

Setting

The time and place in which events occur.

Narrator

The person telling a story.

Note: there can be multiple narrators.

First Person

Narrator uses 'I' or 'me', so they are a character in their story.

Third Person

Narrator uses 'he', 'she', 'they', as if they were an observer of events.

Omniscient Narrator

An all-seeing and all-knowing narrator, able to get into the minds of characters.

Point of View

The perspective taken on events.

Note: events can be seen and interpreted from different angles.

Plot

The sequence of events.

Note: in an extract you will only receive a fraction of the plot but it might hint at wider events and themes.

Sub-plot

A strand of events that is of less significance to a text's main themes or characters but still of interest to readers.

Genre

The style or category of literary text according to recognised codes and conventions.

Note: plot, character details and language can all denote genre, which in turn can affect a reader's expectations of the text.

Foreshadowing

Hints of what's to come.

Repetition

Recurring sounds, words or ideas, used to emphasise or draw focus.

Exposition

Detailed description or explanation, usually used to introduce a character or idea.

Climax

When events reach a pinnacle, often marking a turning point.

Note: though the climax to the central narrative typically occurs towards the end, a story can contain crescendos and mini-climaxes throughout.

Denouement

A conclusion in which issues are resolved.

Flashback

A temporary interruption of the chronological sequence of events to reveal something that happened earlier.

Flashforward

A temporary interruption of the chronological sequence of events to reveal something that will happen later.

Note: also called a prolepsis if you want to really impress with terminology!

Conflict

Forces at odds with one another.

Note: conflict can come in many guises such as tension or a dilemma and it could occur in a character's thoughts; it needn't be physical or even involve more than one person.

Protagonist

The main character, often the 'hero' who readers are made to root for or empathise with.

Antagonist

Who the protagonist battles against.

Note: can occasionally be a more abstract idea, rephrasing the definition as what the protagonist battles against.

Foil

A character who contrasts with another (usually the protagonist) in order to draw attention to particular qualities or characteristics.

Dialogue

Conversation between characters.

Note: dialogue is nearly always included to tell readers something about character relationships.

Accent

The way someone pronounces words.

Note: this can be revealing of setting, character, mood, tone and theme.

Dialect

Words that are distinct to a particular geographical region or social group.

Note: as with accent, writers might use this to convey ideas on a number of different levels.

Stream of Consciousness

A person's thoughts and feelings delivered as if they are pouring out of their head, unhindered by any other character or event.

Themes

The morals, ideas and deeper meanings contained in a literary text.

Note: when asked what a text is about, pay more attention to themes than plot.

Mood

The disposition a literary text evokes in its readers.

Note: often referred to as atmosphere, consider how writers use language to create mood.

Tone

The attitude that a writer conveys through their language and stylistic choices.

Imagery

The use of figurative language to create pictures in the reader's mind and appeal to their physical senses.

Irony

A discrepancy between the expected state and how things really are.

Note: often used for humour but can equally be used to create pathos.

Verbal Irony

A person says one thing but means another.

Situational Irony

The outcome of a situation is different to what was expected.

Dramatic Irony

The audience is given information or knowledge that is denied to a character.

Wordplay

Words are deliberately used for an ambiguity in sound or meaning.

Note: puns are a prime example and are often, but not always, used for humour.

Paragraphs

The chunking of text according to time, topic, person or place.

Note: paragraphs can be long or short and the reason for division of text is not always obvious but usage is never random.

Punctuation

Structures text at sentence level but can also contribute to meaning and whole text cohesion.

Note: look for patterns such as a series of simple sentences and the effect of this. Some forms of punctuation might serve a more obvious structural purpose, such as an ellipsis...