Basic Elements of Style

I. Narration/Point of View

Participant Point of View - The participant point of view is also called the first-person point of view because first-person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our) are used to tell the story. It can be further subdivided into two types:

- The **narrator as a major character** in the story (the story is told by and is chiefly about the narrator).
- The **narrator as a minor character** (the narrator tells a story that focuses on someone else, but the narrator is still a character in the story).
- A special type of participant narrator is called the **innocent-eye narrator**. The character telling the story may be a child or a developmentally disabled individual; the narrator is thus naïve. The contrast between what the innocent-eye narrator perceives and what the reader understands may produce an ironic effect.
- Another special type of first person or participant narrator involves a different time in a character’s life (e.g., Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird or David in David Copperfield).
- **Stream of consciousness** (interior monologue) is a narrative method in modern fiction in which the author tells the story through an unbroken flow of thought and awareness. The technique attempts to capture exactly what is going on in the mind of a character.

Participant Points of View: **Purpose** - The first-person point of view offers immediacy. The reader sees what is perceived by the individual “I.”

- The **first-person narrator** can approach other fictional characters as closely as one human being can approach another.
- The **first-person narrator** can be an eyewitness, observing what other characters say and do.
- The **first-person narrator** can summarize events and retreat from a scene to meditate on its significance.

The first person point of view allows the reader to be discerning; the reader must determine whether the narrator is trustworthy.

- The **first-person narrator** understands other characters only by observing what they say and do, this narrator cannot enter the minds of the other characters and is unable to grasp their inner thoughts.
- The **first-person narrator** outlines what a character observes and feels, and thus the narrator’s conclusions may be inaccurate.
- The reader may question the validity and accuracy of the narrator’s opinions.
- The **first person point of view** may contribute to dramatic irony; there is a discrepancy between what the narrator knows and what the reader understands.

Nonparticipant Point of View - the nonparticipant point of view is also called third-person point of view because third-person pronouns (he, him, she, her, they, them) are used to tell the story. The nonparticipant point of view can be subdivided into three types:

- **Omniscient narrator**. The author can enter the minds of all the characters.
- **Selective (limited) omniscient narrator**. The author limits his omniscience to the minds of a few of the characters or to the mind of a single character.
- **Objective narrator**. The author does not enter a single mind, but instead records what can be seen and heard. This type of narrator is like a camera or fly on the wall.

Note: A rarely used point of view in literature is the second-person point of view. This narrative technique uses second-person pronouns (you, your, yourself, etc.). Use of second-person point of view is uncommon because it directly involves the reader in the story, and the reader may be unwilling and unable to
identify with the “you” in the story. An author may choose to use more than one point of view in a given work.

**Nonparticipant Points of View: Purpose**

**Omniscient Point of View** - The omniscient point of view allows great freedom in that the narrator knows all there is to know about the characters, externally and internally.
- The third-person narrator describes what characters are feeling and thinking,
- The third-person narrator describes what characters do,
- The narrator may shift focus from the close view to the larger perspective.
- The narrator may comment on events and characters, thus explaining their significance to the reader.
- The narrator may offer multiple perspectives on the same event.

**Limited Omniscient Point of View** - The author knows everything about a particular character.
- The story is portrayed through the eyes of one character, and there is a sense of distance from the other characters.
- The limited omniscient point of view approximates conditions of life in that only one character’s thoughts are known. The story is more unified through the use of this point of view.

**Objective Point of View** - The objective point of view allows inferences to be made by readers through their observance of dialogue and external action. Readers are not directly influenced by the author’s statements. Readers’ perceptions are influenced more subtly by the author’s selection of diction and details.

**Miscellaneous Terms**
- **Reliable** - narrator who can be trusted to tell the truth and be objective
- **Unreliable** - narrator who cannot be trusted to tell the truth or be objective

---

**II. Character**

In fiction, character refers to a textual representation of a human being (or occasionally another creature). Most fiction writers agree that character development is the key element in a story’s creation, and in most pieces of fiction a close identification with the characters is crucial to understanding the story. The story’s **protagonist** is the central agent in generating its plot, and this individual can embody the story’s theme. Characters can be either **round** or **flat**, depending on their level of development and the extent to which they change. Mrs. Mallard, in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour,” though developed in relatively few words, is a round character because she shows complex feelings toward her husband, and her character develops when she envisions the freedom of being widowed. Authors achieve **characterization** with a variety of techniques: by using the narrative voice to describe the character, by showing the actions of the character and of those reacting to her, by revealing the thoughts or dialogue of the character, or by showing the thoughts and dialogue of others in relation to the character.

- **Protagonist** - A story’s main character (see also **antagonist**)
- **Antagonist** - The character or force in conflict with the protagonist
- **Round character** - A complex, fully developed character, often prone to change
- **Flat character** - A one-dimensional character, typically not central to the story
- **Characterization** - The process by which an author presents and develops a fictional story
- **Static characters** - do not experience basic character changes during the course of the story
- **Dynamic characters** - experience changes throughout the plot of a story
- **Antithero** - a central sympathetic character with significant personal flaws
- **Symbolic** - caricature that is representative of certain kinds of people
III. Plot

Plot refers to the series of events that give a story its meaning and effect. In most stories, these events arise out of conflict experienced by the main character. The conflict may come from something external, like a dragon or an overbearing mother, or it may stem from an internal issue, such as jealousy, loss of identity, or overconfidence. As the character makes choices and tries to resolve the problem, the story's action is shaped and plot is generated. In some stories, the author structures the entire plot chronologically, with the first event followed by the second, third, and so on, like beads on a string. However, many other stories are told with flashback techniques in which plot events from earlier times interrupt the story's "current" events.

All stories are unique, and in one sense there are as many plots as there are stories. In one general view of plot, however—and one that describes many works of fiction—the story begins with rising action as the character experiences conflict through a series of plot complications that entangle him or her more deeply in the problem. This conflict reaches a climax, after which the conflict is resolved, and the falling action leads quickly to the story's end. Things have generally changed at the end of a story, either in the character or the situation; drama subsides, and a new status quo is achieved. It is often instructive to apply this three-part structure even to stories that don't seem to fit the pattern neatly.

