Literrary Terms Used in AP Literature Exams

Terms Used In Essay Instructions:

allusion – A reference in a work of literature to something outside the work, especially to a well-known historical or literary event, person, or work.

attitude – A speaker’s, author’s, or character’s disposition toward or opinion of a subject.

details (or choice of details) – Details are items or parts that make up a larger picture or story.

devices of sound – The techniques of deploying the sound of words, especially in poetry, such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia.

diction – The author’s word choice.

figurative language – Writing that uses figures of speech (as opposed to literal language or that which is actual or specifically denoted) such as metaphor, simile, and irony. Figurative language uses words to mean something other than their literal meaning.

imagery – The images of a literary work; the sensory details of a work; the figurative language of a work. Imagery has several definitions, but the two that are paramount are the visual, auditory, or tactile images evoked by words of a literary work or the images that figurative language evokes.

irony – A figure of speech in which intent and actual meaning differ, characteristically praise for blame or blame for praise; a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement of its own obvious meaning. The term irony implies a discrepancy.

metaphor – A figurative use of language in which a comparison is expressed without the use of a comparative term like “as,” “like,” or “than.”

narrative techniques – The methods involved in telling a story; the procedures used by a writer of stories or accounts. Narrative techniques is a general term (like “devices,” or “resources of language”) which asks you to discuss the procedures used in the telling of a story. Examples of the techniques you might use are point of view, manipulation of time, dialogue, or interior monologue.

omniscient point of view – The vantage point of a story in which the narrator can know, see, and report whatever he or she chooses. The narrator is free to describe the thoughts of any of the characters, to skip about in time or place, or to speak directly to the reader.

point of view – Any of several possible vantage points from which a story is told. The point of view may be omniscient, limited to that of a single character, or limited to that of several characters. The teller may use first person or the third person.

resources of language – A general phrase for the linguistic devices or techniques that a writer can use. A question calling for the “resources of language” invites a student to discuss the style and rhetoric of a passage. Such topics as diction, syntax, figurative language, and imagery are all examples of resources of language.

rhetorical techniques – The devices used in effective or persuasive language. The number of rhetorical techniques, like that of the resources of language, is long. Examples would be devices such as contrast, repetitions, paradox, understatement, sarcasm, and rhetorical question.

satire – Writing that seeks to arouse a reader’s disapproval of an object by ridicule. Satire is usually comedy that exposes errors with an eye to correct vice and folly.

setting – The background to a story; the physical location of a play, story, or novel. The setting of a narrative will
normally involve both time and place.

simile – A directly expressed comparison; a figure of speech comparing two objects, usually with “like,” “as,” or “than.”

strategy (or rhetorical strategy) – The management of language for a specific effect. The strategy or rhetorical strategy of a poem is the planned placing of elements to achieve an effect.

structure – The arrangement of materials within a work; the relationship of the parts of a work to the whole; the logical divisions of a work.

style – The mode of expression in language; the characteristic manner of expression of an author. Elements of style include diction, syntax, figurative language, imagery, selection of detail, sound effects and tone.

symbol – something that is simultaneously itself and a sign of something else.

syntax – The structure of a sentence; the arrangement of words in a sentence. A discussion of syntax could include such considerations as the length or brevity of the sentences, the kinds of sentences (questions, exclamations, declarative sentences, rhetorical questions – or periodic or loose; simple, complex, or compound).

theme - The main thought expressed by a work.

tone – The manner in which an author expresses his or her attitude; the intonation of the voice that expresses meaning. Tone is the result of allusion, diction, figurative language, imagery, irony, symbol, syntax, and style.

Terms Used In Multiple-Choice Questions

allegory – A story in which people, things, and events have another symbolic meaning.

ambiguity – Multiple meanings a literary work may communicate, especially two meanings that are incompatible.

apostrophe – Direct address, usually to someone or something that is not present.

connotation – The implications of a word or phrase, as opposed to its exact meaning (denotation).

convention – A device of style or subject matter so often used that it becomes a recognized means of expression. For example, a lover observing the literary love conventions cannot eat or sleep and grows pale and lean.

denotation – The dictionary meaning of a word, as opposed to connotation.

didactic – Explicitly instructive.

digression – The use of material unrelated to the subject of a work.

epigram – A pithy saying, often using contrast. The epigram is also a verse form, usually brief and pointed.

euphemism – A figure of speech using indirection to avoid offensive bluntness.

grotesque – Characterized by distortion or incongruities.

hyperbole – Deliberate exaggeration, overstatement. As a rule, hyperbole is self-conscious, without the intention of being accepted literally.

jargon – The special language of a profession or group.

literal – Not figurative; accurate to the letter; matter of fact or concrete.
lyrical – songlike; characterized by emotion, subjectivity, and imagination.

oxymoron – A combination of opposites; the union of contradictory terms. Romeo’s line “feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health” has four examples of the device.

parable – A story designed to suggest a principle, illustrate a moral, or answer a question. Parables are allegorical stories.

paradox – A statement that seems to be self-contradicting but, in fact, is true.

personification – A figurative use of language which endows the nonhuman (ideas, inanimate objects, animals, abstractions) with human characteristics.

reliability – A quality of some fictional narrators whose word the reader can trust. There are both reliable and unreliable narrators, that is, tellers of a story who should or should not be trusted.

rhetorical question – A question asked for effect, not in expectation of a reply.

soliloquy – A speech in which a character who is alone speaks his or her thoughts aloud. A monologue also has a single speaker, but the monologuist speaks to others who do not interrupt.

stereotype – A conventional pattern, expression, character, or idea.

syllogism – A form of reasoning in which two statements are made and a conclusion is drawn from them. A syllogism begins with a major premise (“All tragedies end unhappily.”) followed by a minor premise (“Hamlet is a tragedy.”) and a conclusion (Therefore, “Hamlet ends unhappily.”).

thesis – The theme, meaning, or position that a writer undertakes to prove or support.

