

Asyndeton

Definition of Asyndeton

Asyndeton is derived from the Greek word *asyndeton*, which means “unconnected.” It is a stylistic device used in literature and poetry to intentionally eliminate conjunctions between the phrases, and in the sentence, yet maintain grammatical accuracy. This literary tool helps in reducing the indirect meaning of the phrase, and presents it in a concise form. It was first used in Greek and Latin literature.

Types of Asyndeton

Asyndeton examples may be classified into two types:

Used between words and phrases within a sentence

For example:

“Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, Shrunk to this little measure?”

(*Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 1, by William Shakespeare)

Used between sentences or clauses

For example:

“Without looking, without making a sound, without talking”

(*Oedipus at Colonus*, by Sophocles)

Difference Between Syndeton and Asyndeton

Syndeton and asyndeton are opposite to one another. Syndeton includes the addition of multiple conjunctions, such as in this example: “He eats **and** sleeps **and** drinks.” On the other hand, asyndeton is the elimination, or leaving out, of conjunctions, such as in this example: “He eats, sleeps, drinks.”

Each creates a completely different effect. Syndeton slows down the [rhythm](#) of speech, and makes it moderate, whereas asyndeton speeds up the rhythm of the speech.

Examples of Asyndeton in Literature

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

IAGO

“Call up her father.

Rouse him. Make after him, Poison his delight,

Proclaim him in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,

And, though he in a fertile climate dwell...”

In this excerpt, Shakespeare has eliminated conjunctions deliberately. There is a shortage of the conjunctions *and*, *for*, *or*, and *but*, which are required to join the sentences. Due to this, the words have been emphasized, and feelings of anger and jealousy are articulated explicitly.

Example #2: *The Scholar-Gipsy* (By Matthew Arnold)

“Go, shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes!

No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,

Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,

Nor the cropp’d herbage shoot another head...

Thou hast not lived, why should’st thou perish, so?

Thou hadst *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire;

Else wert thou long since numbered with the dead...”

This is a good example of asyndeton. The conjunctions are missing in the sentences, such as the second and sixth lines are not connected with adjoining words. However, it produces speed in the poem.

Example #3: *The Winter’s Tale* (By William Shakespeare)

“Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?

Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career

Of laughter with a sigh? (a note infallible
Of breaking honesty!) horsing foot on foot? “

In this excerpt, we can observe both types of asyndeton. The first type (between the words) such as “from” is removed between the words “leaning” and “cheek” and similarly the second type (between the sentences) with the sentences not being joined by conjunctions.

Example #4: *Rhetoric* (By Aristotle)

“This is the villain among you who deceived you, who cheated you, who meant to betray you completely...”

The word “and” is not featured in the given lines, which could have functioned as a conjunction here. Aristotle believed that asyndeton could be effective if used in the ending of the texts. Here he himself employed this device.

Example #5: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (By James Joyce)

“Consciousness of place came ebbing back to him slowly over a vast tract of time unlit, unfelt, unlived...”

Joyce has also used this device, omitting the conjunctions in order to give rhythm and pace to the text. Here, we can see the elimination of conjunctions, which could have joined the words unlit, unfelt, and unlived. This creates a frantic and hurried effect.

Function of Asyndeton

Asyndeton helps in speeding up the rhythm of words. Mostly this technique is employed in speech but can be used in written works too. It helps in attracting readers to collaborate with the writers, since it suggests that words, phrases, and sentences are incomplete, and the readers would have to do some work to deduce meanings. This version creates immediate impact, and the readers are attuned to what the author is trying to convey.

Asyndeton is often applied intentionally in order to give a unique emphasis to the text, thereby drawing the attention of readers towards a particular idea the author wants to convey.