- **Conflict**: The basic tension, predicament, or challenge that propels a story's plot
- **Complications**: Plot events that plunge the protagonist further into conflict
- **Rising action**: The part of a plot in which the drama intensifies, rising toward the climax
- **Climax**: The plot's most dramatic and revealing moment, usually the turning point of the story
- **Falling action**: The part of the plot after the climax, when the conflict is resolved
- **Chronological**: Linear telling of events
- **Backward**: Starting at the end and working toward the beginning
- **Forward**: Starting at the beginning and working toward the end
- **Circular**: A reflection that begins anywhere, goes to the end, to the beginning, eventually getting back to the start
- **Flashbacks**: Looking back into time
- **Historical**: Grounded in a "real" historical time period
- **In media res**: Beginning more or less in the middle of events
- **Projections**: Looking forward into time
- **Fragmented**: Going back and forth in time with combinations of chronologies
- **Atmosphere**: Physical and external descriptions that help us better understand the setting
- **Mood**: The underlying feeling or atmosphere produced by a story
- **Social context**: The significant cultural issues affecting a story's setting or authorship

IV. Setting

Setting is the story's time and place. While setting includes simple attributes such as climate or wall décor, it can also include complex dimensions such as the historical moment the story occupies or its social context. Because particular places and times have their own personality or emotional essence (such as the stark feel of a desert or the grim, wary resolve in the United States after the September 11th attacks), setting is also one of the primary ways that a fiction writer establishes mood. Typically, short stories occur in limited locations and time frames, such as the two rooms involved in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," whereas novels may involve many different settings in widely varying landscapes. Even in short stories, however, readers should become sensitive to subtle shifts in setting. For example, when the grieving Mrs. Mallard retires alone to her room, with "new spring life" visible out the window, this detail about the setting helps reveal a turn in the plot. Setting is often developed with narrative description, but it may also be shown with action, dialogue, or a character's thoughts.

- **Place**: Physical or psychical locations of events, things, characters, and historical times
- **Time**: Physical or psychical progression of events
- **AtHistorical**: Not grounded in any "real" historical period; imaginary or fantasy
V. Imagery, Symbolism, Allegory, Allusion

An image is a sensory impression used to create meaning in a story. For example, near the beginning of "Young Goodman Brown," we see Faith, Brown's wife, "thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap." While visual imagery such as this is typically the most prominent in a story, good fiction also includes imagery based on the other senses: sound, smell, touch, and taste.

- **Visual imagery**: Imagery of sight
- **Aural imagery**: Imagery of sound (e.g., the soft hiss of skis)
- **Olfactory imagery**: Imagery of smell (e.g., the smell of spilled beer)
- **Tactile imagery**: Imagery of touch (e.g., bare feet on a hot sidewalk)
- **Gustatory imagery**: Imagery of taste (e.g., the bland taste of starchy bananas)

If an image in a story is used repeatedly and begins to carry multiple layers of meaning, it may be significant enough to call it a symbol. Symbols are often objects, like a toy windmill or a rose, or they may be parts of a landscape, like a river. While a normal image is generally used once, to complete a scene or passage, a symbol is often referred to repeatedly and carries meanings essential to the story. Some symbols are universal, like water for cleansing, but others are more culturally based. In some African societies, for example, a black cat is seen as good luck. Fiction writers use preexisting cultural associations as well as meanings drawn from the context of the story to create multiple levels of meaning. Faith's pink ribbons in "Young Goodman Brown" carry cultural connotations of innocence and purity, but the fact that the wind plays with the ribbons in one key image also brings to mind temptation, alluring chaos, the struggle with natural forces. Red is also a significant color in the story's final temptation scene, with its basin of "water, reddened by the lurid light? Or was it blood?"

Faith's pink ribbons carry, of course, a tinge of red.

An allegory is a work of fiction in which the symbols, characters, and events come to represent, in a somewhat point-by-point fashion, a different metaphysical, political, or social situation. In Western culture, allegories have often been used for instructive purposes around Christian themes. For example, in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a protagonist named Christian goes on a journey in which he encounters complicating characters and situations such as Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Vanity Fair, and the Slough of Despair, thus depicting the struggles of a Christian trying to stay pure. In some ways Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is structured as an allegory, as is evident in the character Faith, the Devil offering his snakelike staff, the temptation scene, and so on. Hawthorne skillfully manipulates the conventions of allegory, however, to resist a fixed meaning and create an ending that is open to interpretation.

VI. Diction (word choice)

A study of diction is the analysis of how a writer uses language for a distinct purpose and effect, including word choice and figures of speech. Examine the following when considering diction or word choice:

**Types of Diction**

- **Informal Diction** (personal writing) e.g. bug, folks, job, kid, boss, get across
- **Formal Diction** (academic or literary writing) e.g. germ, relatives, position, child, superior, communicate
- **Colloquial** words – conversational language – Is there dialect?
- **Slang** – highly informal
- **Jargon** – the special language of a profession or group (lawyer talk, technical talk)

**Ways to Characterize Diction**

- **General** – look, walk, sit, cry, throw, dog, boy
- **Specific** – gaze, stride, slump, weep, hurl, black Labrador retrieve, tall boy

- **Monosyllabic** words – single syllable words

- **Polysyllabic** words – more than one syllable in the words; the greater the number of polysyllabic words, the more complex the passage.

- **Denotative** words – dictionary meaning (wedding dress, law officer, public servant)

- **Connotative** words – emotional meaning (wedding gown, cop, bureaucrat)

- **Cacophonous** words – harsh sounding words (maggot)

- **Euphonious** words – pleasant sounding words (butterfly)

- **Abstract** words – not material; representing a thought (pleasant tasting)

- **Concrete** words – real or actual; specific, not general (sour tasting)

**Diction Review** (some essential questions to help guide your analysis)

- Are the words monosyllabic or polysyllabic? What is the effect on message or other stylistic element?

