

Important Terms to Know when Reading Shakespeare

Refer to the *Literature* textbook, pages 930 and 932, to define the following terms. Make certain that you definitions are complete and include all aspects that are given.

Tragedy:

Tragic Hero:

Antagonist:

Foil:

Soliloquy

Aside:

Dramatic Irony:

Blank Verse:

Iambic Pentameter:

Allusion:

Pun:

**Use the Glossary R102-R114, to find the definitions of the following words:**

Aside:

Oxymoron:

Prose:

Stage Directions:

**About Shakespeare’s Language:** In Shakespeare's words are clues to characters and situations that any reader needs.It's simply a matter of knowing how to find them. The clues are not necessarily in the meanings of the words; the rhythms of the language and the patterns and sounds of the words contain a great deal of valuable information.

Shakespeare writes either in **blank verse**, in **rhymed verse** or in **prose.** Blank verse is unrhymed but uses a regular pattern of rhythm or meter. In the English language, blank verse is **iambic** **pentameter**. Pentameter means there are five poetic feet. In iambic pentameter each of these five feet is composed of two syllables: the first unstressed; the second stressed. The rhythm of blank verse is conversational and with its dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM rhythm, it imitates the heartbeat.̬

**two HOUSE holds, BOTH a LIKE in DIG ni TY,**

**in FAIR ve RO na, WHERE we LAY our SCENE**

In conversation, we often break the rhythmic pattern and this throws specific words into focus. Shakespeare does the same with blank verse: he often deviates from the perfect iambic line. When he does, it's a clue to a change in the character's feelings or thoughts or a change in situation or both. The convention in Shakespeare's time was to write plays in verse. His extensive use of **prose** is yet another sign of his inventiveness and capacity to break with custom when it served his plan. He uses prose for a variety of purposes. Often lower class or comic characters speak prose while the more socially or morally elevated characters speak in verse, but this is far from always the case. Why does Shakespeare shift from verse to prose? The conversational tone of prose can make a character seem more natural at a particular moment or it can indicate the degeneration of a noble nature. A swift movement from prose to poetry or the reverse is always an indication that a change is taking place.