Non Sequitur

Definition of Non Sequitur

Non sequitur is a literary device that includes statements, sayings, and conclusions that do not follow the fundamental principles of logic and reason. They are frequently used in theater and comedies to create comedic effect.

In fact, non sequitur is a Latin phrase that means "it doesn't follow." Here, *non* means "not," and *sequitur* means "to follow." It takes place when a difference is created between the principle idea and the conclusion, which finally leads to a [fallacy](). In conversation, non sequitur is something that is said, which seems quite absurd – to the point of confusion due to lack of proper meanings. It is sometimes taken as postulation, which means the statement might not be true. For instance:

> Maria drives a car. She must be a wealthy person.
> David eats broccoli. David should love to eat meat.

The sentences do not follow a proper sequence in non sequitur, and words do not give the same meaning as readers suppose them to do.

Types of Non Sequitur

One can find non sequitur examples in everyday speech and in different fields of life, such as in the practice of law where non sequitur in arguments is regularly used. It can be classified into following six [categories]():

> Non sequitur in everyday speech: "Business is business, and a cup of tea is a cup of tea."
> Fallacy of the undistributed middle: "All humans have bones. Crocodiles have bones. Therefore, crocodiles are humans."
> Affirming the consequent: "If Charles is right, then Diana is right. As Diana is right, therefore, Charles is right."
> Denying the [antecedent](): "If I am Indian, then I am Asian. I am not Indian. Therefore, I am not Asian."

Affirming a disjunct: "Adam is right or Eve is right. Adam is right, therefore Eve is not right."
Denying a conjunct: "It is not that both Horse and Cow is true. Cow is not true. Therefore, Horse is true."

Examples of Non Sequitur in Literature

The best examples of non sequitur can be observed in the Theatre of the Absurd.

Example #1: *Waiting for Godot* (By Samuel Beckett)

VLADIMIR: "Consult his family…"
ESTRAGON: (anxious) "And we?"
ESTRAGON: "And why would he shout?"
VLADIMIR: "At his horse. Silence."
ESTRAGON: (violently) "I'm hungry!"
VLADIMIR: "Do you want a carrot…"
VLADIMIR: "I might have some turnips…"
VLADIMIR: "Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot…"
ESTRAGON: (Chewing) "I asked you a question."
VLADIMIR: "Ah."
ESTRAGON: "Did you reply?"
VLADIMIR: "How's the carrot?"
ESTRAGON: "It's a carrot."

Here we can clearly see the use of non sequiturs, where Estragon persistently asks a question, but Vladimir does not bother to answer.

Example #2: *Bald Soprano* (By Eugene Ionesco)

Mrs. Smith:
"There, it's nine o' clock; we have drunk the soup, and eaten the fish and chips and the English salad … That's because we live in the suburbs of London and because our name is smith."

> Mr. Smith: (continues to read and clicks his tongue)
> "Potatoes are very good, fried in fat: the salad oil was not rancid
> … However, I prefer not to tell them that their oil is bad."
>
> Mr. Smith: (continues to read and clicks his tongue)
> "However, the oil from the grocer at the corner is till the best."
>
> Mr. Smith: (continues to read and clicks his tongue)

In this excerpt, we can notice the strong use of non sequitur, where Mrs. Smith is talking to Mr. Smith, and he does not respond at all as it is quite absurd.

Function of Non Sequitur

Non sequitur is produced inadvertently due to some confusion, and even sometimes deliberately to confound the audience, in order to point out the confusion existing in the situation or society at large. However, it is often used in order to change the subject of the conversation, and give a humorous touch by jumping to a conclusion abruptly, without following the fundamental principles of conversation.

Similarly, as a literary device it is used in the Theater of the Absurd, and in surreal absurdist comedies. In theater, there are characters that give one non sequitur after another and move away, to provide comedic effect. Since the audience cannot foresee what the next statement will be, they merely laugh at it.