

Taft Glossary of Writing Terms

Allusion—An allusion is reference in literature to a person, place, event, or another passage of literature, often without explicit identification. Allusions can come from mythology, biblical references, historical events, legends, geography, or earlier literary works. Authors often use an allusion to establish a tone, create an implied association, contrast two objects or people, make an unusual juxtaposition of references, or bring the reader into a world of experience outside the limitations of the story itself.

Analysis— A detailed examination of anything complex made in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features. Analysis is the separation or breaking up of a whole into its fundamental parts.

Anecdote—An anecdote is a short narrative account of an amusing, unusual, revealing, or interesting event. A good anecdote has a single, definite point, and the setting, dialogue, and characters are usually subordinate to the point of the story.

Argument—An argument is a reason for or against a matter under discussion; a statement or presentation made in support or opposition to a proposal or opinion; a form or rhetorical expression intended to convince or persuade; a coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a point of view.

Assertion- Something declared or stated positively, often as if no supporting evidence were necessary

Brainstorm—Brainstorming is a technique by which a group or individual attempts to find a solution to a problem or an undertaking by amassing all the ideas that come to mind spontaneously in connection with the topic.

Citations —Citations are the way writers acknowledge material borrowed from sources. Most systems of citation are basically similar (some using footnotes or endnotes and some providing brief parenthetical references in the text), but there are precise distinctions you should be familiar with. The MLA style is used predominantly at Taft. Refer to the Citations link on the Taft Writing Center website.

Coherence—Coherence refers to the connection between adjacent parts. It can refer to the connections between words or phrases in a sentence, between sentences in a paragraph, or between paragraphs in an essay.

Compare and contrast—These terms refer to the process of exploring and identifying the similarities (comparison) or differences (contrast) between two or more things (objects, ideas, persons, groups, places, etc.).

Composition—Composition is the effort to integrate and relate constituent parts of a work into a unified whole.

Conciseness—Conciseness is achieved by economy and precision of expression.

Conclusion—A conclusion closes an essay by tying off the writer's thoughts and leaving readers with a sense of completion; it is a deliberate end. Often a restatement of the thesis and summary of the main points of an argument are necessary for an effective closing, but these features may not be necessary for a short essay in which they would be more repetitive than refreshing. It may also be effective to mention topics related to the argument that would warrant further thought and writing, or to comment on how the thesis may have a personal significance for the writer or the reader.

Connotation—The connotation of a word is the association of meanings each word acquires through usage beyond the minimal, strict definitions found in a dictionary. For example, the words *house* and *home* both refer to a domicile, but *home* calls to mind personal and emotional associations in a way that *house* doesn't. Home, then, has more connotations than house. A word can have many, and sometimes even inconsistent connotations.

Denotation—A denotation is an explicit definition of a word as found in a dictionary, disregarding any historical or emotional associations. Words often have more than one denotation. Contrast with **connotation**.

Description—Description provides details of the sensory qualities of a thing, person, place, or feeling.

Development—Development refers to the use of both explanation and evidence to clarify and support an assertion.

Dialogue—Dialogue refers to the lines spoken by a character or characters in a play, essay, story, or novel, especially a conversation between two characters; or it may refer to a literary work that takes the form of such a conversation.

Diction—Diction is the choice of a particular word for a precise purpose. A writer could call a rock formation by many words--a stone, a boulder, an outcropping, a pile of rocks, a cairn, a mound, or even an "anomalous geological feature." The word choice a writer makes, the writer's diction, determines how the reader will perceive what the writer says and contributes to the author's **style and tone**.

Evidence—Evidence refers to the specific details, facts, or quotations used to prove an assertion or support an idea.

Explanation—Explanation is an account in specific terms of what you think and what your reasons you have for your thinking; a detailed laying out of the logic on which your assertion or argument is based.

Illustration—An illustration is a concrete detail or image that clarifies, supports, or exemplifies. Often a visual representation to make the meaning more vivid and comprehensible.

Integration of quotation—This phrase refers to the relationship between a quotation and the sentence to which it is attached. A quotation should be a fluent and grammatically correct part of the sentence structure of which it is a part, and what the quotation says should be logically coherent with the statement it supports. An integrated quotation is united in both language and thought to the assertion of which it is a part.

Introduction—The introduction is the beginning of the paper that tells the reader what the essay is about (its subject), what specifically you think or have come to understand about the subject (your thesis), and why this understanding would be meaningful to the reader. The introduction engages the reader's interest and informs the reader about the reading experience. In addition to stating the position or understanding you will develop in the paper, you may wish to provide a summary of the main supporting ideas that will contribute to your argument and provide an indication of how these main ideas are related to your unifying purpose.

