



Comprehensive Review—Prose

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: A brief review of terms and processes associated with prose analysis



Key Ideas

- ✦ Understand the components of a narrative
- ✦ Explore various types of novels
- ✦ Learn literary terminology related to analysis
- ✦ Understand various levels of interpretation

Introduction to Prose

Our desire to know ourselves and others, to explore the unknown mysteries of existence, to make sense out of chaos, and to connect with our own kind are all primary reasons for engaging in the process of literary analysis.

The benefits to self and society that result from this interaction include a sense of wonder at the glory of humanity's imagination, a sense of excitement at the prospect of intellectual challenge, and a sense of connection with the universe.

You have already engaged in these lofty experiences. This section will provide a brief review of terms and processes associated with the study of literature. Included are some suggested activities for you to try which will help you prepare for the exam.



What is prose?

As you know, prose is the written equivalent of the spoken language. It is written in words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. It utilizes punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary to develop its message. Prose is made up of fiction and nonfiction. For the AP Lit exam, you are required to be well read in the areas of:

- Fiction, which includes:
 - Novels
 - Short stories
- Nonfiction, which includes:
 - Essays
 - Autobiographies and biographies
 - Speeches
 - Journals
 - Articles

Note: A brief word about drama. Since this section is a review of prose designed to prepare you for the AP Lit exam, it is not feasible to address every literary distinction and definition. Therefore, we wish to stress the following:

- Specific terminology can be found in the glossary at the back of this book.
- All the techniques examined for prose can be used to analyze drama as well.
- The overlapping nature of the analytical skills makes them suitable for prose, poetry, and drama.

Five Aspects of Every Narrative



There is a certain degree of universality regarding definitions of terms when analyzing literature. For clarity and understanding you should be aware of the following terms.

Plot

The plot is a series of episodes in a *narrative* carried out by the *characters*. Here are the primary terms related to plot. You should be familiar with all of them. Obviously each work manipulates these concepts in its own unique way.

- *Initial incident:* the event that puts the story in gear.
- *Rising action:* the series of complications in the narrative.
- *The climax:* the highest point of interest, action, or tension. More subtly, it is a turning point in the protagonist's behavior or thoughts.
- *Falling action:* the series of events occurring after the climax.
- *Denouement:* the resolution that ties up the loose ends of the plot.

These form the skeleton of a discussion about plot. But there are also other elements that add to your comprehension.

- *Foreshadowing:* hints at future events.
- *Flashbacks:* cut or piece a prior scene into the present situation.
- *In medias res:* literally, to be in the middle. This is a device that places the reader immediately into the action.

Character

Character development can be both simple and complex. The author has a variety of methods from which to choose. Here's a mnemonic device that may help you analyze character: Use the word **STAR**.

- **S**—what the character *says*;
- **T**—what the character *thinks*;
- **A**—how the character *acts* and interacts; and
- **R**—how the character *reacts*.

Traditionally, characters carry out the plot and it is around the characters that the plot revolves and the theme is developed. There can be many types of characters in a given work:

- **Protagonist**: the main character who is the central focus of the story. For example, Hamlet is the eponymous protagonist.
- **Antagonist**: the opposing force. It does not always have to be a person. For example, the sea or the fish in *The Old Man and the Sea*.
- **Major**: the character or characters who play a significant role in the work.
- **Minor**: the characters who are utilized for a specific purpose, such as moving the plot along or contrasting with a major character.
- **Dynamic**: refers to characters who undergo major changes, such as Jane Eyre.
- **Static**: generally refers to characters who remain the same throughout the story. For instance, Brutus in *Julius Caesar* always considers himself to be an “honorable man.”
- **Stereotype**: a character who is used to represent a class or a group.
- **Foil**: a character who provides the opportunity for comparison and contrast. For example, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Brutus and Cassius are foils for each other.

Character as Hero

Once again, you may encounter many variations on the concept of hero:

- Aristotelian tragic hero:
 - Of noble birth; larger than life
 - Basically good
 - Exhibits a fatal flaw
 - Makes error in judgment
 - Possesses hubris (excessive arrogance or pride) which causes the error in judgment
 - Brings about his own downfall
 - Has a moment of realization, an epiphany
 - Lives and suffers
 - Examples: Creon in *Antigone*, Oedipus in *Oedipus*, Jason in *Medea*
- Classical hero: a variation on the tragic hero:
 - Examples: Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Lear in *King Lear*, Hamlet in *Hamlet*
- Romantic hero:
 - Larger than life
 - Charismatic
 - Possesses an air of mystery
 - “Saves the day” or the heroine

“Be consistent and persistent in maintaining a literary journal. Students who do this have greater recall of information that they can incorporate into their literary essays.”

