

AP English Literature and Composition Key Definitions · 核心定义

Naming a device earns nothing on its own; the rubric pays for explaining how it produces an effect. These entries are written so that each definition ends where your analysis should begin. 文学分析中, 识别手法本身不得分, 必须说明它如何产生效果。

Narrative and structure

Point of view 叙述视角 — the position from which a story is told; the question is always what that position lets the reader see and what it withholds

Unreliable narrator 不可靠叙述者 — a narrator whose account the reader has reason to doubt, so the gap between what is told and what is true becomes the meaning

Free indirect discourse 自由间接引语 — narration that adopts a character's idiom without quotation marks, blending narrator and character so judgement becomes hard to locate

Foil 陪衬人物 — a character whose contrast illuminates another's qualities

Dramatic irony 戏剧性反讽 — the reader knowing something a character does not, which charges ordinary lines with a second meaning

In medias res 中间开始 — beginning in the middle of the action, withholding context so the reader assembles it

Language and figurative devices

Diction 用词 — an author's word choice, described by its register and connotation rather than merely labelled 'strong'

Syntax 句法 — the arrangement of words in a sentence; its length and interruption control pace and emphasis

Metaphor 隐喻 — a comparison asserting one thing IS another, which transfers the associations of the second onto the first

Conceit 奇喻 — an extended metaphor sustained and elaborated across a passage or whole poem

Synecdoche 提喻 — a part standing for the whole, or the whole for a part

Juxtaposition 并置 — placing two elements side by side so their contrast generates meaning neither carries alone

Tone 语气 — the speaker's attitude toward the subject, inferred from diction, syntax and imagery – never simply asserted

Poetry

Enjambment 跨行连续 — a sentence running past the line break without pause, which sets the line's meaning against the sentence's

Caesura 行中停顿 — a strong pause within a line, usually marked by punctuation

Iambic pentameter 抑扬格五音步 — five metrical feet per line, each an unstressed then a stressed syllable; the interest lies in where the pattern BREAKS

Volta 转折 — the turn in a sonnet where the argument shifts, conventionally at line 9 in a Petrarchan and line 13 in a Shakespearean

Apostrophe 呼语 — direct address to someone absent, dead or abstract

Writing about literature

A thesis must be defensible and interpretive. “The poem uses imagery to convey emotion” is true of every poem and earns nothing.

Quote briefly and embed the quotation in your own sentence. Long block quotations displace the commentary that carries the marks.

Move from device to EFFECT to meaning: name the choice, say what it does to the reader, then what it contributes to the work’s argument.

Write about the author’s choices, not the character’s psychology alone – the essay is about a made object.