

Exposition

Definition of Exposition

Exposition is a literary device used to introduce background information about events, settings, characters, or other elements of a work to the [audience](#) or readers. The word comes from the Latin language, and its literal meaning is “a showing forth.” Exposition is crucial to any story, for without it nothing makes sense.

There are many ways to present an exposition, including monologues, dialogues, in-universe media (newspapers, letters, reports, journals, etc.), a [protagonist](#)’s thoughts, or a narrator’s explanation of past events. It is one of the four rhetorical modes of communication – the other three being narration, description, and argumentation.

Examples of Exposition in Literature

Exposition in Movies

Example #1: *Star Wars* (By George Lucas)

There are countless examples of exposition in many great movies and one of them, which comes across particularly well, is from *Star Wars*. The exposition in this movie is the opening title sequence, which gives information about the past events to the audience. The crawling text on the screen at the beginning of each movie in the series gives the audience every piece of information they need to understand the upcoming events in the film. The opening lines usually begin like this:

“A long time ago in a galaxy far away, far away...”

Exposition in Literature

Example #2: *The Three Little Bears* (By Robert Southey)

An exposition is typically positioned at the beginning of a novel, movie, or other literary work, because the author wants the audience to be fully aware of the characters in the story. The famous children's story entitled *The Three Little Bears* applies this technique of exposition.

“Once upon a time, there were three bears. There was a Daddy Bear, who was very big, a Mama Bear, who was middle-sized, and a Baby Bear, who was very small. They all lived together in a little cottage in the middle of the woods. Their favorite breakfast was porridge. One morning, after they made their porridge, Daddy Bear said, ‘Let’s go for walk in the woods until it cools.’ Mama Bear and Baby Bear liked the idea, so off they went. While they were away, a little girl named Goldilocks came walking through the forest and smelled the porridge...”

With the help of a single passage, the author of the story has given us an overview of the bear family, their residence, and information that sets the story in motion.

Example #3: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

All of Shakespeare's writings contain excellent exposition examples. Take *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, and *Richard III*, and you will see how exceptionally well he used the art of expository writing. Here, two examples from *Othello* have been taken to elaborate the point.

The opening scene in Act I of *Othello* shows a fierce [argument](#) between Roderigo and Iago, which helps build the interest of the audience. The audience realizes that Iago is persistently trying to convince Roderigo to be his accomplice in destroying Othello. The exposition in this scene plays the following roles:

It explicates Iago's treacherous, spiteful, and scheming nature.

The main [conflict](#) of the play is revealed here. It revolves around Iago's concealed bitterness towards his boss Othello who, in Iago's opinion, is overlooking him for promotion. It ascertains two basic themes of the play: racism, and that appearance is not always the same as reality.

At the end of Act 1, the play gives the audience a few facts about Othello, including:

He is a very respectable man.

He had run away with Desdemona, Brabantio's daughter.

He is a great general who is sought by Venice to defend it in the war against the Turks.

As is evident from the examples given above, exposition always gives us an insight into the characters' personalities, and adds flavor to the [tragedy](#) and [drama](#) we see towards the end of the play.

Function of Exposition

The importance of exposition in literature, as well as in our practical lives, cannot be ignored. Examining the types of writing we come across in our daily lives shows us that almost all of them are incomplete without exposition.

The [fiction](#) books, articles, and magazines that people read in their everyday lives essentially rely on exposition to connect the readers to the main story by giving them the background information. In most cases, a [narrative](#) or script loses its essence if not accompanied by an exposition. Not only is it important for bringing clarity to a script, but it is also vital to enhance its literary value. The true essence of a book usually lies in how the reader is introduced to the characters in it and, if done correctly, the reader automatically starts relating to them.

Moreover, exposition is widely used for academic purposes in schools, colleges, and universities. Generally, students are asked to submit research reports and pass exams to establish their progress. The exposition here is keeping the academia updated on what you have learned so far. Also, employees are asked very often to put together business reports and memorandums to update their employers about their progress.