—Charles V.
AP teacher

- Embodies freedom, adventure, and idealism
- Often outside the law
- Examples: Robin Hood, Ivanhoe, James Bond, Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*
- Modern hero:
 - May be everyman
 - Has human weaknesses
 - Caught in the ironies of the human condition
 - Struggles for insight
 - Examples: Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, Tom Joad in *Grapes of Wrath*
- Hemingway hero:
 - Brave
 - Endures
 - Maintains a sense of humor
 - Exhibits grace under pressure
 - Examples: Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, Butch and Sundance in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*
- Antihero: Protagonist is notably lacking in heroic qualities:
 - Examples: Meursault in *The Stranger*, Randall McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Homer Simpson of cartoon fame

Theme

Theme is the main idea, the moving force, what it's all about, the "why" behind the "what," the universal concept or comment, the big picture, the major insight, the *raison d'être*. But theme is much more than a simple checklist. And, we cringe each time we hear, "What is the theme?" Remember, the enlightened, complex mind questions, ponders, responds. A literary work evolves and can be validly interpreted in so many ways that it would be a disservice to limit it to any single, exclusive theme.

Keeping an open mind, understand that the following is an overview of ways of assessing themes. All elements of a literary work point toward the development of the theme. Therefore, you will apply all that you have been learning and practicing in your search for a discernible, supportable theme.

Motif In its most general sense, motif is the repetition of an image. It may be closely connected to symbol, or it may be a thematic restatement.

The following is a preparation process for discovering and analyzing the function of motif. You can try this with any work.

- Isolate some general motifs you've noticed in a work.
- Provide specific examples to illustrate the motif.
- Draw inferences from your observations.

These rough inferences may lead you to a better understanding of character and theme. The following is a sample worksheet that uses the above process to analyze motif in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.



Motif in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

MOTIF	EXAMPLE	THEMATIC IMPLICATIONS
Color	White woods (Blanche DuBois) Blue piano Red pajamas—Stanley Allan Grey	Red/white/blue = American theme Blue/gray—Civil War? Rape of Old South? Destruction of a way of life
Music	The blues “Only a Paper Moon” (if you believed in me) Captive maiden	Loss/sorrow, betrayal Lack of reality—insanity Control/Slavery
Animals	<u>Blanche:</u> fine feathered/wild cat trapped bird/tiger moth to light <u>Stanley:</u> rooster/pig ape goat/Capricorn	ego/id duality self-destruction survival of the fittest Darwinism/primitivism Dionysian—rape



Here’s another way to work through an idea about theme. Sometimes it’s easier to input a theme and then prove it with support from a work. If you can defend an idea with several specifics, you probably have identified a theme. Let’s look at Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

Hamlet

POSSIBLE THEME	EVIDENCE
What is, is not	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hamlet is not mad, only north-northwest. 2. Polonius is not Claudius in Gertrude’s chamber. 3. Ophelia is not disinterested in Hamlet’s overtures. 4. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not Hamlet’s “friends.”
Vengeance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Old Hamlet’s charge to Hamlet to redress his murder. 2. Laertes’s vow to avenge his father’s death. 3. Fortinbras’s victory to avenge his father.

Obviously, we have provided the organization in our samples, but these two techniques are solid, reliable processes. They will work on the exam, too, especially as you interrelate ideas for your essays or identify points that may be the topic of multiple-choice questions.



Keep a section in your notes where you enter important motifs, images, and so on and their implications from works you study. These concrete details will be invaluable when you write the free-response essay. Keep in mind that motif, imagery, symbol, and theme build on one another and are interrelated.

Point of View

Point of view is the method the author utilizes to tell the story. It is the vantage point from which the narrative is told. You've had practice with this in both reading and writing.

