

Pedantic

Definition of Pedantic

Pedantic comes from the French word *pedant*, which means “to teach or to act as pedagogue.” A pedantic is someone who is concerned with precision, formalism, accuracy, and minute details in order to make an arrogant and ostentatious show of learning. He could be a writer, a [character](#), feelings, tone, or words. Sigmund Freud defined pedantic in this manner:

“The pedant is he who finds it impossible to read criticism of himself without immediately reaching for his pen and replying to the effect that the accusation is a gross insult to his person.”

A pedant often corrects small mistakes that are not very important in grand matters and, therefore, may annoy others around him.

Popular Views about Pedants

But even they are too pedantic: with prejudiced views, they pursue one-sided aims.

(From *Piano and Song*, by Friedrich Wieck)

The pedant still does the cause of education incalculable injury. (From *Craftsmanship in Teaching*, by William Chandler Bagley)

It is their instinct to flower in spring, of course, but they are not pedantic about it in the least. (From *About Orchids: A Chat*, by Frederick Boyle)

Examples of Pedantic Characters in Literature

Example #1: *Pale Fire* (By Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov)

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov has used Charles Kinbote as a pedant in his novel *Pale Fire*. Kinbote is a leading character, living in exile as a

literature Professor in a New England college town known as New Wye. In fact, he belongs to a country called Zembla.

Kinbote is a pedantic, a disturbed liar who cannot avoid telling lies, which makes this novel interesting. Throughout the novel, Kinbote keeps giving clues that he is an exiled king from Zembla. In this case, the readers believe that Kinbote is really a king from Zembla, despite that it is equally important to remember that Zembla has no king. He did this through demonstration of his knowledge of things others do not know about.

Example #2: *The Big Bang Theory* (By Bill Prady and Chuck Lorre)

Bill Prady and Chuck Lorre's sitcom contains a pedantic character, Dr. Sheldon Lee Cooper, who is a theoretical physicist. Dr. Sheldon Cooper is idiosyncratic and obsessed, being possessed with extreme narcissism and extensive general knowledge. Other characteristics of his personality include inflated ego, prodigy, social ineptitude, and his inability to express emotions to people, which show him as a typical pedantic person.

Example #3: *The Great Gatsby* (By F. Scott Fitzgerald)

“Civilization's going to pieces ... I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read 'The Rise of the Colored Empires' by this man Goddard? ... Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be — will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved ... I know I'm not very popular. I don't give big parties. I suppose you've got to make your house into a pigsty in order to have any friends — in the modern world.”

In this paragraph, Tom Buchanan is trying to look like a learned person but he winds up looking foolish. The final line is a pedantic, as Tom is citing popularity and parties of Gatsby as a proof of modern world disintegration.

Example #4: *Cherry Orchard* (By Anton Chekhov)

Trofimov is an intelligent person yet impassioned, and immature too. Therefore, Chekhov calls him an “Eternal Student.” He is unforgiving and judgmental, as Lubov puts blame on his youth saying:

“You boldly look forward, isn’t it because you cannot foresee or expect anything terrible, because so far life has been hidden from your young eyes? You are bolder, more honest, deeper than we are, but think only, be just a little magnanimous, and have mercy on me.”

Here he thinks that he is an intellectual and a revolutionary preoccupied with plans, however being ostentatious, lacking real world experience and displaying characteristics of a pedantic man.

Function of Pedantic

Writers use a pedantic character to teach something in a complicated manner, or to teach with excessive demonstration of knowledge. Another purpose of writers in using pedantry is to display their multilingual abilities by using excessive knowledge. Though the term *pedantic* refers to displaying a sense of knowledge, which is its positive side, it also tells about the narrow-mindedness of a character or a writer who tries to insist on adhering to arbitrary rules and principles, because often such rules are pointless.