- Is the diction formal or informal? Colloquial? Slangy? Filled with jargon? What is the effect on message or other stylistic element?

- Is the language concrete or abstract? What is the effect on message or other stylistic element?

- Is there a change in the level of diction in the passage? What is the effect on message or other stylistic element?

---

**VII. Tone**

Tone is the manner of expression showing the author’s attitude toward characters, events, or situations. Tone is reflected in the author’s “voice.” **Tone** is the author’s attitude toward the writing (his characters, the situation) and the readers. A work of writing can have more than one tone. An example of tone could be both serious and humorous. An example of tone could be both serious and humorous. Tone is set by the setting, choice of vocabulary and other details. **Mood** is the general atmosphere created by the author’s words. It is the feeling the reader gets from reading those words. It may be the same, or it may change from situation to situation.

Authors set a tone or mood in literature by conveying an emotion or emotions through words. The way a person feels about an idea, event, or another person can be quickly determined through facial expressions, gestures and in the tone of voice used. **MOOD:** (sometimes called atmosphere) the overall feeling of the work Mood is the emotions that you (the reader) feel while you are reading. Some literature makes you feel sad, others joyful, still others, angry. The main purpose for some poems is to set a mood. Writers use many devices to create mood, including images, dialogue, setting, and plot. Often a writer creates a mood at the beginning of the story and continues it to the end. However, sometimes the mood changes because of the plot or changes in characters. Examples of MOODS include: suspenseful, joyful, depressing, excited, anxious, angry, sad, tense, lonely, suspicious, frightened, disgusted **TONE:** the way feelings are expressed Tone is the attitude that an author takes toward the audience, the subject, or the character. Tone is conveyed through the author’s words and details. Use context clues to help determine the tone. In literature an author sets the tone through words. The possible tones are as boundless as the number of possible emotions a human being can have. Has anyone ever said to you, “Don’t use that tone of voice with me?” Your tone can change the meaning of what you say. Tone can turn a statement like, "You're a big help!" into a genuine compliment or a cruel sarcastic remark. It depends on the context of the story.

**Tone Review** (some essential questions to help guide your analysis)

- What seems to be the speaker's attitude in the passage?

- Is more than one attitude or point of view expressed?

- Does the passage have a noticeable emotional mood or atmosphere?

- What effect does tone have on the reader?
VIII. Syntax

Syntax is the arrangement—the ordering, grouping, and placement—of words within a sentence. Syntax is the study of the way that sequences of words are ordered into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax controls verbal pacing and focus.

Classification by sentence length:

- **Telegraphic** – < five words long
- **Short** – ~ five words long
- **Medium** – ~ eighteen words long
- **Long** – > 30 words long

Classification of sentences by their purpose:

- **Declarative sentence** – makes a statement
- **Imperative sentence** – gives a command
- **Interrogative sentence** – asks a question
- **Exclamatory sentence** – provides emphasis or expresses strong emotion

Classification of sentences by their structure:

- **Simple sentence** – contains one independent clause.
- **Compound sentence** – contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction or by a semicolon.
- **Complex sentence** – contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses.
- **Compound-complex sentence** – contains two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.
- **Loose or cumulative sentence** – has its main clause at the beginning of the sentence. (main clause + subordinate constructions = loose sentence) A loose sentence makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending.
  
  *We arrived at Odiham bout half after eleven, at the end of a beautiful ride of about seventeen miles, in a very find and pleasant day.*
  
  The loose sentence is ideal for writing that aims at being colloquial, informal, relaxed. It puts first things first, as most of us do when we talk. Even so, the loose sentence lacks emphasis, and it can easily become formless.

- **Periodic sentence** – organized into at least two parts and expresses a complex thought not brought to completion until the close. (subordinate constructions + main clause = periodic sentence) A periodic sentence makes sense fully only when the end of the sentence is reached.
  
  *As we started to arrange the pieces on the board, I was startled by the sight of his crippled right hand.*
  
  The periodic sentence is emphatic. By delaying and preparing the way for the principal thought, readers are alerted to the importance. The style is also formal and literary, suggesting not the flow of familiar talk, but the writer at his desk.

- **Convoluted sentence** – is a special kind of periodic sentence where the subordinate elements, instead of preceding the main clause, split it apart from the inside.
  
  *White men, at the bottom of their hearts, know this.*
  
  *Now demons, whatever else they may be, are full of interest.*
  
  The convoluted sentence establishes strong emphasis by throwing weight upon the words preceding the commas or dashes that set off the intruding constructions. When used sparingly, the long, intricate convoluted sentence has the advantage of the unusual: it draws attention to
itself and, more important, to what it says, and it can be a pleasant and stimulating challenge to the reader.

- **Balanced sentence** – two or more words or constructions have essentially the same form and length and have similar functions.
  - Visit either you like; they’re both mad. The road lay white in the sun, and the railway ran just beyond.
  - He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape
  - We live in an ascending scale when we live happily, one thing leading to another in an endless series.

Balance requires that the sentence divide into roughly equal halves on either side of a

- **Central pause** – not necessarily always two independent clauses as the first two examples. Balanced elements may be played against one another, sometimes repeating the same idea, sometimes expressing contrasting ideas. When the contrast is sharply pointed it is called

---

**IX. Rhetorical Devices**

- **Antithesis**: antithetical constructions are simply balanced phrases or clauses expressing opposed ideas.
  - Cattiness is a cold war staged by women; macho is a hotter war fought by men.

- **Parallelistm** – two or more words, phrases, or clauses have the same grammatical form and an identical grammatical relationship to the same thing.
  - In its energy, its lyrics, its advocacy of frustrated joys, rock is one long symphony of protest.
  - The Department of Justice began a vigorous campaign to break up the corporate empires, to restore the free and open market, and to plant the feet of industry firmly on the road to competition.

