Shakespeare's language: some technical terms

More information and examples can be found on the pages shown after each item.

alarms and excursions	a stage direction meaning the sounds and actions of battle: trumpets, drums and skirmishes on stage (page 127)
alliteration	the repetition of initial consonant sounds or blends (pages 14, 21)
antithesis	the opposition of words or phrases against each other in balanced contrast (pages 12–13)
apostrophe	addressing a person, personified object, abstract quality, or idea as if it was actually present ('O Wall!')
aside	a brief remark by a character, usually to the audience, unheard by other characters
assonance	the repetition of vowel sounds (pages 14, 21)
blank verse	unrhymed verse written in *iambic pentameter* (pages 28–35)
bombast	boastful or ranting language (page 54)
caesura	a pause or break in a line of verse (page 30)
chiasmus	a mirror image type of *antithesis* where one phrase is the reverse of the other: 'Love's fire heats water, water cools not love' (pages 12–13)
Chorus	a narrator who introduces or comments on the play: as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*. In *Pericles*, Gower acts as Chorus. (pages 96, 122)
conceit	an elaborate image that sets up a startling or unusual comparison between two very dissimilar things (see *imagery*)
deixis	such words as I, he, she, them, it, there, then, etc. These words tell who or what is the person, thing, place or time referred to. (pages 62–63)
dialogue	verbal exchange between two or more characters on stage (pages 68–76)
end-stopped lines	a line of verse that makes sense on its own, with a clear pause at the end of the line (page 28)
enjambement	verse in which the sense runs on from one line to the next; lines which are not *end-stopped* (page 28)
epilogue	a speech to the audience at the end of the play, often asking for applause, as in *As You Like It, All's Well That Ends Well, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Henry V, Henry IV part 2, Henry VIII, Pericles, Twelfth Night* (a song), *The Tempest*
exeunt	a stage direction meaning 'everyone leaves the stage'
feminine ending	line of verse in *iambic pentameter* with an additional unstressed syllable at the end of the line ('To be, or not to be, that is the question')
folio	a large sheet of paper, approximately 18" x 14". The First Folio is the collection of all Shakespeare's plays published in 1623. (pages 142–143)
hyperbole	extravagant and obviously exaggerated language: 'hype' (pages 52–53)
iamb	a metrical unit of two syllables, the first unstressed, the second stressed: the regular rhythm of *blank verse* (listen to your heart-beat! di *dum*, di *dum*, di *dum* …)

iambic pentameter	a ten syllable line of verse with five stresses: di *dum*, di *dum*, di *dum*, di *dum*, di *dum* (pages 28–35)
imagery	the use of emotionally charged words and phrases that conjure up vivid mental pictures in the imagination (pages 1–11)
irony	verbal irony: saying one thing but meaning another; dramatic irony: the audience knows something that a character does not (pages 56–58)
iterative imagery	repeated *imagery*, images which recur throughout the play (pages 1–11)
line	the basic unit of verse
malapropism	inappropriate, muddled or mistaken use of words (page 60)
masculine ending	a stressed syllable ending a verse line
metaphor	a comparison that suggests two dissimilar things are actually the same (page 1)
meter	how the rhythm of verse is measured; the inner rhythmical structure of a line (see *pentameter*, *tetrameter*) (pages 28–37)
onomatopoeia	words whose sound mimic what they describe (page 21)
oxymoron	two incongruous or contradictory words brought together to make a striking expression: 'cold fire'; 'sweet sorrow' (page 59)
parody	a mocking imitation of a particular style of language use (page 15)
pentameter	the rhythm of a verse line with five stresses (penta = five) (page 28)
personification	turning all kinds of things – death, time, war, love, England, etc. – into persons, giving them human feelings and attributes (page 11)
prologue	the introduction to a play, spoken by Chorus in *Henry V* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and by Rumour in *Henry IV part 2* (page 122)
prose	all language not in verse. Used mainly, but not always, for comedy, madness, low status characters, letters and proclamations. (pages 40–45)
pun	wordplay: when a word has two or more different meanings the ambiguity can be used for comic or serious effect (page 55)
quarto	a sheet of paper approximately 9" x 7". Around half Shakespeare's plays were published during his lifetime in Quarto editions (pages 142–143)
rhetoric	the art of persuasion (pages 46–51)
rhyme	matching sounds at the end of verse lines (pages 38–39)
run-on lines	see *enjambement*
shared lines	where a line is shared between two or more speakers (page 33)
simile	a comparison using 'like' or 'as' (page 1)
soliloquy	a speech by a character who is alone, or believes himself or herself to be alone, on stage. Often a kind of internal debate (pages 77–84)
sonnet	a poem of fourteen lines written in *iambic pentameter*
stichomythia	rapidly alternating single lines spoken by two characters (pages 68, 70)
syntax	sentence structure; the way in which words, phrases, and clauses are arranged in a sentence
tetrameter	the rhythm of a verse line with four stresses (pages 36–37)
verse	strongly patterned language. The typical Shakespearean pattern is *blank verse*: each line has ten syllables and five stresses (see *iambic pentameter*). (pages 28–37)