point.
* Apostrophe: A figure of speech that directly addresses an absent or imaginary person or a personified abstraction, such as liberty or love. It is an address to someone or something that cannot answer. The effect may add familiarity or emotional intensity. Many apostrophes imply a personification of the object addressed.
* Appositive: a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun right beside it (Ex: The insect, a cockroach, is crawling across the table.)
* Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming within phrases or sentences. Ex: Men sell the wedding bells.
* Asyndeton: a construction in which elements are presented in a series without conjunctions (“They spent the day wondering, searching, thinking, understanding.”)
* Atmosphere: the emotional nod created by the entirety of a literary work, established partly by the author’s choice of objects that are described. Even such elements as a description of the weather can contribute to the atmosphere. Frequently atmosphere foreshadows events. Perhaps it can create a mood.
* Caricature: A verbal description, the purpose of which is to exaggerate or distort, for comic effect, a person’s distinctive physical features or other characteristics.
* Chiasmus: A statement consisting of two parallel parts in which the second part is structurally reversed (“Susan walked in, and out rushed Mary.”)
* Cliché: an expression that has been overused to the extent that its freshness has worn off (“the time of my life,” “at the drop of a hat”)
* Coherence: the principle of clarity and logical adherence to a topic that binds together all parts of a composition. A coherent essay is one whose parts—sentences, paragraphs, pages—are logically fused into a single whole. Its opposite is an incoherent essay—one that is jumbled, illogical, and unclear.
* Colloquialism: 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.
* Complex Sentence: a sentence with one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.
* Conceit: A fanciful expression, usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects. A conceit displays intellectual cleverness as a result of the unusual comparison being made.
* Concrete: said of words or terms denoting objects or conditions that are palpable, visible, or otherwise evident to the senses. Concrete is the opposite of abstract. The difference between the two is a matter of degrees. Illness, for example, is abstract; ulcer is concrete. Hunger is abstract, but hamburger is concrete. The best writing blends the abstract with the concrete.
* Connotation: The non-literal, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning. Connotations may involve ideas, emotions, or attitudes.
* Denotation: The strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, devoid of any emotion, attitude, or color. (Example: the denotation of a knife would be a utensil used to cut; the connotation of a knife might be fear, violence, anger, foreboding, etc.)
* 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.
* Didactic: From the Greek, didactic literally means “teaching.” Didactic words have the primary aim of teaching or instructing, especially the teaching of moral or ethical principles.
* Euphemism: 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. Saying “earthly remains” rather than “corpse” is an example of euphemism.
* Extended metaphor: a metaphor developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout a work.
* Figurative Language: writing or speech that is not intended to carry literal meaning and is usually meant to be imaginative and vivid.
* Homily: This term means “sermon,” but more informally, it can include any serious talk, speech, or lecture involving moral or spiritual advice.
* Hyperbole: A figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement. (The literal Greek meaning is “overshoot.”) Hyperboles often have comic effect; however, a serious effect is also possible. Often, hyperbole produces irony. The opposite of hyperbole is understatement.
* Idiom: an expression in a given language that cannot be understood from the literal meaning of the words in the expression; or, a regional speech or dialect (“fly on the wall,” “cut to the chase”)
* 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: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory. 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. On the AP exam, pay attention to *how* an author creates imagery and to the effect of this imagery.
* Inference/Infer: to draw a reasonable conclusion from the information presented. When a multiple-choice question asks for an inference to be drawn from a passage, the most direct, most reasonable inference is the safest answer choice.
* Invective: an emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language.
* Inverted Syntax: a sentence constructed so that the predicate comes before the subject (ex: in the woods I am walking)
* Irony: the contrast between what is stated explicitly and what is really meant, or the difference between what appears to be and what is actually true. Irony is often used to create poignancy or humor. In general, there are three major types of irony used in language:
  + Verbal irony: when the words literally state the opposite of the writer’s (or speaker’s) meaning.
  + Situational irony: when events turn out the opposite of what was expected; when what the characters and readers think ought to happen is not what does happen.
