

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Literary Elements

Each instructor develops his or her own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but they should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

Elements

Allusion: An indirect reference, often to a person, event, statement, theme, or work; enriches meaning through connotation; assumes the reader will make the connection

Characters/Characterization: The various means by which an author describes and develops characters in a work; (See handout: Character Analysis)

Diction: The author's word choice; the general type or character of language used in the body of the work; encompasses the degree of difficulty, complexity, abstractness, formality, and frequency of words used

Figurative Language: Language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation

Imagery: An author's vivid description or representation of ideas

Literal, or concrete, imagery is purely descriptive and represents an object or event with words that appeal directly to the five senses.

Figurative imagery typically involves a sensory description of an intangible object such as hope, truth, or beauty by giving them physical characteristics.

Irony: A contradiction between appearance or expectation and reality; when a writer's meaning is different from what is actually stated. (See handout: Irony Explained)

Verbal Irony: Characterized by a discrepancy between what a character or writer says and what he or she means or believes to be true. In fact, the speaker often says exactly the opposite of what he or she actually means.

Situational Irony: Involves a discrepancy between expectation and reality and derives primarily from events or situations themselves, whether or not the characters understand the situation as ironic.

Dramatic Irony: Dramatic irony involves a discrepancy between a character's perception and what the reader or audience knows to be true. Lacking material information that the audience possesses, the character creates discord by his or her responses to plot events.

Motif: A recurrent, unifying element in a work such as a character type, image, or symbol that usually expresses or reveals a theme.

Plot: The arrangement and interrelation of events in a narrative work, chosen and designed to engage the reader's attention or to achieve a desired effect; typically involves but is not limited to elements such as rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution

Point of View: The vantage point from which a work is written; first-person, second-person, and third-person omniscient or limited

Setting: Combination of place, time, and environment that provides background for the characters and plot of a work; the specific setting of an individual scene may contrast or contribute to the overall setting of the work

Style: The author's chosen style is produced by the message of material s/he communicates to the reader, along with how s/he chooses to present it. Style is traditionally divided into three categories: high (formal), middle (standard), and low (informal)

Symbolism: The author's recurring use of symbols; symbols are figures in which the image or concept represents more than itself, having both literal and figurative significance

Syntax: The arrangement, ordering, grouping, and placement of words within a phrase, sentence, or paragraph

Theme: An overall idea that becomes apparent throughout a text; the statement(s), expressed or implied, that a text seems to be making about its subject

Tone: Similar to atmosphere and mood; the attitude of the author toward the subject matter or audience; the general feeling created by a work at a given point

Figures of Speech

Anaphora: The exact repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of successive lines

Metaphor/Simile: Metaphors associate two distinct things without using a connective word; Similes associate two distinct things by using *like* or *as*.

Parallelism: Used to accentuate or emphasize ideas or images by using grammatically similar constructions

Others: alliteration, antithesis, apostrophe, chiasmus, hyperbole, litotes, metonymy, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, paradox, personification, synecdoche, zeugma