

## WRITING TERMS EVERY WRITER SHOULD KNOW

From *Writing Made Easy: Just the Basics*  
by Timothy Sharkey

- BOMBASTIC** (L *bombyc* cotton, silk, as in the cotton padding of shoulders in coats): inflated, padded, overblown language.<sup>1</sup> For example, “Chicago’s nickname of ‘The Windy City’ came from its bombastic politicians, not its skyscrapers.”<sup>2</sup>
- CLICHE** (F *cliché* stereotype): an expression so overused it is no longer effective.<sup>3</sup> For example, “You’re as busy as a bee.” “I slept like a baby.”
- COLLOQUIAL** (L *colloqui* converse, speak): conversational language: informal language: writing in a conversational style.<sup>4</sup> For example, “Walt Whitman chose to write in the colloquial language of the man on the street corner and not the man in academia.”
- CONCISE** (L *concisus* to cut up): brevity of expression: free of all elaboration: writing that is brief and to the point (*i.e.*, poignant).<sup>5</sup>
- CONNOTATION**: the implied meaning of a word.<sup>6</sup> A *snake*, for example, implies (or connotes) a sneaky person, but it literally means a reptile.
- DENOTATION**: the dictionary meaning of a word.<sup>7</sup> *Cheap* denotes a low price for something but it also implies (or connotes) low-quality.
- DICTION** (L *diction* speaking): word choice: the art of choosing good words: picking the right word for the right context (considered the essence of poetry by some).<sup>8</sup>
- ESSAY** (L *exagium* act of weighing): a composition that is analytical, interpretive, personal, and limited in scope.<sup>9</sup> For example, a political essay, a descriptive essay, an argumentative essay, a photographic essay. An essay is essentially a short piece of writing.
- ETYMOLOGY** (Gk *etymon* origin + *logia* word): the study of the origin of words: the branch of linguistics that studies the origin of words.<sup>10</sup>
- EUPHEMISM** (Gk *eupemismos* nice sounding language): the substitution of an agreeable, softened word for one that may offend.<sup>11</sup> For example, *military campaign* for war, *military fatigue* for shell shock, and *incident* for rampage.
- EXPOSITION** (L *exponere* to expose, explain, or present for view): exposing facts: conveying information.<sup>12</sup>
- EXPOSITORY WRITING**: writing involving exposition; *i.e.*, writing that exposes facts, details, names, and important information.

**FIGURE OF SPEECH:** an expression that describes something in terms of something else: a comparison: figurative, not literal, language. For example, “He ran very fast” uses literal language. “He ran like a rabbit” uses figurative language.

**GRAMMAR** (Gk *grammatikos* of letters; gram Gk *gramma* small weight, one unit): the study of the 8 different kinds of words in English: *nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections*.<sup>13</sup> Grammar involves using the right word in the right place in a sentence.

**HYPERBOLE** (Gk *hyperbole* excess): extreme exaggeration in language.<sup>14</sup> For example, “Mile high ice cream cones.” “I was so embarrassed I could have died.” “My love for you is infinite.” “He is older than the hills.”

**IDIOM** (L *idioma* peculiarity of language): the language, or way of talking, unique to a particular group, period, or location.<sup>15</sup>

**IDIOMATIC:** a form of expression, or way of talking, unique to a particular group, period, or location.<sup>16</sup> For example, “Groovy, baby. I can dig it.” in the 1960s in America.

**JARGON** (F *jargon*, I4c): the technical terminology of a particular group of people (such as lawyers using legal jargon, doctors using medical jargon, and musicians using musical jargon).<sup>17</sup>

**LACONIC** (L *laconicus* Spartan, Gk *lakonikos* Spartan terseness of speech): a minimum use of words.<sup>18</sup> For example, Clint Eastwood’s screen persona in his Western films used an economy of words.

**MALAPROPISM** (from Mrs. Malaprop, a character in R B Sheridan’s *The Rivals*, a comedy in 1775, noted for her misuse of words): a humorous misapplication of a word. For example, “He is the very pineapple [pinnacle] of success!”<sup>19</sup> “You’re constipating [concentrating] too much” (Archie Bunker).

**MELLIFLUOUS** (L *mellifluus* flowing like honey): smooth or rich language that flows like honey: smooth sounding words.<sup>20</sup>

**METAPHOR** (Gk *metaphorein* to transfer): a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of something else: an idea expressed through the image of a second object: one object described through the qualities of a second object.<sup>21</sup> (Please see *Metaphor* in the *Rhetorical Terms* section of Chapter 2: *The Descriptive Essay* for a complete explanation of *metaphor* and *simile*.)

