

# Maxim

## Definition of Maxim

A literary device, maxim is a simple and memorable line, quote, or rule for taking action and leading a good life. Simply put, it is a thought with moralistic values that intends to motivate individuals. Maxim is, in fact, a type of saying, or a brief statement of a great thought about life, especially a sententious or aphoristic one such as, “He who hesitates is lost.” It helps in characterizing characters.

## Everyday Examples of Maxim

It's better to be safe than sorry.  
You're never too old to learn.  
Opposites attract.  
You can't teach an old dog new tricks.  
Nothing ventured, nothing gained.  
One man's meat is another man's poison.  
We promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears.  
It is easier to be wise for others than for ourselves.

## Examples of Maxim in Literature

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### Example #1: *Various Works* (By Francis Bacon)

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*Of Truth*

“A mixture of lie doth ever add pleasure.”

*Of Marriage and Single Life*

“He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune ...  
Unmarried men are best friends, best masters, best servants but  
not always best subjects.”

### *Of Friendship*

“For a crowd is not company and faces are but a gallery of  
pictures.”

Francis Bacon has been very famous for compact, aphoristic, and concise sayings as given above. All of these sayings have deep thought and ideas.

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### **Example #2: *Essay on Criticism* (By Alexander Pope)**

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“A fool might once himself alone expose,  
Now One in [Verse](#) makes many more in [Prose](#) ...  
A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring.”

These heroic couplets are rich with words of wisdom. Pope delineates very common faults of poets, and suggests that, despite harmful effects of negative criticism, literature needs it.

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### **Example #3: *Anna Karenina* (By Leo Tolstoy)**

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“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in  
its own way.”

These are the opening lines of Tolstoy’s novel, *Anna Karenina*. The idea behind this maxim is that families fail in many ways; however, they can be happy by avoiding negative possibilities and it’s their choice to do this.

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### **Example #4: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)**

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“Four legs good, two legs bad.”

“All Animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

These two phrases present a tool for propagating ideology in the novel, in how the elite class uses language against the lower class. It also connotes a totalitarian mindset and points toward the corruption on Animal Farm, because the pigs see themselves as privileged, under their totalitarian command, and working animals only exist to serve their leadership.

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#### **Example #5: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)**

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“Above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Polonius gives a life lesson to Laertes by using maxim. He teaches how to be true to himself and to others. The purpose of making this statement is for his own benefit, in order to sound intelligent to his son.

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#### **Example #6: *Romeo & Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)**

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“Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast ...”

The [speaker](#) suggests that it is wise to not be in hurry. Rather, one should look where he is going, otherwise he might fall flat.

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#### **Example #7: *Mending Wall* (By Robert Frost)**

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“He will not go behind his father’s saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well...  
Good fences make good neighbors.”

This statement carries a [moral](#) code that serves to characterize a

every spring by re-building the wall.

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### Example #8: *Maxims* (By La Rochefoucauld)

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“The world more often rewards the appearance of merit than merit itself.”

“It is a great ability to be able to conceal one’s ability.”

“We like to judge others, but we do not like to be judged ourselves.”

La Rochefoucauld has written many books on maxims and proverbs. These are some of the more popular maxims from his book.

### Function of Maxim

To qualify as a maxim, a statement must contain a truth that is revealed in a terse way. Writers, politicians, philosophers, artists, sportsmen, and individuals use such sentences in their respective fields. These maxims bring a pinch of wit, making statements more appealing to the [audience](#). It is also that these adages, proverbs, [clichés](#), and maxims are different types of aphoristic sayings that become relevant to many people and situations, turning into everyday sayings with the passage of time.