

Prosthesis

Definition of Prosthesis

Prosthesis is a literary device that involves the addition of an extra sound or syllable to the beginning of a word, which helps in making it easier to pronounce. Since the meaning of this word is “to put before,” an additional syllable or sound is placed at the beginning of a word, which helps in highlighting it. It can be understood from the following example:

“Old fond eyes, **beweep** this cause again....” (*King Lear*, by William Shakespeare).

Here, Shakespeare adds **be-** (an extra syllable) at the beginning of the word **weep**, making it **beweep**.

Difference Between Aphaeresis, Apocope, and Prosthesis

Aphaeresis and apocope are opposites of prosthesis. In aphaeresis, an unaccented or accented syllable is removed from the front of a word to create a new phrase or term. Like, “the king hath cause to **plain**.” (*King Lear*, by William Shakespeare). Here, Shakespeare has deleted the initial syllable of the word “complain,” which is changed into the word “plain”; whereas, apocope is the removal of a letter or syllable at the end of a word. An example is in the following line: “when I **ope** my lips let no dog bar” (*The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare).

On the other hand, prosthesis is adding an additional letter or syllable to the front of a word. Like, “Touchstone: I remember, when I was in love I broke my sword upon a stone and bid him take that for coming **a-night** to Jane Smile.” (*As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare). In these lines, an extra letter “a” is added to word “night.”

Examples of Prosthesis in Literature

Example #1: *Tempest* (By William Shakespeare)

Prospero: “I have **bedimm’d** the noontide sun ...”

This extract is an example of prosthesis. Here, a word “bedimm’d” gives a poetic touch to a piece of [prose](#) by adding “be” at the front. This is among the prosthesis examples that turn an ordinary word into something unique, and give rhythmic effect to a text.

Example #2: *Sonnet 29* (By William Shakespeare)

“I all alone **beweep** my outcast state ...”

This is one of the more popular examples of prosthesis in literature, in which Shakespeare could have used the word “weep,” rather than “beweep.” However, he uses prosthesis because this expression matches the [meter](#), and creates a great poetic effect.

Example #3: *A Dream Within a Dream* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“Thus much let me **avow**—
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away ...”

In the excerpt, Poe adds a syllable at the beginning of the word “vow.” He added the letter “a” to make the literary piece more rhythmic.

Example #4: *A Lover’s Complaint* (By William Shakespeare)

“Tearing of papers, breaking rings **a-twain**,
Storming her world with sorrow’s wind and rain.”

Shakespeare widely used prosthesis in his works, such as in this extract, the letter “a” is included in the beginning of the word “twain” to put an emphasis on it.

Example #5: *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (By John Milton)

“Yet first to those **ychain'd** in sleep,
The wakefull trump of doom must thunder through the deep ...”

In this passage, Milton added an extra sound or letter to the word “chain'd,” transforming it into “ychain'd.” This gives the piece a heightened poetic and rhythmic effect.

Example #6: *A Dream* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“What though that light, thro' storm and night,
So trembled from **afar**—
What could there be more purely bright
In Truth's day-star?”

This is another good example of prosthesis in which Poe adds a syllable “a” to the word “far.” The purpose of this device is to give a perfect rhythmic effect to this extract, and highlight the importance of this particular word in a given [context](#).

Function of Prosthesis

The main function of this device is to create a poetic effect in a piece of writing, and to lay emphasis on a particular word. It is a rhetorical strategy of highlighting a point or idea in a text or speech. Since the altered word is employed with additional sound at its beginning, it draws focus, and the attention of readers, by slowing the pace of the text a bit. Frequently, it is used in prose for poetic and humorous effects, in poetry for rhythmic effect, and in everyday conversations and political speeches for emphasis.