

## Discourse

Discourse is written or spoken words. It is communication that describes thought through language in everyday life and literature.

Foucault famously defined discourse as "Systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, and courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak." This all-encompassing definition helps readers understand discourse on the broadest level. But, when it comes to literature, it's slightly different. It refers to speech or writing that deals with subjects formally. Sentences are longer and more complex. Readers won't find colloquialisms like slang words in formal discourse.

Discourse is the dialogue in literature. It is any form of written communication, often seen through conversations between characters and descriptions of the setting. Often, these are long and detailed sentences that provide information about a character's background, the setting, or other critical information that will inform the reader's perspective.

Writers use discourse to tell their stories. This might be through a conversation between two characters, the narrator's description of what's going on, or simple descriptions of the setting, time period, and more. Readers can explore the different types of discourse common to literature, from novels to poems.

The word "discourse" comes from the Latin meaning "a running about." Scholars related this to the movements of language and its natural flow. In literature, discourse is the formal arrangement of words. It refers broadly to all language and all forms of communication, written or spoken. This means small acts of communication and large, more complicated ones. There are

several different types of discourse, all of which writers depend on to convey information. Explore them below.

## Types of Discourse

The four most common and commonly cited types of discourse are:

- **Narration**: the voice that presents the story to readers or listeners. It is the commentary that engages the reader and inspires them to keep reading. The more interesting it is, the more likely the reader will be compelled to continue reading.
- **Exposition**: used to inform the audiences about background information. These are facts that aren't up for interpretation or seek to change the audience's mind. This kind of discourse is unbiased and uses a neutral tone. For example, telling readers what time it is when a particular chapter of a book starts or what the weather is like.
- **Description**: uses images and encourages the reader to imagine experiences as if they were living them. This type of discourse is incredibly important in creative writing if the author wants to set the scene and convince the reader of it.
- **Argument**: used to try to convince another person about an idea. It uses logic and reasoning. The writer makes claims, backs them up, and ideally sways the reader or listener to a specific way of thinking. This kind of discourse is seen in political speeches, academic papers, and other sources.

There are also several other types of discourse that are also interesting to consider:

- **Expressive**: reflects what the writer is feeling or thinking. It generates ideas and is usually not concerned with facts.

- **Transactional:** is used when the writer wants to take a less-literary and more instructional or didactic approach to writing. The writer usually uses the active voice. It appears in advertisements and business meetings.
- **Poetic:** uses rhythmic language and rhyming words to appeal to the reader's emotions and convey experiences. Often uses imagery, figurative language, and other techniques familiar to poetry.

## Examples of Discourse in Literature

### *She Walks in Beauty* by Lord Byron

In this well-loved Byron poem, readers can find a great example of poetic discourse. It was written after Byron met his cousin, Mrs. John Wilmont. Her beauty so moved him that he immediately went home and wrote this poem about her. The poem uses iambic tetrameter throughout much of it as Byron describes the woman's awe-inspiring beauty

She walks in beauty, like the night  
 Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
 And all that's best of dark and bright  
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
 Thus mellowed to that tender light  
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

Here are the first few lines in which the rhyme scheme is quite clear. Byron uses rhyming words at the end of lines and devices like alliteration and similes to create memorable imagery. Words like "gaudy

day denies” and “Thus mellowed to that tender light” are great examples of poetic discourse.

### ***The Diary of Virginia Woolf***

In this example, readers can find expressive discourse. The author Virginia Woolf kept a diary, recording her personal recollections and emotions in its pages. These are examples of her own ideas, presented for their own reasons. She is not attempting to sway anyone to her point of view or make a reader feel something specific. Here is a quote from her diary:

I enjoy almost everything. Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say “This is it”? My depression is a harassed feeling. I’m looking: but that’s not it — that’s not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it?

In these lines, she considers her emotions, tries to analyze them, and alludes to a deeper depression she can’t shake off. Within expressive discourse, readers can find a writer’s clear and unaltered thoughts.

### **“I Have a Dream” Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.**

This incredibly famous speech is an example of narrative and argumentative discourse. King expresses his thoughts and those at the heart of the Civil Rights movement. He creates calls to action, hoping to inspire those listening to join him, as well as persuade those who disagree with him to change their minds. Here are a few lines:

“In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were

signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

King’s words are clear, mostly formal, and to the point. He has a specific message he’s trying to spread, and he does not spend time adding in flowery language to obscure it.

### **Do Writers Use Discourse?**

Discourse is used whenever and however a writer addresses a topic. It takes many different forms, as described above, and is crucial for conveying one’s experience. This might be through writing or through speech. Without communication, there would be no genres of literature nor any way for stories to be shared.

### ***Romeo and Juliet Act I Prologue* by William Shakespeare**

The opening [prologue](#) is delivered prior to the actors entering the stage. It is spoken by the “Chorus.” This is a group of people, or a single narrator, who, throughout this play, and in other Shakespearean works, introduced scenes, gave necessary background detail, and describe characters

The chorus provides a discourse that is not heard by the characters in the story. They are narrative discourse is critical to the reader, audience members, and understanding of what they’re about to see. The prologue begins with the lines:

Two households, both alike in dignity,

In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

The chorus provides [exposition](#) and other details about the characters who readers and audience members are about to meet and what's going to happen to them. This example of discourse also includes examples of [foreshadowing](#), [metaphor](#), and [allusion](#).

## FAQS

### Why do writers use discourse?

Writers use discourse in order to inform the reader's understanding of their written work. The different types of discourse discussed above are used to form the fiction or fictional world within poems, plays, [novels](#), and [short stories](#). Discourse also appears in diary entries, emails, letters, and other examples of written communication within contemporary life.

### What is the concept of discourse?

Discourse is defined as communication in written or spoken language. In literature, it is any way that communication is delivered. It could be through diary entries, letters, [dialogue](#) within a poem, narrative description within a longer [novel](#), and more.

### What is the meaning of discourse in linguistics?

In linguistics, discourse is defined as the organized segments of language that are used to construct sentences and create meaning.

## Summary

### Poetic Discourse

Poetic discourse is a type of literary conversation which focuses on the expression of feelings, ideas, imaginations, events, and places through specific rhymes and rhythms. Poetic discourse makes use of common words in appealing ways to present feelings and emotions. The mechanism of poetic discourse involves certain steps starting from different sources, then entering the mental process, mental realization, and then finally into a finished product as poetry.

### Expressive Discourse

Expressive discourse does not involve the presentation of facts, or the motivating of others, but is rather a reflection of our emotions that form the foundation of our expressions. This is a form of basic or entry-level discourse, and is beneficial for beginners in the field of literature. It primarily deals with generating ideas with no concrete source. Examples include academic essays and diaries.

### Transactional Discourse

The basic aim in this kind of discourse is to convey the message in such a way that it is clearly understood without any confusion. Whatever is said has no ambiguity – everything is clear for the reader. Usually, this type of discourse is in active voice. Examples include *instructions, guidelines, manuals, privacy policies, and patient instructions as written by doctors.*