Logical reasoning—This is the process of using specific details and explanation to prove an assertion. Two basic forms of reasoning are inductive (in which specific examples are examined in order to form a valid generalization) and deductive (which begins with what is presumably a true generalization (a premise) and applies it to various examples and circumstances which are slightly different but similar.

Mapping—Mapping is an organizational device for collecting and connecting ideas and evidence that might contribute to an essay. Mapping is a process for sorting out the writer's thinking spatially, looking at thoughts and examples in relation to each other visually and by association rather than sequentially or in a logical order.

Monologue—A monologue is an extended speech by a single person.

Objective—Objective refers to the kind of writing that attempts to express something strictly on its own terms, as it would be perceived by any or all onlookers; an effort to express the inherent qualities of something without interpretation. Objective writing tries to avoid the biased or personalized point of view of the object, idea, or experience being expressed.

Outline—An outline is an organizational device which lays out the content of an essay in abbreviated form (in important words or phrases, not in complete sentences), showing the explicit thesis, all of the main ideas or assertions presented to develop the thesis, the specific examples and illustrations to support the assertions, and the explanation of how the detailed evidence clarifies and verifies the assertions. An outline presents these contents in order with clear indications of how each part of the essay is coherently related to the other parts. An outline may be used as a simplification of an already developed

composition as a guide to understanding a written or oral presentation, or it may be used to direct or shape the process of composition itself.

Paragraph—A paragraph is a group of related sentences with a purpose, set off by a beginning indentation. Paragraphing is a way to break down complex ideas into manageable parts, discuss each part separately and completely, relate each part to the central thesis of the essay, and thus achieve the unifying purpose. Effective paragraphs have three essential qualities: **unity** (everything in the paragraph pertains to one idea, which is expressed in a **topic sentence**), **coherence** (each sentence is logically and fluently related to the sentence before or after it), and **development** (the use of specific evidence and explanation to clarify and verify the main idea).

Precision of expression—Precision of expression refers to presenting the best words in the best order to convey an exact meaning.

Rhetorical devices—These are specific stylistic methods or techniques employed in the art of speaking or writing effectively. A rhetorical device uses language in a way that is not typical of ordinary, literal expression so that the language will have a striking effect. Alliteration, hyperbole and simile are all examples of rhetorical devices.

Structure—The structure of a piece of writing refers to how the elemental parts of a composition are put together to form the whole work. A consideration of structure goes beyond organization to explain how each particular part functions in support of the whole work and how each part relies on the others parts.

Subject—The subject of a piece of writing is the broad or general category which the writer explores for a more limited **topic** to write about. While “cell phones” might be a subject, “the use of cell phones in cars” would be one of many available topics to focus on, and the assertion that “the use of cell phones in cars is a prominent cause of accidents among young drivers” would be a feasible **thesis statement** for an essay.

Subjective—Subjective writing expresses the writer’s point of view of a subject. The subject is represented in terms of the writer’s perceptions, attitudes, and viewpoint; the writer’s biases, prejudices, and personal limitations influence how the subject is presented. The degree of subjectivity may vary to suit the writer’s purposes. This term is often used in opposition to **objective expression**.

Syntax—Syntax refers to how parts of a sentence are related to each other grammatically and logically to create the meaning of the sentence. Sentences can be structured in a variety of ways for particular effects or purposes, and the proper grammatical forms of words, phrases, and clauses allow the reader to construct the writer’s meaning accurately.

Synthesis—A synthesis is the combination of two or more elements in the formation of something new; often referring to thinking or writing in which two or more ideas, insights, or perceptions are joined together to create a new, more complex understanding.

Thesis—A thesis is a statement of the main, unifying idea of a composition, which expresses the writer's explicit purpose for writing and what the writer specifically thinks or feels about the topic. It is the primary assertion to which all the other parts of the essay relate. Refer to the explanation of **subject**, above, for a sample thesis statement.

Tone—Tone refers to the attitude a writer or speaker reveals toward his or her subject and audience. This attitude may be expressed directly or indirectly.

Topic—A topic is defined in relation to the explanation of **subject**, above, which distinguishes between the generality of a subject and the more limited focus of a **topic**.

Topic sentence—A topic sentence is a statement of the main idea or purpose of a paragraph (see paragraph).

Unity—Unity is created when all the parts of a paragraph, essay, or some other kind of composition relate to one guiding purpose. All the parts, taken together, are a unit, a single thing.