The parallel style suits the needs of speakers well. It is impressive and pleasing to hear—elaborate yet rhythmic and ordered, following a master plan with a place for everything and everything ordered. It is also economical. In its fullest development the parallel sentence has something of the grandeur of a great building, and this architectural impressiveness gives weight and dignity to what the sentence says.

- **Inverted word order** – rearranging the main elements of a sentence in some order other than subject-verb-object, which is often called **natural word order**. Inversions almost always draw attention and is used for emphasis.
  - Him Nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory picture; him the past instructs; him the future invites.

- **Juxtaposition** – a poetic and a rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, often creating an effect of surprise or wit.

- **Rhetorical question** – a question that requires no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement.
  - Yet this need not be. The means are at hand to fulfill the age-old dream: poverty can be abolished. How long shall we ignore this under-developed nation in our midst? How long shall we look the other way while our fellow human beings suffer? How long?

- **Repetition** – a device where words, sounds, and ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and to create emphasis.

- **Anaphora** – the repetition of the same term beginning successive clauses.
  - I didn’t like the swimming pool, I didn’t like swimming, and I didn’t like the swimming instructor, and after all these years I still don’t.
- **Epistrophe** – the repetition of the same term at the ending of successive clauses.
  
  *When that son leaves home, he throws himself with an intensity which his children will not know into the American way of life; he eats American, talks American, he will be American or nothing."

- **Symploce** – combines anaphora and epistrophpe by repeating words at both the beginning and the ending of phrases, clauses, or sentences.
  
  *It is not enough that smoke detectors be installed in every bedroom, smoke detectors must be maintained in every bedroom.

- **Anadiplosis** – using the same term at the end of one clause at the beginning of the next one.
  
  *To philosophize is to understand; to understand is to explain oneself; to explain is to relate.

- **Epanalepsis** – when the same word appears at the beginning and the end.
  
  *Problem gives rise to problem.

- **Polysyndeton and Asyndeton** – two different ways of handling lists or items in a series.
  
  Traditionally a comma follows each item in the list with a conjunction (and) between the last two. Polysyndeton places a conjunction after every term except the last. Asyndeton uses no conjunctions and separates terms of the series with commas. Where the conventional series emphasizes no particular item, though the last usually seems a bit more significant, in polysyndeton the emphasis falls more evenly upon each member of the list:

  *It is the season of suicide and divorce and prickly dread, whenever the wind blows."

  In asyndeton the series takes on more significance as a whole than it does in the conventional pattern. But the stress on each individual item is lighter than in polysyndeton, and the passage moves more quickly:

  *His care, his food, his shelter, his education—all of these were by-products of the parents’ position.

- **Alliteration** is formed by repeating the same sound at the beginning of successive words or words that are related to each other in some way. The most familiar form of alliteration is the repetition of consonants in words pairs.
  
  *Without: The late delivery of parts resulted in an unwanted delay in production.
  
  *With: The late delivery of parts resulted in a disheartening delay in production.

- **Onomatopoeia** is a word that, when pronounced, imitates the sound the word names. In essence, the word sounds like its meaning.
  
  *Without: If you like the dripping of a faucet at three o’clock in the morning, you will like this group’s music.
  
  *With: If you like the plop, plop, plop of a faucet at three o’clock in the morning, you will like this group’s music.

- **Assonance** is created by repeating vowel sounds in the stressed syllables of successive words or words relatively close to each other.
  
  *The hoot of the owl in the cool of the moonlight warned them to head home soon.

- **Reversal and Balance** – positions of the key terms are reversed, a rhetorical device called chiasmus or antimetabole.
  
  *If there had never been a danger to our constitution there never would have been a constitution to be in danger.
  
  *Books are among the best of things, well used; abused, the worst.

- **Zeugma** is a special kind of pun involving a verb. It occurs when the one verb has two different meanings with objects that complement both meanings.
  
  *She left his apartment with tarnished virtue and a new mink.
  
  Joanna, pursued by the three monks, ran about the room, leaping over tables and chairs, sometimes throwing a dish or a scriptural maxim at her pursuers.

  Zeugma, like puns in general, is a comic figure of speech. At its best zeugma is witty and amusing, and it increases meaning by revealing hidden connections.
**Syntax & Rhetorical Device Review** (some essential questions to help guide your analysis)

- Are the sentences simple and direct or complex and convoluted? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Are the sentences loose/cumulative or periodic? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Are there rhetorical questions in the passage? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Is there variety in the sentence patterns? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Does the author use repetition? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Does the author use parallel structure? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element? Does the author use antithesis? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?
- Does the author use juxtaposition? Why? What is the effect on the message or other stylistic element?

---

**X. Literary Devices** (Figurative Language/Figures of Speech/Tropes)

- **Metaphor** - implied comparison between two things of unlike nature
  a. “The symbol of all our aspirations, one of the student leaders called her: the fruit of our struggle.”—John Simpson, “Tiananmen Square”
  b. “A breeze blew through the room, blue curtains in at one end and out the other...twisting them up toward them frosted wedding-cake of a ceiling, and the rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it...”—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
- **Simile** - explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature
  a. “The night is bleeding like a cut.”—Bono
  b. “Ah my!” said Eustacia, with a laugh which unclosed her lips so that the sun shone into her mouth as into a tulip and lent it a similar scarlet fire.”—Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*
- **Synecdoche** - figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole
  a. The British crown has been plagued by scandal.
  b. There is no word from the Pentagon on the new rumors from Afghanistan.
- **Metonymy** – substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant
  a. “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.” –Winston Churchill, 1940
  b. “In Europe, we gave the cold shoulder to De Gaulle, and now he gives the warm hand to Mao Tse-tung.” —Richard Nixon, 1960
- **Antanaclasis** (a type of pun)– repetition of a word in two different senses
  a. “Your argument is sound, nothing but sound.”—Benjamin Franklin
  b. “If we don’t hand together, we'll hang separately.”—Benjamin Franklin
- **Paronomasia** (a type of pun) - use of words alike in sound but different in meaning
  a. “Ask for me tomorrow and you will find me a grave man.” –William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*
- **Syllepsis** (a type of pun) - use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs
  a. “There is a certain type of woman who'd rather press grapes than clothes.”—Advertisement for Peck & Peck
  b. “The ink, like our pig, keeps running out of the pen.”—Student paper
- **Alliteration** - repetition of beginning consonant sounds in words
  a. righteous rapture; singsong syllable; sing a song of sixpence; big, black bear)
  b. “GLORY be to God for dappled things/ For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow”
    Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty”
• **Assonance**—resemblance or similarity in sound between vowels followed by different consonants in two or more stressed syllables (lake and fate)
a. This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon/The winds that will be howling at all hours
   William Wordsworth, “The world is Too Much with Us”

