General Literary Terminology
The following terms describe the different types and elements of literature.

**Abstract** - is the opposite of concrete. Abstract terms and statements describe ideas or refer to general qualities of persons or things such as goodness and honesty.

**Allegory** - is a story in which people, things, and actions represent an idea or a generalization about life; allegories often have a strong moral or lesson.

**Allusion** - is a literary reference to a familiar person, place, thing, or event. These references frequently relate to other literary works, history, mythology, religion, or popular culture.

**Analogy** - is a comparison of two or more similar objects, suggesting that if they are alike in certain respects, they will probably be alike in other ways as well.

**Anecdote** - is a short summary of a humorous event used to make a point. Abe Lincoln was famous for his anecdotes.

**Antagonist** - is the person, force, or thing working against the protagonist, or hero, of a literary work.

**Aphorism/Proverb/Maxim** - is a concise, pointed statement that intends to reveal a truth or principle that can be attributed to a specific person. Once a statement is so generally known that the original author is unknown, it is called a *proverb*. A statement that gives advice about how to behave rather than simply revealing a truth is called a *maxim*.

**Characterization** - is the method an author uses to reveal characters and their personalities.

**Concrete** - is used to refer to particular persons or things that have real substance appealing to one of the five senses.

**Conflict** - is the problem or struggle in a story that triggers the action. There are five basic types of conflict:
- **Person vs. Person**: One character in a story has a problem with one or more of the other characters.
- **Person vs. Society**: A character has a problem with some element of society: the school, the law, the accepted way of doing things.
- **Person vs. Self**: A character has a problem deciding what to do in a certain situation.
- **Person vs. Nature**: A character has a problem with nature: heat, cold, a tornado, an avalanche, or any other element of nature.
- **Person vs. Fate (God)**: A character must battle what seems to be an uncontrollable problem attributed to fate or an act of God.

**Denouement** - is the final resolution or outcome of a play or story.

**Dialogue** - is the conversation carried on by the characters in a literary work, usually written in quotation marks.

**Diction** - is an author’s choice of words based on their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness.
- **Archaic words** are those that are old-fashioned and no longer sound natural when used (ex: "I believe thee not" for “I don’t believe you”).
- **Colloquialism** is an expression that is usually accepted in informal situations and certain locations such as "no way."
- **Dialect** is the form of a spoken language peculiar to a region or special group as in the dialect spoken by Jim in Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
• **Jargon** (technical diction) is the specialized language used by a specific group, such as those who use computers: (override, interface, download).
• **Profanity** is language that shows disrespect for someone or something regarded as holy or sacred.
• **Slang** is the informal language used by a particular group of people among themselves; it is also language that is used in fiction to lend color and feeling: “ain’t” or “chill out.”
• **Vulgarity** is language that is generally considered crude, gross, and, at times, offensive. It is sometimes used in fiction to add realism. Such language is used in Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*.

**Empathy** - is putting yourself in someone else’s place and imagining how that person must feel.

**Epithet** - is a word or phrase used in place of a person’s name; it is characteristic of that person: Alexander the Great or the Material Girl as examples.

**Falling action** - is the part of a play or story that works out the decision arrived at during the climax. (See Plot line)

**Figurative Language** - is language used to create a special effect or feeling.

**Figure of speech** - is a literary device used to create a special effect or feeling by making some type of interesting or creative comparison.

• **Antithesis** is an opposition or contrast of ideas: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...” (C. Dickens)
• **Apostrophe** is a figure in which the speaker directly addresses a person who is dead or otherwise not physically present, an imaginary person or entity, something inhuman, or a place or concept.
• **Hyperbole** is a gross exaggeration or overstatement for effect: “I was so hungry I could eat a horse.”
• **Metaphor** is a comparison of two unlike things in which no word of comparison (like or as) is used: "A green plant is a machine that runs on solar energy." (Scientific American)
• **Metonymy** is the substituting of one word for another related word: “The White House has decided to create more public service jobs.” (White House is substituted for president.)
• **Personification** is a literary device in which the author speaks of or describes an animal, object, or idea as if it were a person: “The rock stubbornly refused to move.”
• **Simile** is a comparison of two unlike things using the words like or as: “They had hands like claws.”
• **Synecdoche** is using part of something to represent the whole: "Idle hands are the devil's playground."
• **Understatement** is a way of emphasizing an idea by talking about it in a restrained manner: "... except for an interruption caused by my wife's falling out of the car, the journey went very well." (E. B. White, "A Report in Spring."

**Flashback** - is returning to an earlier time in a story for the purpose of making something in the present clearer.

**Foil** - is someone who serves as a contrast or challenge to another character.

**Foreshadowing** - is giving hints or clues of what is to come later in a story.

**Hubris** - is derived from the Greek word *hybris*, which means excessive pride. In Greek tragedy, hubris is often viewed as the flaw that leads to the downfall of the tragic hero.