- *First person*: The narrator is the story's protagonist. (I went to the store.)
- *Third-person objective*: The narrator is an onlooker reporting the story. (She went to the store.)
- *Third-person omniscient*: The narrator reports the story and provides information unknown to the character(s). (She went to the store unaware that in 3 minutes she would meet her long-lost mother selling apples on the corner.)
- *Stream of consciousness*: This is a narrative technique that places the reader in the mind and thought processes of the narrator, no matter how random and spontaneous that may be (e.g., James Joyce's *Ulysses*).
- *Chorus*: Ancient Greek plays employed a chorus as a narrative device. The chorus, as needed, could be a character, an assembly, the playwright's voice, the audience, an omniscient forecaster. This function can be seen in modern works as well.
- *Stage manager*: This technique utilizes a character who comments omnisciently (e.g., *Our Town*, *The Glass Menagerie*).
- *Interior monologue*: This technique reflects the inner thoughts of the character.

Note: In modern literature, authors often use multiple forms of narration. For example, in *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner every chapter has a different narrator.

Types of Novels



There are many types of novels you will encounter during your study of English literature. Some novels exhibit several qualities. A few of the most common genres are:

- *Epistolary*: These novels utilize the convention of letter writing and are among the earliest novel forms (e.g., *Pamela*, *Dracula*, *The Color Purple*).
- *Picaresque*: This early, episodic novel form concentrates on the misadventures of a young rogue (e.g., *Huckleberry Finn*, *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *Candide*).
- *Autobiographical*: This readily identifiable type is always told in the first person and allows the reader to directly interact with the protagonist (e.g., *David Copperfield*, *Catcher in the Rye*).
- *Gothic*: This type of novel is concerned with the macabre, supernatural, and exotic (e.g., *Frankenstein*, *Interview with a Vampire*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*).
- *Historical*: This form is grounded in a real context and relies heavily on setting and factual detail (e.g., *A Tale of Two Cities*, *War and Peace*).
- *Romantic*: This novel form is idealistic, imaginative, and adventuresome. The romantic hero is the cornerstone of the novel, which often includes exotic locales (e.g., *Wuthering Heights*, *Madame Bovary*).
- *Allegorical*: This type of novel is representative and symbolic. It operates on at least two levels. Its specifics correspond to another concept (e.g., *Animal Farm*, *Lord of the Flies*).



Consider this. *Jane Eyre* has elements of all these types as do many other novels. List and loosely categorize some of the major novels you've read.

Literary Terminology



Literary analysis assumes the working knowledge of a common vocabulary.

The Kaleidoscope of Literary Meaning

Literary meaning is developed and revealed through various devices and techniques. What follows is a brief listing of those terms and devices most often used in prose, poetry, and drama.

- **Allusion:** An allusion is a reference to another work, concept, or situation which generally enhances the meaning of the work that is citing it. There are many types of allusions, and they may be implicit or explicit, highly limited, or broadly developed. Often, modern readers may miss the context of a particular reference because they have a limited frame of reference. A few common categories of allusion follow:
 - **Mythological allusions:** These often cite specific characters. Common allusions might refer to the beauty of Aphrodite or the power of Zeus. "She followed like Niobe, all tears" (*Hamlet*). Sometimes the entire work may refer to a mythological event. The play *Desire Under the Elms* is a sustained allusion to the Phaedra legend, as well as the Oedipal myth.
 - **Biblical allusions:** These references may deal with circumstances as familiar as "the mark of Cain," "the fall from paradise," "the tribulations of Job," or "destruction by flood or fire." A character may have the "strength of Samson" or the "loyalty of Ruth."
 - **Historical allusions:** These kinds of allusions might refer to major historical events, such as Napoleon meeting his Waterloo or Nixon dealing with Watergate.
 - **Literary allusions:** Often works will refer to other well-known pieces. For example, *West Side Story* expects you to think of *Romeo and Juliet*. To describe a character as "quixotic" refers to Cervantes's great novel *Don Quixote*.
 - **Political allusions:** These references would be sustained in works like *Gulliver's Travels* or *Alice in Wonderland*. They might also be used briefly. If a character were called the next Julius Caesar, we might sense that he would be betrayed in some manner. *The Crucible* is a historical allusion to the Salem witch trials and is also a statement about McCarthyism in the 1950s.
 - **Contemporary allusions:** These are often lost when the current context is no longer in the public eye. For example, "valley girls" or "Beavis and Butthead" may not remain in vogue, and, therefore, references to them would lose their effectiveness.