• **Anthimeria - the substitution of one part of speech for another**
b. “Me, dictionarying heavily, ‘Where was the one they were watching?’”—Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa*

• **Periphrasis** (autonomasia) - substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name or a proper name for a quality associated with the name
a. “They do not escape Jim Crow; they merely encounter another, not less deadly variety.”—James Baldwin, Nobody Knows My Name
b. “In his later years, he became in fact the most scarifying of his own creatures: a Quixote of the Cotswolds…” *Time*, referring to Evelyn Waugh

• **Personification (Prosopesis)** - investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities
a. “The night comes crawling in on all fours.” —David Lowery
b. “And indeed there will be time/ For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,/Rubbings its back upon the window panes.” —T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

• **Onomatopoeia** - use of words whose sound echoes the sense
a. “Snap, crackle, pop!”—Commercial

• **Oxymoron** - the yoking of two terms that are ordinarily contradictory
a. “The unheard sounds came through, each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece, and waiting patiently for the other voices to speak.”—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
b. “Still waking sleep, that is not what it is!/ This love I feel, that feel no love is this.”—William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

• **Litotes** - deliberate use of understatement
a. “Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her appearance for the worse.”—Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*

• **Paradox** - an apparently contradictory statement that nevertheless contains a measure of truth
a. “And yet, it was a strangely satisfying experience for an invisible man to hear the silence of sound.”—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
b. “Art is a form of lying in order to tell the truth.”—Pablo Picasso

• **Irony (incongruity)** - use of a word in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite to the literal meaning of the word
a. “This plan means that one generation pays for another. Now that’s just dandy.” —Huey P. Long
b. “By Spring, if God was good, all the proud privileges of trench lice, mustard gas, spattered brains, punctured lungs, ripped guts, asphyxiation, mud and gangrene might be his.”—Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel*
b. “…From the clamor and the clangor of the bells!”—Edgar Allan Poe, “The Bells”

   **Verbal Irony** - occurs when people say the opposite of what they mean. This is perhaps the most common type of irony.

• **Hyperbole/Understatement** - the use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis or heightened effect.
a. “It rained for four years, eleven months, and two days.”—Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*
b. “We walked along a road in Cumberland and stooped, because the sky hung so low.”—Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*

• **Idiom** - expression peculiar to a particular language that means something different from the literal meaning of the words
a. “It’s raining cats and dogs, dude!”—Tommy Chong
b. “This relationship is a match made in heaven”—Some Poor Sap
- **Pun (double entendre)** – plays with the multiple meanings of a word or words. One word may be used in a way that suggests several meanings, or two words that sound alike may be used, with their different meanings.
  a. “Being struck by lightning is a shocking experience!” Joe Notpunny
  b. “Santa’s helpers are nothing but subordinate clauses.”—A dejected Grinch in a speakeasy somewhere north of Whoville, after he’s realized how boring being nice really is and how it has gotten him nowhere but depressed (because, of course, beneath all the “goodness” everyone is really just in it for themselves in the end). He knows he shouldn’t have sold his cave outside of town and moved into that little studio apartment downtown, and how is he ever going to work around that restraining order? The abyss (which he tossed all those presents in years ago) seems more inviting every day.

- **Situational irony** - the situation is different from what common sense indicates it is, will be, or ought to be.
- **Dramatic irony** - occurs when a character states something that they believe to be true but that the reader knows is not true.

**Figures of Speech (some essential questions to help guide your analysis)**

- Does the passage use unusual images or patterns of imagery?
- Does the author create analogies, like similes or metaphors?
- Does the author use personification?
- Is there deliberate hyperbole or understatement in the passage?
- Does the author employ paradox or oxymoron to add complexity?
- What part do rhythm and sound devices such as alliteration or onomatopoeia play in the passage?
- What purpose do the figures of speech serve, and what effect do they have on the passage?

---

**XI. Theme**

**Theme** is the central message, controlling idea or its central insight. It is the unifying generalization about life stated or implied by the story. To derive the theme of a story, we must determine what its central *purpose* is: what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals.