  + Dramatic irony: when facts or events are unknown to a character in a play or piece of fiction but known to the reader, audience, or other characters in the work.
* Juxtaposition: placing two elements side by side to present a comparison or contrast.
* Litotes (pronounced almost like “little tee”): a form of understatement that involves making an affirmative point by denying its opposite. Litotes is the opposite of hyperbole. Examples: “not a bad idea,” “not many,” “it isn’t very serious,” “I have this tiny little tumor on the brain (Catcher in the Rye)”
* Loose Sentence (Non-periodic sentence): A type of sentence in which the main idea (independent clause) comes first, followed by dependent grammatical units such as phrases and clauses. If a period were placed at the end of the independent clause, the clause would be a complete sentence. A work containing many loose sentences often seems informal, relaxed, or conversational. Generally, loose sentences create loose style. The opposite of a loose sentence is the periodic sentence. Example: I arrived at the San Diego airport after a long, bumpy ride and multiple delays. The sentence could stop at: I arrived at the San Diego airport.
* Malapropism: the mistaken substitution of one word for another word that sounds similar (“The doctor wrote a subscription.”)
* 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: 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. For example, 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 impact.
* Mood: The prevailing atmosphere or emotional aura of a work. Setting, tone, and events can affect the mood. Mood is similar to tone and atmosphere.
* Narrative: the telling of a story or an account of an event of series of events.
* Onomatopoeia: a figure of speech in which natural sounds are imitated in the sounds of words. Simple examples include words as buzz, hiss, hum, crack, whinny, and murmur. If you note examples of onomatopoeia in an essay passage, not 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 the use of oxymoron.
* 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.
* Parenthetical: a comment that interrupts the immediate subject, often to qualify or explain. Example: Strawberry jam, *for instance,* doesn’t make a good spaghetti sauce.
* Polysyndeton: the use, for rhetorical effect, of more conjunctions that is necessary or natural.
* 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. 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.
* Parody: A work that closely imitates the style or content of another with the specific aim of comic effect and/or ridicule. It exploits peculiarities of an author’s expression (propensity to use too many parentheses, certain favorite words, etc.)
* Pedantic: an adjective that describes words, phrases, or general tone that is overly scholarly, academic, or bookish (language that might be described as “show-offy;” using big words for the sake of using big words)
* Periodic sentence: The opposite of loose sentence, a sentence that presents its central meaning in a main clause at the end. This independent clause is preceded by a phrase or clause that cannot stand alone. The effect of a periodic sentence is to add emphasis and structural variety. It is also a much stronger sentence that the loose sentence. (Example: After a long, bumpy flight and multiple delays, I arrived at the San Diego airport.)
* 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, animals, or objects appear more vivid to the reader.
* Point of view: in literature, the perspective from which a story is told. There are two general divisions of point of view, and many subdivisions within those.
  + First person narrator tells the story with the first person pronoun, “I,” and is a character in the story. This narrator can be the protagonist, a secondary character, or an observing character.
  + Third person narrator relates the events with the third person pronouns, “he,” “she,” and “it.” There are two main subdivisions to be aware of:
    - Third person omniscient, in which the narrator, with godlike knowledge, presents the thoughts and actions of any or all characters.
    - Third person limited omniscient, in which the narrator presents the feelings and thoughts of only one character, presenting only the actions of all the remaining characters.

In addition, be aware that the term *point of view* carries an additional meaning. When you are asked to analyze the author’s point of view, the appropriate point for you to address is the author’s *attitude.*

* Repetition: the duplication, either exact of approximate, of any element of language, such as sound, word, phrase, clause, sentence, or grammatical pattern.
* Rhetoric: from the Greek for “orator,” this term describes the principles governing the art of writing effectively, eloquently, and persuasively.
* Rhetorical Modes: this flexible term describes the variety, the conventions, and the purposes of the major kinds of writing, The four most common rhetorical modes (“modes of discourse”) are:
  + Exposition: the purpose is to explain and analyze information by presenting an idea, relevant evidence, and appropriate discussion. The AP exam essay questions are frequently expository topics.
