

Ellipsis

Ellipsis Definition

Ellipsis is a literary device that is used in narratives to omit some parts of a sentence or event, which gives the reader a chance to fill the gaps while acting or reading it out. It is usually written between the sentences as a series of three dots, like this: “...”

Apart from being convenient, ellipses also help in advancing the story. Leaving out part of a sentence or an event by substituting it with ellipses is often done to either save time, or as a stylistic element. The ellipsis can be dated back to Ernest Hemingway, who presented the Iceberg theory, which is also called the theory of omission.

Examples of Ellipsis in Literature

Example #1: *To the Lighthouse* (By Virginia Woolf)

Among the famous examples of ellipsis in literature, the best would be Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*. This book involves two parts, one before the World War I was fought and won, and the latter accounts for the events occurring afterwards. All the events that occurred in between have not been mentioned in the book. Rather, it has left to the readers to deduce the events from the notable changes that have occurred in the characters' lives.

Example #2: *Crash Blossoms*, *The New York Times*, Jan. 27, 2010 (By Ben Zimmer)

“The potential for unintended [humor](#) in ‘compressed’ English isn’t restricted to headline writing; it goes back to the days of the

telegraph. One clever (though possibly apocryphal) example once appeared in the pages of Time magazine: Cary Grant received a telegram from an editor inquiring, 'HOW OLD CARY GRANT? – to which he responded: 'OLD CARY GRANT FINE. HOW YOU?' The omitted verb may have saved the sender a nickel, but the snappy comeback was worth far more."

Function of Ellipsis

Ellipsis is also very commonly used in filmmaking. The parts and scenes that are of no significance to the film are usually omitted by editing. For instance, there would be no point in showing a scene that involves a [character](#) walking to the door to answer it unless there is something absolutely important in that scene that you would like to highlight. Normally, such a scene would be cut short by editing out the unnecessary parts. In such cases, the [narrative](#) logic allows the [audience](#) to ignore the ellipsis.

A very good example of the use of ellipsis in filmmaking would be Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The movie directly proceeds to the modern technology (space station) from the most primitive tool of mankind (a bone). In film language, this kind of ellipsis is often called a match cut. It is bridged by the symbolic [comparison](#) between the two things.

Importance of Ellipsis in Avoiding Superfluity

The greatest of the artists over the years have tried to prove time after time their passion for getting things right. The process of writing and revision can be painstaking. A great piece of writing is not generally created overnight. It requires close observation and a keen eye that points out what should stay and what should go into the bin. A piece of writing cannot achieve that level of intensity without such exertion.

What is its significance in the actual composition? This question has been deemed very important, and many writers have answered it by underlining the importance of avoiding superfluity. Each and every part of a narrative has to fulfill a purpose or it's all for naught. As Aristotle writes about the action of [tragedy](#):

“The structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole” (*Poetics* 8).

Sir Philip Sidney’s concern is slightly different from what has been stated above, but he still emphasizes that every component bears significance, as he said, “one word cannot be lost but the whole work fails” (*An Apology for Poetry*, 122). This idea is not just limited to classical narratives and poems. The idea of functionality, referring to the notion that every part is important, and what is not important is not necessary, assembles economic and organic principles. It is founded on the concept that there is no waste in nature. The relevance of economy does not become any less important if we move from looking at the inherent structure, to studying the meaning of the narrative as a representation of the ideas and [perspective](#) of the author.