- Theme should be expressible in the form of a statement with a subject and predicate. It is insufficient to say that the theme of a story is motherhood or loyalty to country. Motherhood and loyalty are simply subjects.
- The theme should be stated as a *generalization* about life. In stating theme we do not use the names of the characters or refer to precise places or events, for to do so is to make a specific rather than a general statement.
- We must be careful not to make the generalization larger than is justified by the terms of the story. Terms like *every, all, always*, should be used very cautiously; terms like *some, sometimes, may* are often more accurate.
- Theme is the central and *unifying* concept of a story. Therefore (a) it accounts for all the major details of the story. If we cannot explain the bearing of an important incident or character on the theme, either in exemplifying it or modifying it in some way, it is probable that our interpretation is partial and incomplete, that at best we have got hold only of a subtheme. Another alternative, though it must be used with caution, is that the story itself is imperfectly constructed and lacks unity. (b) The theme is not contradicted by any detail of the story. If we have to overlook or blink at or “force” the meaning of some significant detail in order to frame our statement, we may be sure that our statement is defective. (c) The theme cannot rely upon supposed facts—facts not actually stated or clearly implied by the story. The theme exists inside, not outside, the story. The statement of it must be based on the data of the story itself, not on assumptions supplied from our own experience.
There is no one way of stating the theme of a story. The story is not a guessing game or an acrostic that is supposed to yield some magic verbal formula that won’t work if a syllable is changed. It merely presents a view of life, and, as long as the above conditions are fulfilled, that view may surely be stated in more than one way. Here, for instance, are three possible ways of stating the theme of “Miss Brill”: (a) A person living alone may create a protective fantasy life by dramatizing insignificant activities, but such a life can be jeopardized when she is forced to see herself as others see her. (b) Isolated elderly people, unsupported by a network of family and friends, may make a satisfying adjustment through a pleasant fantasy life, but when their fantasy is punctured by the cold claw of reality, the effect can be devastating. (c) Loneliness is a pitiable emotional state that may be avoided by refusing to acknowledge that one feels lonely, though such an avoidance may also require one to create unrealistic fantasies about oneself.

We should avoid any statement that reduces the theme to some familiar saying that we have head all our lives, such as “You can’t judge a book by its cover” or “A stitch in time saves nine.” Although such a statement may express the theme accurately, too often it is simply a lazy shortcut that impovershes the essential meaning of the story in order to save mental effort. When readers force every new experience into an old formula, they lose the chance for a fresh

**XII. Rhetorical Modes of Discourse**

A **rhetorical mode** is a strategy—a way or method of presenting a subject—through writing or speech. Some of the better known rhetorical modes are, for example, “argument” and “cause and effect.” There are literally dozens, perhaps hundreds, of strategies or methods for presenting subjects; however, the modes are among the most basic. Instructors have used rhetorical modes to teach writing or public speaking since ancient Greek times over two thousand years ago, perhaps longer. Knowing the modes can help us understand the organization—the methodology—of most kinds of writings or other presentations. The basic modes are presented below in alphabetical order.

**Description**

"Description" means "illustrative detail." A description paper often takes a person or object and then describes that person or thing in great illustrative detail. For example, a description paper about a close friend might describe his or her appearance, her actions, and her personality, both through direct descriptive words—like paintings of her in different situations—and through stories or vignettes showing him in action. It is important to be thorough—to provide plenty of details. Often it is helpful to use one or more plans or systems of description. One typical plan is to move in a specific direction: e.g., from head to foot when describing a person, or perhaps clockwise when describing a room or place. The exact direction or order does not matter as long as you are consistent. Another system is to use the five senses to describe; still another, is to use the five W’s of journalism by answering the questions “Who, What, Where, When, and Why or How?” When you describe a subject that moves—a person or moving object—it is wise to describe not only its appearance when standing still, but also its movement. In fact, whenever you write a description paper, it is wise to include as much action as possible: to make your readers see a movie whenever possible, and not just a painting or drawing.

A description paper is organized very simply. You can start with a very short paragraph introducing or defining the subject, or a longer one that offers a particularly striking first description or overall summary. Next, you can write the body in as many or as few paragraphs as you need to fully describe the subject. Organizing these paragraphs according to one or more plans or systems often is helpful. Finally, you can write a concluding paragraph either briefly or at length, depending on whether you want to achieve an abrupt end or to provide some kind of especially strong final description that you have saved for the last.

This rhetorical mode is very common in shorter form, as well. When someone writes a story, for example, whether he or she is a famous story writer or a simple school child, he will use two main rhetorical modes: narration (the giving of a series of events, as above) and description. Even business reports must sometimes use description to provide an accurate and full account of the appearance of
something. Description plays an especially important part in the teaching of writing, as writing instructors usually want their students to learn to write in great detail—the more specifics, the better.

**Argumentative**

An "argument" is, simply, an educated guess or opinion, not a simple fact. It is something debatable: "Men have walked on the moon" is a fact, but "People will walk on Venus in the next ten years" is an opinion. Anything that reasonably can be debated is an argument. A simple argument paper usually presents a debatable opinion and then offers supports in favor of it, or sometimes an argument paper will discuss both sides of an issue and then give good reasons for choosing one side over the other. For example, a paper about space flight might argue that humans should not spend large sums of money in sending people into space. The paper might then argue that three good reasons this is true is that there are many poor on our planet, on whom our resources should be spent, that space flight is not as enlightening for humankind as increasing literacy or cultural awareness, and that most of the money being spent on space is for military purposes, which is useless. Another type of argument paper might ask the main idea as a question: "Should the human race spend large sums of money to send people into space?" Then it might argue both sides thoroughly and, finally, choose one side and give strong reasons why this side is best.

A typical argument paper often has what is called a "thesis" structure. It starts with an introduction that offers an interesting opening—a quotation, perhaps, or an interesting story, a statement of the main argument, and sometimes a list of the several reasons (often three, but not necessarily so) to be given in support of this argument. Then, step by step, the reasons are given with supporting details such as quotations, facts, figures, statistics, and/or people's experiences. If the paper is short, there may be just one paragraph per reason. In a longer argument paper, there may be several paragraphs or even several pages per reason. At the end, a conclusion provides a restatement of the main argument and a final interesting quotation or other detail.

In the alternative form, the introduction is much the same, and often starts with an interesting quotation or story, but it offers the main idea as a question and provides the two (or more) possible answers. It may or may not state which answer it will choose in the end. The body is formed by having a section discussing the first possible answer with reasons and details supporting it, the second possible answer and its reasons and supporting details, and a final section in which you choose one of the two answers and give strong reasons why you are doing so. The conclusion once again restates your final choice and offers a final interesting quotation or story.

