

# Digression

## Definition of Digression

While reading a [narrative](#), a reader comes across several sudden interruptions in the main action of the story, which provides him background information, establish his interest, describes a [character](#)'s [motivation](#), and builds [suspense](#). These interruptions are called “digressions.” A digression is a stylistic device authors employ to create a temporary departure from the main subject of the narrative, to focus on apparently unrelated topics, explaining background details. However, after this temporary shift, authors return to the main topic at the end of the narrative.

## Examples of Digression in Literature

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### Example #1: *Iliad* (By Homer)

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Homer is one of the earliest users of digression during the Grecian Era. He uses digressions in *Iliad* to provide the readers with a break from the main narrative, offering background information and enhancing verisimilitudes of the story. For instance, in Book 11, Homer uses a small digression when Agamemnon encounters the brothers Hippolokhos and Peisandros in a battle. When they come to Agamemnon as suppliants, he reminds them that their father once denied emissaries of Menelaos. Homer employs it as a short interlude that provides the readers a serious note on the nature of rivalries and the beginnings of war.

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### Example #2: *The Catcher in the Rye* (By J. D. Salinger)

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J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* is rich with digression. Many thought patterns of Holden Caulfield in the novel seem to be straying from

the main topic, and hence unrelated. However, these digressions are relevant and important for the main topic, as they allow readers to gain insight into this character. For instance, his statements about the intelligence of his sister, followed by a description of how carefully she listens, reveals Holding's concerns.

Another example of digression is his tension about the nuns. Although he enjoyed discussion, he was worried about being asked whether he is a Catholic or not. This shows his tension for being judged morally and ethically, and his associations with moralists, who look down upon those who hide such realities from them.

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### **Example #3: *Oliver Twist* (By Charles Dickens)**

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“If it did not come strictly within the scope and bearing of my long-considered intentions and plans regarding this [prose](#) epic ... to leave the two old gentlemen sitting with the watch between them long after it grew too dark to see it ... I shall not enter into any such digression in this place: and, if this be not a sufficient reason for this determination, I have a better, and indeed, a wholly unanswerable one, already stated; which is, that it forms no part of my original intention to do so.”

Dickens launches a lengthy discussion to show how the plot is progressing. This excerpt is a perfect instance of breaks and digressions in the story, reminding the readers this is not a real story but a novel, which keeps a distance between readers and characters.

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### **Example #4: *Odyssey* (By Homer)**

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Homer's *Odyssey* also contains several interludes and digressions, which take readers away from the main action of the story. Despite that, these digressions are thematically connected to the main narrative, namely Odysseus' journey to home and his several encounters during this journey. The poem's [style](#) ranges from comic and conversational, to pithy, compact, and abstruse. For instance, the poem uses similes, comparing one event or action to another situation or happening in an elaborate or extended

manner. For instance, the poet compares a squid clinging to a rock to Odysseus holding to his boat.

## **Function of Digression**

The main function of digression is to provide a description of characters, give background information, establish interest, and create suspense for the readers. However, these functions vary from author to author. Some use it to provide scholarly background, while others use it to prevent confusion of illusions in a narrative.

Another function is to emphasize or illustrate an idea through anecdotes or examples, and establish a channel through which authors satirize a person or place. Besides these, many authors fear that if they do not digress from the main topic, naïve readers might not be able to differentiate between the reality and [fiction](#). The reason is that some topics are close to reality, such as poverty, strained relationships, and crime. Hence, they use it to put a check on their [audience](#)'s sympathetic identification with certain characters.