

Critical Terminology - General

Get to know the terms listed below in preparation for textual analysis, close reading and critical essays.



Adjective – a describing word

Adverb – a word which tells s more about a verb

Alliteration – the use of the same consonant sound, usually at the beginning of words, e.g. *'She sells sea shells on the sea shore.'*

Ambiguity – the idea that a word or phrase might mean more than one thing

Cliché – an overused expression, e.g. *'There's plenty more fish in the sea'*

Conjunction – a word that links together phrases or clauses e.g. *'and'*

Connotation – the ideas suggested by a particular word

Context – the words, phrases, sentences around a specified word or expression

Enjambment – a sentence or expression over more than one line without a pause

Hyperbole – deliberate exaggeration, e.g. *'It was a million times worse than I had imagined'*

Image – a picture created by words

Irony – language that says the opposite of what is meant, sometimes for humorous effect.

Literal – where a word means exactly what it says, e.g. *'raining cats and dogs'* taken literally would mean that cats and dogs were falling from the sky. The opposite of literally is **figuratively**.

Metaphor – a comparison where one thing is said to be another, e.g. *'Juliet is the sun'*

Noun – a word which names things. Proper nouns are used for the names of actual people and places; common nouns are used for objects; collective nouns refer to groups of things and abstract nouns refer to thoughts, feelings and qualities.

Onomatopoeia – where a word makes the sound it is describing, e.g. *snap, pop, bang, whoosh*

Oxymoron – two words placed side by side which are contradictory, e.g. ‘*sweet sorrow*’ or ‘*bitter sweet*’

Paradox – two contradictory ideas placed together

Parenthesis – non-essential information which is separated from the rest of the sentence by double commas, dashes or brackets, e.g.:

*The cat, **which was black and gorgeous**, sat on the mat.* The section in bold could be removed from the sentence and it would still make sense.

Personification – inanimate objects are described as having human qualities, e.g. ‘*the wind whistled*’

Pronoun – a word which replaces a noun, e.g. *he, she, it, they, I* ...

Rhyme – words that have the same sound

Rhythm – the beat within a line of poetry

Simile – two things are directly compared using ‘*like*’ or ‘*as*’

Stanza – groups of lines in poetry

Symbol – an idea or an object that represents more than just its literal self. The seasons are often used to symbolise life

Theme – the main idea in a text

Tone – the feeling or attitude that is suggested by words, e.g. sarcastic, frightened...

Punctuation Reminder:

Apostrophe (‘) Used to show when a letter has been missed out in a contraction, e.g. do not = don’t. Apostrophes are also used to show possession, e.g. the girl’s books – the books belonging to the girl

Comma (,) Used to create a pause in a sentence and to separate **items in a list**

Semi-colon (;) Can introduce an expansion of an idea in the second part of a sentence or can break up a list of phrases

Colon (:) Used to introduce a list or explanation

Inverted Commas (“ “) For direct speech and titles, or to show when a word should not be taken literally

Dash (-) Used as a sign of interruption.

Hyphen (-) Joins together two separate words to make an expression

Brackets () Used to separate a word or phrase from the rest of the sentence