  + Argumentation: the purpose is to prove the validity of an idea, or point of view, by presenting sound reasoning, discussion, and argument that thoroughly convince the reader. *Persuasive* writing is a type of argumentation having an additional aim of urging some form of action.
  + Description: the purpose is to recreate, invent, or visually present a person, place, event or action so that the reader can picture that being described. Sometimes an author engages all five senses in description; good descriptive writing can be sensuous and picturesque. Descriptive writing may be straightforward and objective or highly emotional and subjective.
  + Narration: the purpose is to tell a story or narrate an event or series of events. This writing mode frequently uses the tools of descriptive writing.
* Rhetorical Question: a question posed with no expectation of receiving an answer. This device is often used in public speaking in order to launch or further discussion.
* 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 poorly done it is simply cruel.
* Satire: a work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule. Regardless of whether or not the work aims to reform human behavior, satire is best seen as a style of writing rather than a purpose for writing. It can be recognized by the many devices used effectively by the satirist: irony, wit, parody, caricature, hyperbole, understatement, and sarcasm. The effects of satire are varied, depending on the writer’s goal, but good satire, often humorous, is thought provoking and insightful about the human condition.
* Semantics: the branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of words, their historical and psychological development, their connotations, and their relation to one another.
* Style: the consideration of style has two purposes:
  + An evaluation of the sum of the choices an author makes in blending diction, syntax, figurative language, and other literary devices. We can analyze and describe an author’s personal style and make judgments on how appropriate it is to the author’s purpose. Styles can be called flowery, explicit, succinct, rambling, bombastic, commonplace, incisive, laconic, etc.
  + Classification of authors to a group and comparison of an author to similar authors.
* Syllepsis: a construction in which one word is used in two different senses (“After he threw the ball, he threw a fit.”)
* Syllogism: from the Greek for “reckoning together,” a syllogism is a deductive system of formal logic that presents two premises (the first one called “major” and the second called “minor”) that inevitably lead to a sound conclusion.
  + Major premise: All men are mortal.
  + Minor premise: Socrates is a man.
  + Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is a mortal.

A syllogism’s conclusion is valid only if each of the two premises is valid.

* Symbol/Symbolism: Generally, anything that represents itself and stands for something else. Usually a symbol is something concrete—such as an object, action, character, or scene—that represents something more abstract.
* Synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole or, occasionally, the whole is used to represent a part. Examples: to refer to a boat as a “sail”; to refer to a car as “wheels”; to refer to the violins, violas, etc. in an orchestra as “the strings.” \*\*Different than *metonymy*, in which one thing is represented by another thing that is commonly physically associated with it (but is not necessarily a part of it), i.e., referring to a monarch as “the crown” or the President as “The White House.”
* Synesthesia: when one kind of sensory stimulus evokes the subjective experience of another. Ex: the sight of red ants makes you itchy. In literature, synesthesia refers to the practice of associating two or more different senses in the same image. Example: Red Hot Chili Peppers’ song title, “Taste the Pain.”
* 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 groups of words, while diction refers to the individual words. In the multiple-choice section of the AP exam, 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.
* Theme: the central idea or message of a work, the insight it offers into life.
* Thesis: In expository writing, the thesis statement is the sentence or group of sentences that directly expresses the author’s opinion, purpose, meaning, or position.
* Tone: Similar to mood, tone describes the author’s attitude toward his material, the audience, or both. Some words describing tone are playful, serious, businesslike, sarcastic, humorous, formal, ornate, sardonic, somber, etc.
* Transition: a word or phrase that links different ideas. Transitions effectively signal a shift from one idea to another. A few commonly used transitional words or phrases are furthermore, consequently, nevertheless, for example, in addition, likewise, similarly, on the contrary, etc.
* Understatement: the ironic minimalizing 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*.
* Wit: in modern usage, intellectually amusing language that surprises and delights. A witty statement is humorous, while suggesting the speaker’s verbal power in creating ingenious and perceptive remarks. Wit usually uses terse language that makes a pointed statement.