As with all the other modes, argument is a thinking pattern or skill that is used in a number of types of college papers in shorter form. You will find it in any sentence, paragraph, or section of a paper in which an opinion is expressed, especially when one or more supporting reasons are given for the opinion. Argument is one of the most basic forms of human thinking. When you use argument, you rise above the mere offering of a personal opinion precisely because an argument requires supporting reasons, preferably with specific supporting details, to justify the position you are taking.

**Cause and Effect**

"Cause and effect" simply means that you start with a subject (an event, person, or object) and then show the causes (reasons) for it, and/or the effects (results) of it. "Cause" means the reasons why or for something, or the source of something. "Effects" simply are results or outcomes. Cause-and-effect writing shows a chain of connected events, each the logical result of the one before it. A simple cause-and-effect paper discusses the chain of events related to a person, event, or object, showing what are the causes and what are the results. For example, a paper about a solar car might describe how it came to be built by an inventor and how he first became interested in solar cars (the causes), and what the results of this solar car might be—how its existence might lead people to take energy efficiency and environmental concerns more seriously and even lead to mass-produced solar cars (effects or results).
Typically a cause-and-effect paper has an introductory paragraph defining or clarifying the subject itself, and stating the nature of the paper (i.e., that your paper is a cause-and-effect paper); a body of several to many paragraphs; and a brief concluding paragraph. Assume, when you write a cause-and-effect paper, that you are explaining events to someone who may know a little about them but never has heard the entire story of how the events are linked by logical cause and effect.

At the end of your cause-and-effect paper, add a final, concluding paragraph. It should summarize, very briefly, the most important cause and effect concerning your subject. And it might offer a final interesting thought or two about the subject.

It also is possible to use cause and effect in less than a full paper. In fact, many explanations and discussions involve cause-and-effect logic in just a paragraph or two, just a sentence, or even within a phrase within a sentence. Anytime you want to answer the question of why something has happened, you are using cause-and-effect logic.

Classification

"Classification" means that a subject--a person, place, event, or object--is identified and broken into parts and sub-parts. This type of paper is slightly more complex than others. For this reason, you might first want to learn to write "Extended Definition," "Comparison/Contrast," and "Description" papers.

For an example of a classification paper, imagine you want to classify a specific student. You might first start by identifying this student by name and briefly defining him or her. Second, you would choose a system by which to classify him: e.g., you could choose a system that would describe his looks, school classes, and after-school activities; or you might choose a biological system and describe him by his physical type, health, blood type, and other biological markings; or, perhaps, you might choose to describe the student by his psychological makeup, his family history, and/or even his medical history. Third, once you have chosen a system, you would then describe the person. As you do so, you would want to show how, in each part of our classification, he is similar to others like him and also how he differs from them--this is the heart of developing lengthy description in a good classification paper, to use comparisons and contrasts with each small element of our classification system.

A standard classification paper starts with a short introduction. In it, you state and briefly define (see "Extended Definition") your subject. You also should state clearly that you intend to classify your subject. In the body of your paper, you describe your subject according to the classification system you have chosen. You choose a system based partly on what your audience expects (e.g., a psychology instructor probably would expect you to classify and describe using a system of psychology; a biology instructor, a system of biology; etc.) and partly on how many classification categories you need to make your paper be well developed (often, the more categories you have, the more length you can develop). Be sure to break down the body into a number of separate paragraphs. Finally, your conclusion briefly reminds your audience of the subject and purpose and, perhaps, ends with a final, interesting sentence or two.

Classification is used as a pattern of thinking, speaking, and writing in shorter forms, too. Whenever you must break down a subject into its separate parts, you are classifying. Classification is almost as basic a way of thinking as are "Cause and Effect" (above) and "Description" (below).

Compare and Contrast

"Comparison/contrast" means to show how subjects are alike and/or different. A simple comparison/contrast paper often has two subjects and describes how they are alike and then how they differ. For example, a comparison/contrast paper on two forms of weekend entertainment, camping and dancing, might first give details on how both can involve physical skills, friends, and enjoying sounds and sights; then the paper might give details of how camping and popular dancing differ in that one happens in nature and the other in the midst of civilization, one usually is slow and quiet and
the other often fast and loud, and one peaceful while the other is rousing. If you are asked to write a comparison/contrast paper on just one subject, you can first compare it to the subjects it is like and then contrast it to the subjects that seem opposite it; several different similarities and several different opposites are acceptable, even helpful, in such a paper. For example, if you were going to write a comparison/contrast paper about airports, you might decide compare them to city bus stations, train stations, and street bus stops. Then you might contrast them with each of these.

In academic writing, comparison/contrast writing sometimes is used to show how two related viewpoints--two ideas or opinions--can be similar but different: for example, in the abortion controversy, some people believe that abortions are wrong; others believe that artificial birth control is wrong. These two positions are similar, but they also are different--leading to different arguments and different results at times. Comparison/contrast also can be useful in analyzing an author's argument by comparing it to someone else's argument (yours or another author's), showing points of similarity and points of difference. For example, if an author argues for a constitutional amendment preventing gender discrimination, you could analyze the argument by comparing and contrasting it to the reasons for other constitutional amendments which already exist.

Start a comparison/contrast paper simply and clearly: tell your readers in a brief introduction what you are going to do (compare, contrast, or both) and what your subject or subjects are. It also may be helpful to offer a very brief definition (see "Extended Definition") of your subject(s). Then write the body. It is a good idea to provide at least one paragraph for each intellectual function you are going to do. For example, you might first have just one paragraph (or one set of paragraphs) that use comparison, then another set that uses just contrast. Instead, you might organize our paragraphs by subject: using the example above of airports, you might have one paragraph or set of paragraphs comparing and contrasting them to city bus stations, a second set comparing and contrasting them to train stations, and a final set to street bus stops. The organization you choose for your body paragraphs should be the one that helps your readers most easily understand your comparisons/contrasts. Your conclusion should be one paragraph containing a summary of your subject and purpose (to compare and/or contrast), and a final interesting sentence or two. The audience you should consider as you plan and then write your paper is anyone who knows all of the subjects you are talking about but who would find it interesting to read about how they are compared/contrasted.

