

Aphorism

Aphorism Definition

Aphorism is a statement of truth or opinion expressed in a concise and witty manner. The term is often applied to philosophical, [moral](#), and literary principles.

To qualify as an aphorism, it is necessary for a statement to contain a truth revealed in a terse manner. Aphoristic statements are quoted in writings, as well as in our daily speech. The fact that they contain a truth gives them a universal acceptance. Scores of philosophers, politicians, writers, artists, sportsmen, and other individuals are remembered for their famous aphoristic statements.

Aphorisms often come with a pinch of [humor](#), which makes them more appealing to the masses. Proverbs, maxims, adages, and [clichés](#) are different forms of aphoristic statements that gain prevalence from generation to generation and frequently appear in our day-to-day speech.

Common Aphorism Examples

Let us look at some common aphorism examples:

Youth is a blunder; Manhood a struggle; Old age regret. [Benjamin Disraeli]

Pride goeth before a fall. [[Proverb](#)]

The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones. [William Faulkner]

Life's [tragedy](#) is that we get old too soon and wise too late. [Benjamin Franklin]

Yesterday is but today's memory, and tomorrow is today's dream. [Khalil Gibran]

The simplest questions are the hardest to answer. [Northrop Frye]
...even a proverb is no proverb until your life has illustrated it. [John Keats]

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind. [Rudyard Kipling]

Examples of Aphorism in Literature

Many pieces of literature are appreciated for the aphorisms they contain, which are often cited by scholars as well as laymen. Below are some examples of aphorisms in literature:

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

Sir Francis Bacon excels in the aphoristic [style](#) of writing. Possibly, his sayings are the most quoted of all. Consider the following examples:

“Studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability.” (*Of Studies*)

“To use too many circumstances, ere one come to the matter, is wearisome, to use none at all, is Blunt.” (*Of [Discourse](#)*)

“Praise is the reflection of the virtue. But it is the reflection glass or body which giveth the reflection.” (*Of Praise*)

Example #2: *Various Works* (By William Shakespeare)

William Shakespeare does not fall behind any writer in the use of aphorisms in his plays. The use of abundant aphorisms testifies to his keen insight and judgment. Below are some examples:

“Having nothing, nothing can he lose.” (*Henry VI*)

“Life is a tale told by an idiot – full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” (*Macbeth*)

“Lord, what fools these mortals be!” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*)

Example #3: *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (By Harper Lee)

An example of aphorism can be seen in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, by Harper Lee. Atticus Finch tells her daughter:

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his [point of view](#) – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it ”

The above statement holds truth, as we cannot [claim](#) to judge a person unless we understand the way he views the world and its affairs.

Example #4: *The Writing on My Forehead* (By Nafisa Haji)

Nafisa Haji provides us an example of aphorism in her novel *The Writing on My Forehead*. Big Namina, a wise [character](#), says:

“If? There is no if. There is only what is. What was? What will be.”

We can perceive the truth in the above statement because it gives a message to always live in the moment. It tells us that it is useless to have regrets about the past, and we should move on with our lives for a better present and future.

Example #5: *Various Works* (By Alexander Pope)

Alexander Pope was a great aphorist of the 18th century. Following are some memorable quotes from his works:

“‘Tis education forms the common mind; just as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined.” (*Golden Treasury of the Familiar*)

“To err is human, to forgive divine.” (*An [Essay](#) on Criticism*)

“What Reason weaves, by Passion is undone.” (*Essay on Man and Other Poems*)

“Act well your part; there all the honour lies.” (*An Essay on Man*)

Function of Aphorism

As already mentioned in the above discussion, making use of aphorisms allows a writer to teach a philosophical or moral truth. The revealed truths prove relevant to human experiences of real life. Therefore, readers relate the piece of literature to real life, and become more fascinated and vigilant in their reading.

Moreover, as truths are universal, revealing general truths in literature adds to their universal commendation. Motivational speeches quote aphorisms from such sources to inspire [motivation](#) among individuals.

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