AP English 11 Rhetorical Devices

AP students should be familiar with the following list of terms upon the start of the school year.

Abstract Language: describes ideas and qualities, rather than observable or specific things
Ad Hominem: attack on one’s opponent, rather than the opponent’s argument
Alliteration: repetition of initial consonant sounds in words
Allusion: indirect reference to famous events or characters from history, literature, or mythology
Ambiguity: event or situation that may be interpreted in more than one way; intentional vagueness
Anaphora: repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row
Apostrophe: address to the dead as though they were living; to the inanimate as if animate; to the absent as if present
Argumentation: exploring a problem by examining all sides of it; persuasion through reason
Assumption: when details are not stated but must be inferred by the reader
Asyndeton: series of words separated by commas without conjunctions
Balance: construction in which both halves of the sentence have the same length and importance
Causal Relationship: one thing results from another
Chiasmus: arrangement of repeated thoughts in the pattern XY-YY
Cliché: expression so often used its freshness and originality have worn off
Colloquial Diction: everyday usage that may contain terms accepted in a group but not universally acceptable
Concrete Language: describes specific, observable things rather than ideas or qualities
Connotation: emotions associated with a word
Consonance: repetition of consonant sounds; not limited to the first letter of words
Conventional: following traditional techniques of writing
Cumulative: sentence that begins with the main idea and expands on that idea with a series of details

denotation: dictionary definition of a word
digression: temporary departure from the main subject in speaking or writing
discursive structure: organization used in an argument or essay
elegy: formal poem lamenting the death of a particular person
elliptical: deliberate omission of words implied by context
enthymeme: syllogism (logical argument) in which the major premise is unstated but meant to be understood
epithet: adjective used to point out a characteristic of a person or thing
ethos: appeals to the audience’s sense of morals or principles
euphemism: mild word used to substitute an unpleasant or offensive word
figurative language: words that are inaccurate literally, but describe by calling to mind sensations or responses that the thing described evokes
foreshadowing: method used to build suspense by providing hints of what is to come
formal diction: used in serious books and lofty discourse
freight train: sentence consisting of three or more short independent clauses joined by conjunctions
generalization: basing a claim upon an isolated example or asserting that a claim is true rather than probable
genre: major category into which a literary work fits
hyperbole: overstatement or exaggeration of facts
idiom: use of words or grammatical construction peculiar to a given language, or an expression that cannot be translated literally into a second language
imagery: use of language to represent sense experience
informal diction: found in relaxed but polite and cultivated conversation
inversion: word order that places a modifier or verb before the subject
logos: appeals to the audience’s sense of logic and reasoning
loose sentence: main clause comes first, followed by dependent grammatical units
metaphor: implied comparison that states one thing is another
mood: atmosphere or feeling created by a literary work
motif: frequently recurring character, incident, or concept in a work of literature
Narrative Structure: chronological organization used to convey a story
Negative-Positive: sentence that begins by stating what is not true and then ending by stating what is true
Onomatopoeia: word whose sound suggests its meaning
Oxymoron: paradox that combines terms normally seen as opposites
Parallelist: similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses
Parenthesis: insertion of some verbal unit in a position that interrupts the normal flow of the sentence
Pathos: appeals to the audience’s emotions
Pedantic: scholarly academic writing that borders on lecturing
Periodic Sentence: main clause comes last, preceded by dependent grammatical units
Personification: attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract concepts
Polysyndeton: sentence that uses “and” or another conjunction (with no commas) to separate items in a series; X and Y and Z
Red Herring: when an author raises an irrelevant issue to draw attention away from the real issue
Rhetoric: art of effective communication, especially persuasive discourse
Rhetorical Criticism: analyzes the techniques employed in a literary work to impose the author’s view on the reader
Rhetorical Question: question used to emphasize a point; no answer is expected
Sarcasm: verbal irony that uses insincere praise to express bitter and caustic disapproval
Satire: used to arouse laughter at targets such as people or groups to expose human folly
Simile: a comparison using “like” or “as”
Situational Irony: contrast between what is normally expected and what actually occurs
Slang: newly coined words that are not yet part of a formal usage
Stream of Consciousness: writing technique that uses frequent illogical and incoherent digressions to reproduce the raw flow of consciousness
Structure: organization or arrangement of various elements in a work
Style: arrangement of words in a manner that expresses the author’s individuality and his or her intent
Syllepsis: grammatical construction in which one word relates to two words in very different ways

Syllogism: format of a formal argument that consists of a major premise, minor premise, and conclusion
Synecdoche: figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole
Synesthesia: one sensory experience is described in terms of another sensory experience
Syntax: manner in which words are joined to make phrases, clauses, and sentences
Theme: main idea that the author expresses in a literary work
Thesis: claim or position that a writer must strive to prove effectively and thoroughly
Tone: attitude of the speaker of a work of literature
Verbal Irony: what is said is the opposite of what is meant
Voice: total “sound” or “feel” of a writer’s style that is present behind characters, narrators, and personae of literature
Wit: intellectual humor that suggests the speaker’s verbal power in creating ingenious and perceptive remarks
Zeugma: writer uses one word to govern several successive words or clauses

**AP English 12 Terms to Know**

As well as knowing the 11th grade list, AP 12 students should be familiar with the following terms upon the start of the school year.

Absurd: idea stemming from Existentialism that human beings, cut off from their roots, live in meaningless isolation in an alien universe
Allegory: symbolic story that has a second meaning beneath the surface one
Anachronism: placement of an event, person, thing out of its proper place in time
Antithesis: juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas
Archetype: a universal symbol; a stereotype of literature
Auditory Imagery: use of language to represent an experience pertaining to sound
Catharsis: cleansing release of unhealthy emotions namely pity and fear
Comic Relief: humor in the serious action of a tragedy; enriches the quality of the work
Dialect: A way of speaking by definable groups of people from a particular geographic region, economic group, or social class
Didactic: literature designed to teach or instruct
Dramatic Irony: reader or audience knows more about the events of a story than the character in the story
Dramatic Structure: organization used in plays that consists of a series of scenes, each of which is presented in vivid detail
Empathy: reader understands closely what the character is feeling
Epiphany: a life-changing realization, in a tragedy, the hero’s realization of self-blame for his downfall
Existentialism: A body of ethical thought, current in the 19th and 20th centuries, centering about the uniqueness and isolation of individual experience in a universe indifferent or even hostile to man, regarding human existence as unexplainable, and emphasizing man’s freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of his acts
Grotesque: bizarre, incongruous, ugly, unnatural, or abnormal

Gustatory Imagery: use of language to represent an experience pertaining to taste
Hamartia: the hero’s internal flaw that brings about his downfall in a tragedy
Hubris: a common hamartia meaning excessive pride
Juxtaposition: placement of two things side by side for the purposes of examination
Kinesthetic Imagery: use of language to represent an experience pertaining to the movement of muscles, joints, or tendons
Metonymy: designation of one thing with something closely associated with it
Modernism: A period of literature that lasted from c. 1914-1965. Influenced heavily by the works of Freud and Jung, it is writing marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition
Olfactory Imagery: use of language to represent an experience pertaining to smell
Paradox: statement that appears to be contradictory yet expresses a truth when viewed from another angle
Parody: comic imitation of another work often for ridicule
Pun: play on words that utilizes a word’s multiple meanings
Realism: faithful representation of reality to make a story more believable
Symbol: character, object, or event in literature that represents something larger than itself
Tactile imagery: use of language to represent an experience pertaining to touch