**AP Terms & Rhetorical Devices:**

The following are brief definitions of grammatical, literary, and rhetorical terms that have appeared on the multiple-choice and essay portions of the AP English Language and Composition exam.

Ad Hominem - an argument based on the failings of an adversary rather than on the merits of the case; a logical fallacy that involves a personal attack.

*Adjective* - The part of speech (or word class) that modifies a noun or a pronoun.

*Adverb* - The part of speech (or word class) that modifies a verb, adjective, or other adverb.

*Allegory* - Extending a metaphor so that objects, persons, and actions in a text are equated with meanings that lie outside the text.

*Alliteration* - The repetition of an initial consonant sound.

**Allusion** - A brief, usually indirect reference to a person, place, or event--real or fictional.

**Ambiguity** - The presence of two or more possible meanings in any passage.

**Analogy** - Reasoning or arguing from parallel cases.

*Anaphora* - The repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses or verses.

**Antecedent** - The noun or noun phrase referred to by a pronoun.

**Antithesis** - The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced phrases.

**Aphorism** -

(1) A tersely phrased statement of a truth or opinion.

(2) A brief statement of a principle.

Apostrophe - A rhetorical term for breaking off discourse to address some absent person or thing.

Appeal to Authority - A fallacy in which a speaker or writer seeks to persuade not by giving evidence but by appealing to the respect people have for a famous person or institution.

Appeal to Ignorance - A fallacy that uses an opponent's inability to disprove a conclusion as proof of the conclusion's correctness.

*Argument* - A course of reasoning aimed at demonstrating truth or falsehood.

Assonance - The identity or similarity in sound between internal vowels in neighboring words.

Asyndeton - The omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses (opposite of polysyndeton).

*Character* - An individual (usually a person) in a narrative (usually a work of fiction or creative nonfiction).

Chiasmus - A verbal pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed.

Circular Argument - An argument that commits the logical fallacy of assuming what it is attempting to prove.

*Claim* - An arguable statement, which may be a claim of fact, value, or policy.

*Clause* - A group of words that contains a subject and a predicate.

*Climax* - Mounting by degrees through words or sentences of increasing weight and in parallel construction with an emphasis on the high point or culmination of a series of events.

**Colloquial** - Characteristic of writing that seeks the effect of informal spoken language as distinct from formal or literary English.

*Comparison* - A rhetorical strategy in which a writer examines similarities and/or differences between two people, places, ideas, or objects.

Complement - A word or word group that completes the predicate in a sentence.

*Concession* - An argumentative strategy by which a speaker or writer acknowledges the validity of an opponent's point.

Confirmation - The main part of a text in which logical arguments in support of a position are elaborated.

*Conjunction* - The part of speech (or word class) that serves to connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences.

*Connotation* - The emotional implications and associations that a word may carry.

Coordination - The grammatical connection of two or more ideas to give them equal emphasis and importance. Contrast with subordination.

Deduction - A method of reasoning in which a conclusion follows necessarily from the stated premises.

**Denotation** - The direct or dictionary meaning of a word, in contrast to its figurative or associated meanings.

*Dialect* - A regional or social variety of a language distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, and/or vocabulary.

**Diction** -

(1) The choice and use of words in speech or writing.

(2) A way of speaking, usually assessed in terms of prevailing standards of pronunciation and elocution.

**Didactic** - Intended or inclined to teach or instruct, often excessively.

Encomium - A tribute or eulogy in prose or verse glorifying people, objects, ideas, or events.

Epiphora - The repetition of a word or phrase at the end of several clauses. (Also known as epistrophe.)

Epitaph -

(1) A short inscription in prose or verse on a tombstone or monument.

(2) A statement or speech commemorating someone who has died: a funeral oration.

**Ethos** - A persuasive appeal based on the projected character of the speaker or narrator.

Eulogy - A formal expression of praise for someone who has recently died.

**Euphemism** - The substitution of an inoffensive term for one considered offensively explicit.

*Exposition* - A statement or type of composition intended to give information about (or an explanation of) an issue, subject, method, or idea.

**Extended Metaphor (conceit)** - A comparison between two unlike things that continues throughout a series of sentences in a paragraph or lines in a poem.

**Fallacy** - An error in reasoning that renders an argument invalid.

False Dilemma - A fallacy of oversimplification that offers a limited number of options (usually two) when in fact more options are available.

*Figurative Language* - Language in which figures of speech (such as metaphors, similes, and hyperbole) freely occur.

Figures of Speech - The various uses of language that depart from customary construction, order, or significance.

Flashback - A shift in a narrative to an earlier event that interrupts the normal chronological development of a story.