- **Ambiguity:** This is the seemingly incongruous and contradictory interpretations of meaning in a work. James Joyce and William Faulkner utilize ambiguity often in their writing.
- **Allegory:** A work that operates on another level. The characters and events may be interpreted for both literal and symbolic meaning. For example, *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck is an indictment of the exploitation of the masses and a call to unionism as well as a story of doomed friendship. Other allegorical works include *The Old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway, *Animal Farm* by Orwell, *Candide* by Voltaire, and *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan.
- **Parable:** A parable is an allegorical story that is intended to teach. It generally provides a moral lesson or illustrates a guiding principle. "The Nun's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer is a parable about vanity and pride.
- **Symbol:** This is an image that also represents something else. Some symbols appear to be extremely specific. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* the scarlet letter is a symbol of Hester's impropriety. It can also represent Hester's pride, talent, responsibility, and shame. The reader should always be open to the broadest interpretation of the concept of symbol, whether about character, setting, situation, detail, or whatever. Another example of symbol is the splitting of the chestnut tree in *Jane Eyre*. Here Bronte symbolizes the breach in the relationship between Jane and Rochester. The white hat in *The Secret Sharer* by Conrad is a symbol of man's compassion and pity for his own kind.
- **Connotation:** This is the implication that is suggested by a word or phrase rather than the word or phrase's actual, literal meaning. For example, the use of "antique land" instead of "ancient land" brings a richer connotation to Shelley's "Ozymandias." The reader must be especially open to the varied levels of meaning in poetry.
- **Denotation:** The literal meaning of a word or phrase. If a reader is attempting to present a valid interpretation of a literary work, he or she must pay attention to both the denotation and the connotation of the language.
- **Tone:** Tone is difficult to define but is relatively easy to assess. It is a subtle feeling that the author creates through diction. The following is a short list of words often used to describe tone. Notice that they are adjectives.

bitter	objective	idyllic
sardonic	naive	compassionate
sarcastic	joyous	reverent
ironic	spiritual	lugubrious
mocking	wistful	elegiac
scornful	nostalgic	gothic
satiric	humorous	macabre
vituperative	mock-serious	reflective
scathing	pedantic	maudlin
confidential	didactic	sentimental
factual	inspiring	patriotic
informal	remorseful	jingoistic
facetious	disdainful	detached
critical	laudatory	



- **Transition:** Do not be fooled into thinking that "transition" is an unimportant term. An author will give you a road map through his or her story's journey, and one of the best

indicators of direction is the transition word or phrase. Transitions help to move the reader smoothly from one part of the text to another. Below is a list of the most effective commonly used transitions:

and	also	as a result	after
but	besides	for example	although
for	consequently	in addition	because
nor	furthermore	in the same way	once
or	however	on the contrary	since
so	likewise	on the other hand	unless
yet	moreover	otherwise	until
	nonetheless	unlike the former	while
	similarly		
	still		
	therefore		

Prose Analysis

A word about this section: There are many processes that will help you to understand prose, poetry, and drama.

These approaches may not all be suitable for every work, but they certainly are worth considering as methods for responding to subtleties that are in the work.

Name Analysis



Consider your name. Did your folks have a specific reason for choosing it? Does it have a family significance or a special cultural meaning? What would you choose for your name and why? Remember, names and identity are closely linked.

Authors often choose names that bring another dimension to a character or place. A good reader is sensitive to the implications of names. Here are a few interesting names and observations about each:

- Oedipus—swollen foot, seeker of truth
- Billy Budd—simple, melodic, young growth, ready to bloom
- *Jane Eyre*—Janus/beginning, air, err, heir, ere, eerie, ire
- Helen Burns—fever, fervor, mythological inspiration
- Mr. Mason—the Masons are a secret fraternity; he holds the secret
- Stella—star, light
- Kurtz—short, curt
- Willy Loman—low man

Your Turn

Create your own listing of literary names and their interpretations and implications. (This could also include place names, etc.)

Literary Work	Name	Interpretations

It's an Open-and-Closed Case

The first thing that catches your attention should be the title. By all means, consider it carefully. *David Copperfield* lets you know it will be a novel about character. *As I Lay Dying* involves plot and theme. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* involves you immediately in symbol, character, and theme.



Authors place special emphasis on the first and last impressions they make on a reader. Their opening and closing lines of chapters or scenes are, therefore, usually very significant and should be closely examined. (This is much like an establishing shot in a movie that sets up the audience for future developments.)

