

Expletive

Definition of Expletive

Expletive is a grammatical construction that starts with words like *it*, *here*, and *there*. This rhetorical device usually interrupts normal speech and lays emphasis on certain words. It originates from the Latin word *explore*, which means “to fill.” It plays a syntactic role, but does not contribute to the meaning of a sentence or line. It is also known as empty words, such as in this sentence, “*There are* some guests waiting for you,” in which *there are* is an expletive phrase.

Common Use of Expletive

There are seven chairs around that dining table.

It is the director of a company, who maintains the discipline.

There's a time bomb hidden in the conference hall.

It is extreme bliss that has Samuel reaching for another cup of tea.

Examples of Expletive in Literature

Example #1: *Pride & Prejudice* (By Jane Austen)

“*It is* a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

See, the use of *it is* was not necessary at the beginning of the sentence, however, it emphasizes the overall impact of this sentence. You can see the expletive words in italics.

Example #2: *The Nightingale and the Rose* (By Oscar Wilde)

“‘*Here* indeed is the true lover,’ said the Nightingale. ‘What I sing of, he suffers – what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. *It is* more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.’”

Look in this excerpt where Oscar Wilde has used the expletive word *here*, and the phrase *it is* at the beginning of their respective sentences.

Example #3: *A Tale of Two Cities* (By Charles Dickens)

“*It was* the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness ... *There were* a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England ... *It was the* year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this.”

Dickens recurrently used expletive phrases, *it was*, and *there were*, in the introduction of his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Though these phrases have no [semantic](#) purpose to serve, they allow him to express the importance of the ideas, with emphasis on each one.

Example #4: *Jane Eyre* (By Charlotte Bronte)

“*There was* no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning ...

‘... *It is* well I drew the curtain,’ thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding-place.”

Again, in this example, look carefully at the italicized phrase, *there was*, at the opening of this extract. The use of this phrase draws the readers' attention, to the emphasis and absence of it on other words.

Example #5: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By S. T. Coleridge)

“*There* passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.”

In this case, Coleridge uses the expletive word *there*, to highlight the idea of weary time, and allows readers to focus on it, and the subject follows the verb, rather than preceding the verb.

Example #6: *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (By John Keats)

“*There are* four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span...”

Here, the use of the expletive phrase *there are*, makes readers notice an object—the spring season.

Function of Expletive

An expletive word acts as an operator that allows writers to manipulate their sentences in many ways. We see its usage in novels, poetry, [prose](#), journalism, advertisement, and many other forms of communication. Expletives also serve as filler words through which writers shift other words to different places for emphasis. Hence, they serve a purpose. However, if you use expletives recurrently in a text, they will weaken the quality of the writing. Another purpose in using this construction is to help writers express something in a different way than a straight and simple recitation would do.