AP Literary Terms (2 every day w/examples – please have in your notes)

1. Alliteration – repetition of same sounds – usually initial consonants or words or of stressed syllables in any sequence of neighboring words.

EX = From Maya Angelou’s “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”:

“Up the aisle, the moans and screams merged with the sickening smell of woolen black clothes worn in summer weather and green leaves wilting over yellow flowers.”

Angelou gives us a striking example of alliteration in the above extract with the letters “s” and “w”. We notice that alliterative words are interrupted by other non-alliterative words among them but the effect of alliteration remains the same. We immediately notice alliteration in the words “screams”, “sickening smell”, “summer”, “weather” and “wilting”.

1. Allusion – an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader’s familiarity with what is thus mentioned

EX = Keats’s “Ode to the Grecian Urn”:

“Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our [rhyme](http://literarydevices.net/rhyme/):  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?”

“Sylvan” is a goat-like-man deity of Greek mythology. “Tempe” alludes to the “Vale of Tempe” in Greece, a place (from Greek mythology) frequently visited by Apollo and other gods. Likewise, “the dales of Arcady” refers to the home of “Pan”, the god of rustic music.

1. Apostrophe – a rhetorical figure in which the speaker addresses a dead or absent person, an abstraction, or an inanimate object

EX = William [Shakespeare](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/shakespeare/) makes use of an apostrophe in his play “[Macbeth](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/macbeth/)”:

“Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand?  
Come, let me clutch thee!  
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.”

In his mental [conflict](http://literarydevices.net/conflict/) before murdering King Duncan, Macbeth has a strange vision of a dagger and talks to it as if it were another person.

1. Anapestic – a metrical foot made of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable

EX = ‘Twas the **night** before **Chri**stmas, when **all** through the **house**  
Not a **crea**ture was **stir**ring, not **ev**en a**mouse**;  
The stoc**kings** were hung **by** the chim**ney** with care,…  
While vi**sions** of sugar **plums** danced in **their** heads…  
had just **settled** our brains **for** a long **winter**‘s nap….  
As dry **leaves** that be**fore** the wild **hur**ricane **fly**,  
when they **meet** with an **obs**tacle, mount to the sky…  
with the **sleigh** full of **toys**, and St. Ni**cho**las too.

(*‘Twas the Night before Christmas* by Clement Clarke Moore)

This poem is a perfect example of anapest, which runs throughout the poem. Most of the lines are following anapestic tetrameter. Like in the first line, there are four anapests. However, three anapests are also used in other lines.

1. Antithesis – a contrast or opposition, either rhetorical or philosophical

EX = The opening lines of [Charles Dickens](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/charles-dickens/)’ [novel](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/novel/) “ [A Tale of Two Cities](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/a-tale-of-two-cities/)” provides an unforgettable antithesis example:

“It was the **best** of times, it was the **worst** of times, it was the age of **wisdom**, it was the age of **foolishness**, it was the epoch of **belief**, it was the epoch of **incredulity**, it was the season of **Light**, it was the season of **Darkness**, it was the spring of ***hope***, it was the winter of **despair**, we had **everything** before us, we had **nothing** before us, we were all going direct to ***Heaven***, we were all going direct **the other way**.”

1. Assonance – the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables (and sometimes n the following unstressed syllables) of neighboring words

EX = similarly, we notice the use of long vowels in a passage from Dylan Thomas’ famous poem “Do Not Go Gentle into the Good Night”:

“[Do not go gentle into that good night](http://literarydevices.net/do-not-go-gentle-into-that-good-night/),  
Old age should burn and r**a**ve at close of d**ay**;  
R**a**ge, r**a**ge, against the dying of the light.  
Gr**a**ve men, near death, who see with bl**i**nding s**i**ght,  
Blind eyes could bl**a**ze like meteors and be g**ay**,  
R**a**ge, r**a**ge against the dying of the light.”

The poet deliberately uses assonance in the above lines to slow down the pace of the lines and create a somber mood, as the subject of the poem is death.

