

Glossary of Literary Terms

You should be familiar with most of these terms and be able to use them in your discussions about literature.

Make sure you note down any new terms that you come across during your post-16 study. It would be useful to create your own glossary. One way of doing this is by buying an address book with A-Z sections, then you can record the terms alphabetically to make referencing them easy!

Alliteration	The repetition of the same consonant sound, especially at the beginning of words
Allusion	A reference to another event, person, place or work of literature. The allusion is usually implied rather than explicit and provides another layer of meaning to what is being said
Ambiguity	Use of language where the meaning is unclear or has two or more possible meanings or interpretations. It could be created by a weakness in the writer's expression, but it is more likely it is a deliberate device used by the writer to create layers of meaning
Anthropomorphism	The endowment of human characteristics to something that is not human
Assonance	The repetition of similar vowel sounds
Atmosphere	The prevailing mood created by a piece of writing
Colloquial	Ordinary, everyday speech and language
Connotation	An implication or association attached to a word or phrase. It is suggested or felt rather than being explicit
Diction	The choice of words a writer uses. Another word for "vocabulary"
Empathy	A feeling on the part of the reader of sharing the particular experience being described by the character or writer
End stopping	A verse line with a pause or stop at the end of it
Enjambement	A line of verse that flows on into the next line without a pause
Figurative language	Language that is symbolic or metaphorical and not meant to be taken literally
Genre	A particular type of writing – eg prose, poetry, drama
Imagery	The use of words to create a picture or "image" in the mind of the reader. Images can relate to any of the senses, not just sight
Internal rhyme	Rhyming words within a line rather than at the end of lines
Irony	At its simplest level, it means saying one thing while meaning another. It occurs where a word or phrase has one surface meaning but another contradictory, possibly opposite meaning is implied. Irony is often confused with sarcasm. Sarcasm is spoken, relying on the tone of voice and is much more blunt than irony
Metaphor	A comparison of one thing to another to make the description

	more vivid. The metaphor actually states that one thing is another
Metre	The regular use of unstressed and stressed syllables in poetry
Narrative	A piece of writing that tells a story
Onomatopoeia	The use of words whose sounds copies the thing or process they describe
Pathos	The effect in literature which makes the reader feel sadness or pity
Personification	The attribution of human feelings, emotions, or sensations to an inanimate object. Personification is a type of metaphor where human qualities are given to things or abstract ideas
Plot	The sequence of events in a poem, play, novel or short story that make up the main storyline
Point of View	A story can be told by one of the characters or from another point of view. The point of view can change from one part of the story to another when events are viewed through the minds of two or more characters.
Protagonist	The main character or speaker in a poem, monologue, play or story
Pun	A play on words that have similar sounds but quite different meanings
Rhyme	Corresponding sounds in words, usually at the end of each line, but not always
Rhyme scheme	The pattern of rhymes in a poem
Rhythm	The 'movement' of the poem as created through the meter and the way that language is stressed within the poem
Satire	The highlighting or exposing of human failings or foolishness through ridiculing them. Satire can range from being gentle and light to extremely biting and bitter in tone
Simile	The comparison of one thing to another in order to make the description more vivid
Sonnet	A fourteen-line poem, usually with 10 syllables in each line. There are several ways in which the lines can be organised, but they often consist of an octave and a sestet
Stanza	The blocks of lines into which a poem is divided. [Sometimes these are, less precisely, referred to as verses, which can lead to confusion as poetry is sometimes called 'verse']
Structure	The way a poem or play or other piece of writing has been put together
Style	The individual way in which the writer has used language to express his or her ideas
Symbol	Like the use of images, symbols present things which represent something else. In very simple terms, a red rose can be used to symbolise love; distant thunder can symbolise approaching trouble. Symbols can be very subtle and multi-layered in their significance

Syntax	The way in which sentences are structured. Sentences can be structured in different ways to achieve different effects
Theme	The central idea or ideas that a writer explores through a text