**Imagery** - is the use of words to create a certain picture in the reader's mind. Imagery is usually based on sensory details: "The sky was dark and gloomy, the air was damp and raw, the streets were wet and sloppy." (C. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*) It can be further defined according to the sense it stimulates: visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory imagery.

**Irony** - is using a word or phrase to mean the exact opposite of its literal or normal meaning. There are three kinds of irony:
- Dramatic irony, in which the reader or the audience sees a character's mistakes, but the character does not.
- Verbal irony, in which the writer says one thing and means another: "The best substitute for experience is being thirteen."
- Irony of situation, in which there is a great difference between the purpose of a particular action and the result.

Juxtaposition - is the device of putting two words or ideas close together to create a contrasting of ideas or an ironic meaning.

Local color - is the use of language and details that are common in a certain region of the country.

Mood - is the feeling a text arouses in the reader: happiness, peacefulness, sadness, and so on.

Motif - is the term for an often-repeated idea or theme in literature. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Huck is constantly in conflict with the "civilized" world. This conflict becomes a motif throughout the novel.

Narrator - is the person who is telling the story.

Plot - is the action or sequence of events in a story. It is usually a series of related incidents that build upon one another as the story develops. There are five basic elements in a plot line.

Plot line - is the graphic display of the action or events in a story: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

Point of view - is the vantage point from which the story is told. In the first-person point of view, the story is told by one of the characters: "I remember the summer I turned sixteen." In the third-person point of view, the story is told by someone outside the story: "The old man shuffled across the street. He looked down at the ground as he walked." There are three types of third-person points of view:
- Omniscient point of view allows the narrator to share the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.
- Limited omniscient point of view allows the narrator to share the thoughts and feelings of only one character.
- Camera view (objective view) allows the storyteller to record the action from his or her own point of view, being unaware of any of the characters' thoughts or feelings.

Protagonist - is the main character or hero of the story.

Pseudonym - (also known as "pen name") means "false name" and applies to the name a writer uses in place of his or her given name. "Mark Twain" is a pseudonym for Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Pun - is a play on words that capitalizes on a similarity of spelling and/or pronunciation between words that have different meanings. A pun may also employ one word which has multiple meanings.

Rising action - is the series of struggles that builds a story or play toward a climax. (See "Plot line")

Sarcasm - is the use of praise to mock someone or something, as in "She's a real winner."

Setting - is the time and place in which the action of a literary work occurs.

Soliloquy - is a speech delivered by a character when he or she is alone or stage. It is as though the character is thinking out loud.
**Stereotype** - is a form that does not change. A "stereotyped" character has no individuality and fits the mold of that particular kind of person.

**Stream of consciousness** - is a style of writing in which the thoughts and feelings of the writer are recorded as they occur.

**Style** - is how the author uses words, phrases, and sentences to form his or her ideas. Style is also thought of as the qualities and characteristics that distinguish one writer's work from the work of others.

**Suspense** - is the growing excitement as the developments of a literary work reach the moment of climax.

**Symbol** - is a person, a place, a thing, or an event used to represent something else: the dove is a symbol of peace. Characters in literature may be symbols of good or evil.

**Theme** - is the statement about life that a writer is trying to get across in a piece of writing. In most cases, the theme will be implied rather than directly spelled out.

**Tone/Voice** - is the overall feeling, or effect, created by a writer's use of words. This feeling may be serious, humorous, or satiric. The terms "tone" and "voice" are related because the author speaks to us through his words to express the attitude that he or she wants to express.

**Tragic hero** - is a character who experiences an inner struggle because of a character flaw. That struggle ends in the defeat of the hero.

**Naturalism** - is an extreme form of realism in which the author tries to show the relation of a person to the environment or surroundings. Often, the author finds it necessary to show the ugly or raw side of that relationship.

**Modernism** - is a revolutionary movement beginning at the end of the 19th century when writers wanted to liberate themselves from the limits and conventions of the Victorian period.

**Realism** - is literature that attempts to represent life as it really is.

**Romanticism** - is a literary movement with an emphasis on the imagination and emotions. It makes individual expression, communion with nature and intuition more important than science or technology. It was linked with the movement to democracy and revolution.

**Transcendentalism** - is a philosophy that requires human beings to go beyond (transcend) reason in their search for truth. It assumes that an individual can arrive at the basic truths of life through spiritual insight if he or she takes the time to think seriously about them.

**Impressionism** - is the recording of events or situations as they have been impressed upon the mind.

**Literary Genres: the following terms refer to specific types of literary forms generally determined by content.**

**Autobiography** - is an author's account or story of her or his own life.

**Biography** - is the story of a person's life written by another person.

**Comedy** - is literature in which human errors or problems appear funny. Comedies end on a happy note.
**Drama** - is the form of literature known as plays. Drama also refers to the type of serious play that is concerned with the leading character's relationship to society.