Here's the opening line from Chapter 1 of *Jane Eyre*:

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.

Here are some implications of this one line: no independence, locked in, no sense of curiosity, outside force preventing a journey, not ready to leave. Obviously, the character is not ready to experience the outside world or to embark on her journey.

Contrast that with the last line of Chapter 1:

Four hands were laid upon me and I was borne upstairs.

This line introduces a spiritual level to the novel. It also implies that a new Jane will emerge, and indeed she does.

Take a look at one of the last lines of the novel:

We wended our way into the wood.

This lovely, alliterative line completes the journey. Jane and Edward have come full circle as they stroll their way together.

In a Shakespearean play, often a couplet at the end of a scene or act will neatly summarize or foreshadow events. In *Julius Caesar*, for example:

*And after this, let Caesar seat him sure
For we will shake him, or worse days endure (Julius Caesar)*

STRATEGY

Keep a written record of opening and closing lines of complete literary works, chapters, scenes, acts. Not only will this develop your interpretative skills, but it will also provide you with a list of quotations for later use in essays.

KEY IDEA

Levels of Interpretation

Complex works of literature afford many avenues of interpretation. After you read a work, consider the following areas of exploration. We use Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* as a model.

- *Literal level:* A young woman is frustrated in her life and eventually commits suicide.
- *Social level:* Ibsen explores the role of women in society and presents the despair connected with a male-dominated existence.
- *Psychological level:* The play traces a descent into madness and the motivations for aberrant human behavior.
- *Religious level:* The loss of a soul to temptation, the encounter with the devil, and the inspiration of godliness are all in the play.
- *Sexual level:* Gender issues, the Electra complex, phallic symbols, abortion, and homosexuality are all developed and explored through numerous love triangles.
- *Political level:* The play could be read as a treatise on socialism. It denigrates capitalism and pays homage to the ideas of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

Obviously, you need to supply the evidence from the works to develop your interpretations in a concrete manner.

KEY IDEA

Note: A word about *subtext*:

Subtext refers to the implied meaning of a work or section of a work. It involves reading between the lines to discover subtle attitudes, comments, and observations within the piece. The exploration of subtext utilizes all of the interpretative skills you've been developing in your AP course.

Practice looking beyond the literal presentation of the plays, novels, and short stories you read. The following are richly suitable for such study:

<i>Desire Under the Elms</i>	Eugene O'Neill
<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	Joseph Conrad
<i>Dubliners</i>	James Joyce
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	John Steinbeck
<i>Les Miserables</i>	Victor Hugo
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	Khaled Hosseini
<i>Beloved</i>	Toni Morrison

Final Comments

STRATEGY

One of the most rewarding forms of preparation you can do involves developing a sensitivity to the words of a piece of literature.

Get a journal or set aside a section of your notebook for recording lines you respond to for their beauty, appeal, meaning, or relevance. For each work you read:

- Enter the lines.
- Identify the speaker and situation.

- Interpret, connect, comment, or reflect on your choice.
- Free-associate as well as relate the quotation to the original text.
- Make connections to other works you read.
- Project and expand on the lines

For each full-length work, record at least ten references. Write these quotations out and include the page numbers so you can easily find them if you need to. Try to take them from throughout the work. Here is what is going to happen. Soon, you will automatically identify and respond to significant lines and passages. It will become second nature for you to identify lines of import and meaning in a work as you read. You will also begin to remember lines from a work and to connect them to important details, episodes, and themes. You will be able to understand and analyze a character in light of his or her own language. In other words, you will be interpreting literature based on text.

Rapid Review

- Every narrative is composed of plot, setting, character, theme, and point of view.
- Motifs develop characters and themes.
- Themes require specific illustrations to support them.
- There are many types of characters and heroes.
- There are many forms of narration.
- Novels may exhibit many characteristics.
- Meaning may be revealed via multiple approaches.
- Parables and allegories operate on symbolic levels. Connotations of words reveal the subtext of a work.
- Tone is a description of the attitude found in a piece of literature.
- Transitions aid movement and unity in a written work.
- Titles and names are important areas for analysis.
- First and last lines often carry great meaning in a work and demand careful attention.
- Works may be interpreted literally, socially, psychologically, sexually, politically, and so on.
- Quotations from works are an accurate way of understanding meaning and characterization. They also provide support for your interpretations.

