

A glossary of analytical terms to explore Shakespeare's Language

In Shakespearean texts, characters of the upper classes tend to speak in 'verse'. This means their lines obey the rules of poetry and you can often identify this by the use of capital letters at the start of each line. The lines look like poetry on the page. Characters of the lower classes tend to speak in prose and their lines look more like a 'block' of text on the page.

Blank Verse	<p>Verse without rhyme, especially that which uses iambic pentameters.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, To the last syllable of recorded time; And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more.</i></p> <p>(Macbeth)</p>
Iambic pentameter	<p>A line of verse with five metrical feet, each consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable. This creates a 'de-dum' rhythm which sounds like a heartbeat. Five 'de-dum's in a row and that is iambic pentameter:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"Two households, both alike in dignity"</i></p> <p>(Romeo and Juliet)</p>
Soliloquy	<p>An act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or believing there is no one listening. This type of speech can often reveal insight into the character's inner workings.</p>
Monologue	<p>A long speech by one actor in a play delivered to others (therefore unlike a soliloquy because they are aware of those listening).</p>
Imagery	<p>Visually descriptive or figurative language</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>'What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'</i></p> <p>(Romeo and Juliet)</p>
Allusion	<p>An expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference. A brief, indirect reference to a place, person, thing or idea that holds, historical, mythological or literary significance:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"You are a lover. Borrow Cupid's wings And soar with them above a common bound."</i> (Romeo and Juliet)</p>
Metaphor	<p>A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable:</p>

	<p><i>'If music be the food of love play on.'</i> (Twelfth Night)</p> <p>Music is not food, and love itself doesn't have food (emotions can't eat), but the character delivers this line to imply that music nourishes and builds emotions like love. This is true today, hence why songs about love and romance are so popular.</p>
Enjambment	<p>The continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza.</p> <p><i>Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments. Love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds</i> (Sonnet 116)</p> <p>Here the enjambment creates unity between the lines. This is a poem about love overcoming all obstacles and it literally overcomes the line boundaries here.</p>
Caesura	<p>This is also a device used in poetry but not in prose. It refers to the use of punctuation that 'cuts' the line in two:</p> <p><i>"To be, or not to be: that is the question"</i> (Hamlet)</p> <p>Here the comma is the caesura and it creates a literal divide in Hamlet's fragmented mind.</p>
Rhetorical questions	<p>The rhetorical question can be used in a soliloquy or monologue, but is posed when a character does not expect a response and can often indicate confusion or frustration or dilemma:</p> <p><i>"O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?"</i></p>
Personification	<p>The attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.</p> <p><i>'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind; and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.'</i> (Romeo and Juliet)</p> <p>Here Shakespeare has personified love - he often personified emotions to help his audience understand what his characters were experiencing.</p>

You should also consider some of the literary techniques we introduced you to last term and in Year 7, as they will be applicable too:

- Simile
- Onomatopoeia
- Alliteration
- Sibilance
- Exclamatives
- Imperatives (when a character delivers an order)
- Emotive vocabulary