**Essay** - is a piece of prose that expresses an individual's point of view; usually, it is a series of closely related paragraphs that combine to make a complete piece of writing.

**Fable** - is a short fictional narrative that teaches a lesson. It usually includes animals that talk and act like people.

**Fiction** - is any writing that relates imagined characters and occurrences rather than recounting real ones.

**Legend/Myth** - is a traditional story that attempts to justify a certain practice or belief or to explain a natural phenomenon. The distinction between a myth and a legend is that a legend relates the adventures of a human cultural hero such as Robin Hood and tend to be less focused on the supernatural. A legend, while exaggerated, is likely to be grounded in historical fact.

**Melodrama** - is an exaggerated form of drama (as in television soap operas) characterized by heavy use of romance, suspense and emotion.

**Memoir** - is writing based on the writer's memory of a particular time, place, or incident.

**Narrative** - is writing that tells a story. It should include details that answer the 5 W's -- who, what, when, where and why -- about the experience or event.

**Nonfiction** - is writing that is based on fact.

**Novel** - is a lengthy fictional story with a plot that is revealed by the speech, action, and thoughts of the characters.

**Novella** - is a prose work longer than the standard short story, but shorter and less complex than a full-length novel.

**Parable** - is a short descriptive story that illustrates a particular belief or moral.

**Parody** - is a form of literature that intentionally uses comic effect to mock a literary work or style.

**Picaresque novel** - is a work of fiction consisting of a lengthy string of loosely connected events. It usually features the adventures of a rogue living by his or her wits. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is a picaresque novel.

**Poetry** - is the expression of feeling and emotion that calls upon figurative language and imagery to convey this feeling to the reader. It makes use of devices of sound and rhythm of language structured in verse rather than in paragraph form.

**Prose** - is a general term that refers to non-poetic expression, writing that follows the conventional form of sentences and paragraphs.

**Quest** - features a main character who is seeking to find something or achieve a goal. In the process, this character encounters and overcomes a series of obstacles, returning wiser and more experienced.

**Romance** - is a term that refers to a variety of fictional works involving some combination of the following: high adventure, thwarted love, mysterious circumstances, arduous quests, and improbable triumphs.

**Satire** - is a literary tone used to make fun of human vice or weakness, often with the intent of correcting or changing the subject of the attack.

**Short story** - is a brief fictional work. It usually contains one major conflict and at least one main character.

**Tragedy** - is a literary work in which the hero is destroyed by some character flaw or by forces beyond his or her control.
Poetry Terms: the following terms relate the various aspects of poetry including poetic devices, poetic forms, and terminology related to rhyme and rhythm.

**Alliteration** - is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in words: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

**Apostrophe** - a figure of speech in which the speaker directly addresses a person who is dead or otherwise not physically present, an imaginary person or entity, something inhuman, or a place or concept. The speaker addresses the object of the apostrophe as if this object were present and capable of understanding and responding. "O wild West wind, thou breath of Autumn's being..." (Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind")

**Assonance** - is the repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants: "Blind eyes could blaze like meteors." (D. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.")

**Ballad** - is a poem in verse form that tells a story.

**Blank verse** - is an unrhymed form of poetry. Each line normally consists of 10 syllables in which every other syllable is stressed (iambic pentameter).

**Caesura** - is a pause or sudden break in a line of poetry.

**Canto** - is a main division of a long poem.

**Consonance** - is the repetition of consonant sounds. Although it is similar to alliteration, consonance is not limited to the first letters of words: "above his blond determined head the sacred flag of truth unfurled." (e.e. cummings, "Two VIII")

**Couplet** - is a pair of lines of verse of the same length that usually rhyme.

**Dramatic monologue** - is a literary work in which a character is speaking about him-or herself as if another person were present. The words of the speaker reveal something important about his or her character.

**Elegy** - is a poem that regrets the loss or death of something or someone.

**End rhyme** - is the rhyming of words that appear at the ends of two or more lines of poetry.

**Enjambment** - is the running over of a sentence or thought from one line to another.

**Epic** - is a long narrative poem that tells of the deeds and adventures of a hero.

**Epigram** - is a brief, witty saying or poem often dealing with its subject in a satirical manner: "There never was a good war or a bad peace." (Ben Franklin)

**Epitaph** - is a short poem or verse written in memory of someone.

**Figurative language** - is language used to create a special effect or feeling. (See figure of speech)

**Foot** - is the smallest repeated pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line.
- **Iambic**: an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable (repeat)
- **Anapastic**: two unstressed followed by a stressed syllable (interrupt)
- **Trochaic**: a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable (older)
- **Dactylic**: a stressed followed by two unstressed syllables (openly)
- **Spondaic**: two stressed syllables (heartbreak)

**Free verse** - is poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme.
**Haiku** - is a form of Japanese poetry that has three lines: the first line has five syllables, the second has seven syllables, and the third has five syllables. The subject of the haiku has traditionally been nature.