*Genre* - A category of artistic composition, as in film or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

Hasty Generalization - A fallacy in which a conclusion is not logically justified by sufficient or unbiased evidence.

**Hyperbole** - A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect; an extravagant statement.

*Imagery* - Vivid descriptive language that appeals to one or more of the senses.

Induction - A method of reasoning by which a rhetor collects a number of instances and forms a generalization that is meant to apply to all instances.

**Invective** - Denunciatory or abusive language; discourse that casts blame on somebody or something.

*Irony* - The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. A statement or situation where the meaning is directly contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.

Isocolon - A succession of phrases of approximately equal length and corresponding structure.

**Jargon** - The specialized language of a professional, occupational, or other group, often meaningless to outsiders.

**Litotes** - A figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite.

**Logos** – a persuasive appeal made through the use of reasoning. It regards the use of deductive and inductive reasoning, and discussion about what makes an effective, persuasive reason to back up a claim.

Loose Sentence - A sentence structure in which a main clause is followed by subordinate phrases and clauses. Contrast with periodic sentence.

**Meiosis** – to dismiss or belittle by using terms that make something seem less important than it is.

*Metaphor* - A figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.

**Metonymy** - A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated (such as "crown" for "royalty").

**Mode of Discourse** - The way in which information is presented in a text. The four traditional modes are narration, description, exposition, and argument.

*Mood* -

(1) The quality of a verb that conveys the writer's attitude toward a subject.

(2) The emotion evoked by a text.

**Narrative** - A rhetorical strategy that recounts a sequence of events, usually in chronological order.

*Noun* - The part of speech (or word class) that is used to name a person, place, thing, quality, or action.

**Onomatopoeia** - The formation or use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

**Oxymoron** - A figure of speech in which incongruous or contradictory terms appear side by side.

**Paradox** - A statement that appears to contradict itself.

**Parallelism** - The similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses.

**Parody** - A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule.

**Pathos** - The means of persuasion that appeals to the audience's emotions.

Periodic Sentence - A long and frequently involved sentence, marked by suspended syntax, in which the sense is not completed until the final word--usually with an emphatic climax.

*Personification* - A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstraction is endowed with human qualities or abilities.

*Point of View* - The perspective from which a speaker or writer tells a story or presents information.

Predicate - One of the two main parts of a sentence or clause, modifying the subject and including the verb, objects, or phrases governed by the verb.

*Pronoun* - A word (a part of speech or word class) that takes the place of a noun.

*Prose* - Ordinary writing (both fiction and nonfiction) as distinguished from verse.

*Refutation* - The part of an argument wherein a speaker or writer anticipates and counters opposing points of view.

*Repetition* - An instance of using a word, phrase, or clause more than once in a short passage--dwelling on a point.

**Rhetoric** - The study and practice of effective communication.

Rhetorical Question - A question asked merely for effect with no answer expected.

Running Style - Sentence style that appears to follow the mind as it worries a problem through, mimicking the "rambling, associative syntax of conversation"--the opposite of periodic sentence style.

**Sarcasm** - A mocking, often ironic or satirical remark.

**Satire** - A text or performance that uses irony, derision, or wit to expose or attack human vice, foolishness, or stupidity.

*Simile* - A figure of speech in which two fundamentally unlike things are explicitly compared, usually in a phrase introduced by "like" or "as."

*Style* - Narrowly interpreted as those figures that ornament speech or writing; broadly, as representing a manifestation of the person speaking or writing.

*Subject* - The part of a sentence or clause that indicates what it is about.

**Syllogism** - A form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.

Subordination - Words, phrases, and clauses that make one element of a sentence dependent on (or subordinate to) another. Contrast with coordination.

*Symbol* - A person, place, action, or thing that (by association, resemblance, or convention) represents something other than itself.

Synecdoche - A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole or the whole for a part.

**Syntax** -

(1) The study of the rules that govern the way words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences.

(2) The arrangement of words in a sentence.

*Thesis* - The main idea of an essay or report, often written as a single declarative sentence.

**Tone** - A writer's attitude toward the subject and audience. Tone is primarily conveyed through diction, point of view, syntax, and level of formality.

*Transition* - The connection between two parts of a piece of writing, contributing to coherence.

**Understatement** - A figure of speech in which a writer deliberately makes a situation seem less important or serious than it is.

*Verb* - The part of speech (or word class) that describes an action or occurrence or indicates a state of being.

*Voice* -

(1) The quality of a verb that indicates whether its subject acts (active voice) or is acted upon (passive voice).

(2) The distinctive style or manner of expression of an author or narrator.

Zeugma - The use of a word to modify or govern two or more words although its use may be grammatically or logically correct with only one.