1. Ballad – poetic song; popular song

EX = **“Rime of an Ancient Mariner”*is an example of a lyrical ballad.***

‘Day after day, day after day  
We stuck nor breathe, nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean’

1. Blank Verse – a very flexible English verse form which can attain rhetorical grandeur while echoing the natural rhythms of speech

EX = “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.…….”  
([*Macbeth*](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/macbeth/) by William Shakespeare)

William Shakespeare wrote verses in iambic pentameter pattern; without rhyme. Macbeth is a good example of blank verse. Many speeches in this play are written in the form of blank verse.

9. Cacophony – harsh, discordance of sounds or a meaningless mixture of sounds

EX = An example of cacophony is found in Hart Crane’s poem “The Bridge”:

The nasal whine of power whips a new universe….  
Where **spouting pillars spoor** the evening sky,  
Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house  
Stars prick the eyes with sharp **ammoniac**proverbs,  
New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed  
Of dynamos, where **hearing’s leash is strummed**….  
Power’s script, – wound, **bobbin-bound**, refined-  
Is stopped to the slap of belts on booming **spools, spurred**  
Into the **bulging bouillon**, harnessed jelly of the stars.

The disorder and confusion of the industrial world has been expressed here by the writer through deliberate selection of cacophonic words and phrases.

10. Cinquain – a short, usually unrhymed poem consisting of 22 syllables distributed as 2, 4, 6, 8, 2 in five lines

EX = Adelaide Crapsey’s “Snow”

Look up…

From bleakening hills

Blows down the light, first breath

Of wintry wind…look up, and scent

The snow!

11) Conceit – an expression usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects

EX = [Shakespeare](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/shakespeare/) makes use of a conceit in Act 3, Scene 5 of his play “[Romeo and Juliet](http://literarydevices.net/community/tag/romeo-and-juliet/)”. Capulet comes to Juliet’s room after Romeo has left. He finds her weeping and says:

“Thou counterfeit’st a bark, a sea, a wind;  
For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea,  
Do ebb and flow with tears; the bark thy body is,  
Sailing in this salt flood; the winds, thy sighs;  
Who, raging with thy tears, and they with them,  
Without a sudden calm, will overset  
Thy tempest-tossed body.”

He compares Juliet to a boat in a storm. The comparison is an extended [metaphor](http://literarydevices.net/metaphor/) where he compares her eyes to a sea, her tears to a storm, her sighs to the stormy winds and her body to a boat in a storm.

12) Consonance – the repetition of two or more consonants with a change of the intervening vowels

EX = pitter-patter, splish-splash, and clack-clack

13) Couplet – a pair of successive lines of verse, especially a pair that rhymes and are of the same length

EX = “The time is out of joint, O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right!” (1.5.189-190)

14) Dactylic – of, containing, or characterized by a foot of three syllables, one long followed by two short in quantitative meter, or one stressed followed by two unstressed in an accentual meter

EX = **Half**a league, **half** a league,  
**Half**a league **on**ward,  
**All**in the **val**ley of **Death**  
**Rode** the six **hun**dred.  
“**For**ward, the **Light** Brigade!  
**Charge**for the **guns**!” he said.  
**In**to the **val**ley of **Death**  
**Rode** the six **hun**dred.

(The Charge of the Light Brigade by[*Alfred Lord Tennyson*](http://literarydevices.net/alfred-lord-tennyson/))

15) Diction – a style of speaking or writing as dependent upon choice of words

16) Dimeter – in measuring lines to scan meter in literature, dimeter has two feet

17) Dramatic monologue – piece of spoken verse that offers great insight into the feelings of the speaker

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east and Juliet is the sun!  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief…  
O that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!

18) Dramatic situation – a situation in a narrative or dramatic work in which people are involved in conflicts that solicit the audience’s empathy to their predicament

19) Elegy – poem lamenting the dead

20) End rhyme – a rhyme that occurs in the last syllables of verse

“Once upon a midnight **dreary**, while I pondered, weak and **weary**.”

(“*The Raven” by*Edgar Allen Poe)