**NEOLOGISM** (Gk *neo* new + *logia* word): a newly invented word (sometimes disapproved of because of its newness). For example, “selfie,” “tweet,” “crowd-sourcing,” “app,” “alt-right,” “woke,” “bot,” “webinar,” “blogosphere,” *etc.*<sup>22</sup>

**ONOMATOLOGY** (Gk *onomat* name + *logos* word): the study of the etymology, history, and use of proper names: the study of name formation and naming practices.<sup>23</sup>

ONOMATOPOEIA (Gk *onomatopoiía* the making of words): the formation of a word from a sound associated with it: the naming of a thing by a vocal imitation of its sound.<sup>24</sup> For example, *sizzle, splash, buzz, bang, honk, hiss, hiccup, oink, roar, chirp, meow.*

ORATORY (L *oratorium* place of prayer): *Oratory* is the art of public speaking, usually with a rhetorical speech.<sup>25</sup> Demosthenes was the great orator of ancient Greece. Cicero was the great orator of ancient Rome. Abraham Lincoln was the great orator of The United States during the civil war.

OXYMORON (Gk *oxymoron* pointedly foolish): a contradiction of terms: a combination of contradictory words.<sup>26</sup> For example, *jumbo shrimp, civil war, tragic pleasure, Nazi culture, an honest thief.* The following speech from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* uses oxymorons: "Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate! / O anything of nothing first create! / O heavy lightness! serious vanity! / Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms! / Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health! / This love feel I, that feel no love in this" (I.i.174-82).

REDUNDANT (L *redundant* overflowing): duplicated and needless language: language that exceeds what is necessary: previously stated and therefore unnecessary.<sup>27</sup>

RHETORIC (Gk *rhetorike* art of oratory): the principles or rules of speaking and writing effectively.<sup>28</sup> Aristotle wrote a book titled *The Art of Rhetoric* in ancient Greece where he formulated three basic elements of rhetoric: *ethos* (ethics), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic). (Please see *Ethos, Pathos, and Logos* in the *Rhetorical Terms* section of chapter 2: *The Descriptive Essay* for a complete explanation of *ethos, pathos, and logos, and more.*)

RHETORICAL TERMS: rhetorical techniques or rhetorical devices that writers use to help them communicate more effectively. These devices include *alliteration, allusion, hyperbole, metaphor, parallel construction, and personification, among others.* (Please see the *Rhetorical Terms* section of Chapter 2: *The Descriptive Essay* for a complete explanation of rhetorical terms.)

SLANG (origin unknown, 1756): non-standard language composed of coinages, deliberately changed words, and extravagant figures of speech.<sup>29</sup> For example, *blood sludge* for greasy food, *dough* for money, *bombed* for being drunk, and all *nicknames.* Slang is frowned upon in formal writing, but it can be useful in narrative essays, novels, and screenplays. Slang is rich in metaphor.

SUCCINCT (L *succinctus* girded up): compact, precise expression without wasted words: language that makes every word count.<sup>30</sup>

VERBAL BULL-ROAR: language that does a lot of talking but never says a hot-damned thing: language that beats around the bush but never gets to the point. For example, "We're going to implement a strategic initiative." This expression simply means "We're going to do something," but it uses pretentious words to sound important.

VERBOSE (L *verbosus* wordy): too wordy: containing more words than necessary: language that is impaired by excessive wordiness.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Bombastic.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bombastic>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “Sweet Home Chicago.” *A Front Porch Travelogue*. <https://acclaimhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Read-and-Discuss-Travel-to-Chicago.pdf>. Accessed 15 Aug. 2021.

<sup>3</sup> “Cliché.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1983.

<sup>4</sup> “Colloquial.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colloquial>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>5</sup> “Concise.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concise>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>6</sup> “Connotation.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/connotation>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> “Denotation.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denotation>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>8</sup> “Diction.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diction>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>9</sup> “Essay.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1983.

<sup>10</sup> “Etymology.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/etymology>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> “Euphemism.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/euphemism>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>12</sup> “Exposition.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exposition>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>13</sup> “Grammar.” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1983.

<sup>14</sup> “Hyperbole.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hyperbole>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>15</sup> “Idiom.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/idiom>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>16</sup> “Idiomatic.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/idiomatic>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> “Jargon.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jargon>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>18</sup> “Laconic.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/laconic>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>19</sup> “Malapropism.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/malapropism>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>20</sup> “Mellifluous.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mellifluous>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>21</sup> “Metaphor.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>22</sup> “Neologism.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/neologism>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>23</sup> “Onomatology.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/onomatology>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>24</sup> “Onomatopoeia.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/onomatopoeia>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>25</sup> “Oratory.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oratory>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>26</sup> “Oxymoron.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oxymoron>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>27</sup> “Redundant.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/redundant>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>28</sup> “Rhetoric.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>29</sup> “Slang.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/slang>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>30</sup> “Succinct.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/succinct>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.

<sup>31</sup> “Verbose.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/verbose>. Accessed 16 Aug. 2021.