

Literary Devices

Bring Critical Writing Into Your Own Novel!

Allusion - "There's a coincidence today. On this day three hundred and ninety years ago, the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian later said, 'He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it.' Well, today, we can say of the "Challenger" crew: Their dedication was, like Drake's, complete." (Ronald Reagan, Challenger Tragedy Address)

Juxtaposition - "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." (*Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy)

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"Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."
("Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," Dylan Thomas)

Oxymoron - "The movie is seriously funny."

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"Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!
O anything, of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness! Serious vanity!
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
Dost thou not laugh?" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare)

Colloquialism - "I didn't want to go back no more. I had stopped cussing, because the widow didn't like it; but now I took to it again because pap hadn't no objections... But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over with welts. He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in. Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome." (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain)

Imagery - "Beyond the shadow of the ship, / I watched the water- snakes: / They moved in tracks of shining white, / And when they reared, the elfish light / Fell off in hoary flakes." (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge)

Innuendo - "Even the written instructions which Winston received, and which he invariably got rid of as soon as he had dealt with them, never stated or implied that an act of forgery was to be committed: always the reference was to slips, errors, misprints, or misquotations which it was necessary to put right in the interests of accuracy." (*1984*, George Orwell)

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“Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.” (*Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare)

Irony - “Water, water, everywhere, / And all the boards did shrink; / Water, water, everywhere, / Yet nary a drop to drink.” (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge)

Repetition - “My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, / And every tongue brings in a several tale, / And every tale condemns me for a villain.” (*Richard III*, Shakespeare)

Connotation - childish (negative) vs. childlike (negative/neutral) vs. youthful (positive)

fascinating (connotation of flashy/sparkly) vs. captivating, (connotation of capturing/imprisoning interest) vs. absorbing (connotation of being interesting by pulling you in)

Hyperbole - “I could eat a horse,” “he was dying of thirst,” or “she was thin as a rake.”

Metaphor - “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul -” (Emily Dickinson)

Personification - “The wind whispered through the trees”

“When all at once I saw a crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils; / Beside the lake, beneath the trees, / Fluttering and dancing in the breeze” (“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” William Wordsworth)

Simile - “His hair gleamed like gold,” or “She is as brave as a lion”

Symbolism - A rose can represent love; a chain can represent bondage, a link, or unity; and a smile can represent friendship.

Alliteration - “Peter Piper picked a peck of peppers.”

Onomatopoeia - “He saw nothing and heard nothing but he could feel his heart pounding and then he heard the clack on stone and the leaping, dropping clicks of a small rock falling.” (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway)

Deus Ex Machina - *The Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien): Magical, gigantic eagles arrive to save Gandalf when he is trapped on top of a tower by evil wizard Saruman with no hope of escape.

Foreshadowing - In *Of Mice and Men*, George kills Candy’s dog. This is foreshadowing for George killing Lennie later; both are shot in the back of the head.

Foil - “[Tom Buchanan] was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward.”

"[Gatsby] smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life." (*The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald)

Mood - "A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle. At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another, and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door." ("The Monkey's Paw," Edgar Allen Poe)