Comparison and contrast both are commonly used in short form in many other types of papers, too. For example, you must use comparison and contrast to define something (see "Extended Definition": you show what the subject is like; then you show how it differs or contrasts from others like it). You also use comparison anytime you explain that something is "like" something else; likewise, you use contrast whenever you want to show how something is different. Comparison/contrast is quite deeply and naturally imbedded in our everyday thinking and logic.

**Exemplification**

"Exemplification" means "the giving of an example." An exemplification paper usually starts with a main idea, belief, or opinion--something abstract--and then gives one extended example or a series of shorter examples to illustrate that main idea. In fact, an exemplification paper is a paper that illustrates an abstract idea. For example, if I wished to write an exemplification paper about "The Opposite Sex--Problems and Pleasures" (as a man or as a woman), there might be two ways I could go about this. One would be, after introducing my general idea, to tell several little stories about--give examples of--how the opposite sex can be both a problem to deal with and a pleasure to be with. The other way I might write the paper (and a stronger, more unified way of doing it) might be to pick out one person of the opposite gender I have dated or lived with and describe how this one person gave me both problems and pleasures in my overall relationship with him or her.

A typical short exemplification paper is written like most of the other rhetorical-modes paper. It usually starts with a single introductory paragraph that briefly defines your subject and states what you will do in the paper--exemplify. Then there are one or two to many paragraphs offering one or
more extended examples of your subject. Finally, there is a brief closing paragraph restating what your subject is and offering some kind of final brief, strong example or some other kind of interesting ending. Your audience is anyone who might only have a partial understanding of the subject and to whom an example would be helpful: in fact, you choose your examples partly by deciding what the audience will easily understand.

Shorter versions of this rhetorical mode exist, as do the others, within the space of a few paragraphs, one paragraph, or even as part of a larger paragraph. Exemplification simply means to give an example of a subject, and it is possible to do this in as little as a sentence.

**Extended Definition**

This section describes how to start an “extended definition.” An extended definition simply defines a subject in a fuller or more extended—more thorough—way than does a dictionary. Typically an extended definition has a brief introductory paragraph of a few sentences, a body of one or several paragraphs, and a brief concluding paragraph. Assume, when you write an extended definition, that you are defining something for a student or perhaps a foreigner who never has heard the term before.

To write an extended definition, start with an introductory paragraph first. Write it in just two or three sentences as if it were a dictionary definition. A good dictionary definition has the following parts:

1. the exact term (the who or what) being defined,
2. its classification—the class or group of people, events, or things to which it belongs, and
3. a brief summarizing description of the term. (This description often helps define your subject by showing how it differs from similar subjects that fit in the same classification as you have described in “2”: in other words, provide enough details that your subject cannot be mistaken for a similar but different one.)

These three items are the three parts of a good dictionary definition. Use these in the introduction; then the rest of your news release is the “extended” part of the definition, adding further description of or about the term. Here are three examples of good dictionary definitions using the three defining items above:

1. **“Chris Smith**
   - **class:** is a student at George Washington College.
   - **sum/des:** He is 19, is working on an engineering degree, and is from Chicago, Illinois.

2. **“The Sun Car Race**
   - **class:** is a national competition.
   - **sum/des:** It is based in Utah for solar-run cars developed by independent inventors and schools.

3. **“La-Zee**
   - **class:** is a new silicon-based car polish.
   - **sum/des:** It is made by Dup Chemicals and can be used so easily that it practically applies itself.

A simple extended-definition paper usually starts with such simple dictionary-like definitions; then the definition is extended by writing a long body further describing the term. The body paragraph(s) may consist of any or all of the following:

- further description and/or details about the subject
- one or several excellent examples
- a description of the subject in action or use
- a background or history of the subject

The conclusion should simply summarize your subject or say something particularly interesting about it in a final paragraph. Try to make your conclusion relatively short—just several sentences, if possible.

Definition is a rhetorical mode that can be used in something smaller or shorter than a full paper. You can use extended definition for several paragraphs only in a paper of much greater length. You also can add to a paper a one-paragraph definition—like a brief encyclopedia definition. And you
can use a short definition, dictionary style, in many types of writing situations that call for just a sentence or two of definition.

**Narration**

"Narration" or a "narrative" provides details of what happened. It is almost like a list of events in the order that they happened, except that it is written in paragraph form. A narration or narrative doesn't have to show any cause and effect; it only needs to show what happened in the order that it happened. History books are filled with narrations. For example, if I were to describe the visit of the Pope to Denver in 1993, I would use his itinerary and give details of each major event in that visit. If I were writing a book about it, I would give details of many of the more interesting minor events as well. I would do this in the order in which they occurred: first the Pope did this, then he did that, and then he did a third thing.

A typical short narration paper starts with a brief introductory paragraph consisting of two parts. The first is a sentence or two stating the event you are going to narrate; you might even want to include the who, what, where, and when of the event in this part. The second part is a simple statement that the paper you are writing is a narrative of this event. In the body of the narrative, you break the event into several parts--one part per paragraph. Each paragraph would then further break down the event into sub-events and enough description of them that your reader will know what you mean. The body may have just a few paragraphs or many, depending on the length of paper and complexity you want. The conclusion can be very brief: just a final rewording of the overall event you have narrated, and a final interesting comment or two about it, or perhaps a statement about how, where, or when this event fits into the larger flow of history around it. Your audience is anyone who knows little or nothing about the event but can understand it easily once you explain it.

As with other rhetorical modes, narration often is used in a context shorter than an entire paper. More commonly, you may need to explain a sequence of events, event by event, in just a paragraph or two when you are writing a longer paper for some other purpose: if you need to give a long example of one or two paragraphs, this example might, perhaps, be in story form--in the order in which events happened. This would be a short narration. Any other time as well that you write about events in the order in which they happened, you are using narration.