Metrical Terms

alliteration – The repetition of identical or similar consonant sounds, normally at the beginning of words.

assonance – The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds.

ballad meter – A four-line stanza rhymed abcb with four feet in lines one and three and three feet in lines two and four.

blank verse – Unrhymed iambic pentameter.

dactyl – A metrical foot of three syllables, an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables.

end-stopped – A line with a pause at the end (punctuation).

free verse – Poetry which is not written in a traditional meter but is still rhythmical.

heroic couplet – Two end-stopped iambic pentameter lines rhymed aa,bb,cc with the thought usually completed in the two-line unit.

hexameter – A line containing six feet.

iamb – A two-syllable foot with an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable.

internal rhyme – Rhyme that occurs within a line, rather than at the end.

onomatopoeia – The use of words whose sound suggests their meaning.
pentameter – A line containing five feet.

rhyme royal – A seven-line stanza of iambic pentameter rhymed ababbcc, used by Chaucer.

sonnet – Normally a fourteen-line iambic pentameter poem.

stanza – Usually a repeated grouping of three or more lines with the same meter and rhyme scheme.

terza rima – A three-line stanza rhymed aba, bcb, cdc.

tetrameter – A line of four feet

Grammatical Terms

antecedent – That which goes before, especially the word, phrase, or clause to which a pronoun refers.

clause – A group of words containing a subject and its verb that may or may not be a complete sentence.

ellipsis – The omission of a word or several words necessary for a complete construction that is still understandable.

imperative – The mood of a verb that gives an order.

modify – To restrict or limit in meaning.

parallel structure – A similar grammatical structure within a sentence or with a paragraph. Winston Churchill’s “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields” speech depends chiefly on the use of parallel structure.

periodic sentence – A sentence grammatically complete only at the end. A loose sentence is grammatically complete before the period. The following are (1) periodic and (2) loose sentences.

1. When conquering love did first my heart assail,/ Unto mine aid I summoned every sense.
1. Fair is my love, and cruel as she’s fair.

syntax – The structure of a sentence.

Types of Poems

Ballad is a relatively short narrative poem with a simple dramatic action. Ballads tell of love, death, the supernatural or a combination of these. Two characteristics of a ballad are incremental repetition and the ballad stanza.

Blank Verse is a type of poetry, distinguished by having a regular meter, but no rhyme. In English, the meter most commonly used with blank verse has been iambic pentameter.

Carpe Diem translated means "Seize the Day." Carpe Diem poetry encourages readers to make the most of the immediate, to enjoy life.

Concrete Poetry is poetry in which the shape or pattern is essential to the conveying the intended effect or meaning.

Didactic poems which are usually written to teach or to state an informative lesson. These poems can be somewhat moralistic.
Elegy is a poem of mourning, from the Greek *elegos*, a reflection on the death of someone or on a sorrow generally - which is a form of lyric poetry.

**Epic** is a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of heroic figures.

**Epigram** is a short, witty poem or statement.

**Epitaph** is a short text honoring a deceased person, strictly speaking that inscribed on their tombstone or plaque, but also used figuratively.

**Extended Metaphor** is a poem in which the metaphor continues throughout the poem.

**Found Poetry** is the rearrangement of words, phrases , and sometimes whole passages that are taken from other sources and reframed as poetry by changes in spacing and/or lines (and consequently meaning), or by altering the text by additions and/or deletions.

**Free Verse** is a term describing various styles of that are written without using strict metre, or rhyme, but that still are recognizable as poetry by virtue of complex patterns of one sort or another that readers will perceive to be part of a coherent whole.

**Lyric** is a short poem with one speaker (not necessarily the poet) who expresses thought or feeling.

**Monologue** is a speech presented by a single character to express his thoughts.

**Narrative** is a form of poetry that tells a story.

**Ode** is a longer lyric poem having a serious subject and dignified style, often addressed to some person.

**Pastoral** is a brief poem that focuses on scenes from rural or pastoral life. It often contains descriptions of shepherds and idealized views of life.

**Sonnet** is a lyric poem consisting of fourteen lines, a set rhyme and rhythm. In English, the two basic sonnets are the Italian or Shakespearean.

**Cinquain** - a five line poem with a set structure. These structures vary depending on the form of cinquain.

**Haiku** - a form of Japanese poetry, usually three lines of five, seven and then five syllables.

**Limerick** - an often witty or humourous five line poem that follows a strict structure.

**Acrostic** - a poem in which the first letter of each line forms the subject or title.