**Heroic couplet** - (closed couplet) consists of two successive rhyming lines that contain a complete thought.

**Internal rhyme** - occurs when the rhyming words appear in the same line of poetry: "You break my eyes with a look that buys sweet cake."

**Lyric** - is a short verse that is intended to express the emotions of the author.

**Meter** - is the patterned repetition of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.

**Ode** - is a poem of praise for a formal occasion such as a marriage, a funeral, or a state ceremonial.

**Onomatopoeia** - is the use of a word whose sound suggests its meaning, as in *clang, buzz, and twang.*

**Oxymoron** - is a phrase that combines two seemingly contradictory elements, such as *icy heat, loud silence, bittersweet.*

**Refrain** - is the repetition of a line or phrase of a poem at regular intervals, especially at the end of each stanza.

**Repetition** - is the repeating of a word, a phrase, or an idea for emphasis or for rhythmic effect: "someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door..." (E.A.Poe, 'The Raven")

**Rhyme** - is the similarity or likeness of sound existing between two words. Sat and cat are perfect rhymes because the vowel and final consonant sounds are exactly the same.

**Rhythm** - is the regular or random occurrence of sound in poetry. Regular rhythm is called *meter.* Random occurrence of sound is called *free verse.*

**Sonnet** - is a poem consisting of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter.

- The Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet has two parts: an octave (eight lines) and a sestet (six lines), usually rhyming *abbaabba, cdecde, or cdcccd.* Often, a question is raised in the octave and answered in the sestet.
- The Shakespearean (English or Elizabethan) sonnet consists of three quatrains (four lines) and a final rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme is *abab, cdcd, efef, gg.* Usually, the question or theme is set forth in the quatrains while the answer or resolution appears in the final couplet.

**Stanza** - is a division of poetry named for the number of lines it contains:

- **Couplet:** two-line stanza
- **Triplet:** three-line stanza
- **Quatrain:** four-line stanza
- **Quintet:** five-line stanza
- **Sestet:** six-line stanza
- **Septet:** seven-line stanza
- **Octave:** eight-line stanza

**Verse** - is a metric line of poetry. It is named according to the kind and number of feet composing it: *iambic pentameter,* for example.

- **Monometer:** one foot
- **Dimeter:** two feet
- **Trimeter:** three feet
- **Tetrameter:** four feet
- **Pentameter:** five feet
- **Hexameter:** six feet
- **Heptameter:** seven feet
- **Octometer:** eight feet
Writing Terms: The following terms relate to the discipline of writing.

**Audience** - Those people who read or hear what you have written.

**Body** - The main part of a piece of writing, supporting or developing the thesis statement.

**Coherence**: the logical arrangement of ideas in writing.

**Connotation** - The association(s) evoked by a word beyond its denotation or literal meaning.

**Denotation** - A word's literal and primary meaning, independent of any connotations – emotional associations or secondary meanings that an individual might attach to it. Denotation is the dictionary definition of a word.

**Deductive reasoning**: A logical presentation of information in which a main idea is stated early in a piece of writing and supporting details follow.

**Inductive reasoning**: A logical presentation of information in which specific examples and details lead up to the main concluding idea.

**Domains** - The primary or general categories into which writing can be categorized:
- **Narrative**: Writing that tells a story.
- **Descriptive**: Writing that paints a colorful picture of a person, a place, or a thing.
- **Expository**: Writing that explains.
- **Persuasive**: Writing that is meant to change a reader's thinking or action.

**Objective** - Relating information in an impersonal manner without feelings or opinions.

**Parallelism** - is the device of repeating similar grammatical structures (words, phrases, or sentences) to give writing rhythm.

**Poetic license**: The freedom a writer has to bend the rules of writing to achieve a certain effect.

**Premise**: A statement or central idea that serves as the basis of discussion or a debate.

**Rhetorical question** - A question that is asked to emphasize a point, not to get an answer.

**Subjective** - Thinking or writing that includes personal feelings, attitudes, and opinions.

**Support/Evidence** - The use of facts, examples, details, or anecdotes that illustrate or demonstrate the truth of your thesis.

**Syntax** - The order and relationship of words in a sentence.

**Thesis** - A statement of the purpose, intent, or main idea of an essay, sometimes referred to as the focus of your writing.

**Transitions**: Words or phrases that connect or tie ideas together.

**Unity**: A sense of oneness in writing in which each sentence helps to develop the main idea.

**Universal** - A topic or an idea that applies to everyone.

**Usage**: The way in which individuals use language; language is generally considered to be standard (formal and informal) or nonstandard.