

Prose Definition

Prose is a form of language that has no formal metrical structure. It applies a natural flow of speech, and ordinary grammatical structure rather than rhythmic structure, such as in the case of traditional poetry.

Normal every day speech is spoken in prose and most people think and write in prose form. Prose comprises of full grammatical sentences which consist of paragraphs and forgoes aesthetic appeal in favor of clear, straightforward language. It can be said to be the most reflective of conversational speech. Some works of prose do have versification and a blend of the two formats that is called prose poetry.

Example of a Poetry Verse

Read this from “**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**” written by **Robert Frost**.

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”

Prose Form

“The woods look lovely against the setting darkness and as I gaze into the mysterious depths of the forest, I feel like lingering here longer. However, I have pending appointments to keep and much distance to cover before I settle in for the night or else I will be late for all of them.”

The above paragraph is conveying a similar message but it is conveyed in ordinary language, without a formal metrical structure to bind it.

Some Common Types of Prose

- 1. Nonfictional Prose:** A literary work that is mainly based on fact although it may contain fictional elements in certain cases. Examples are biographies and essays.
- 2. Fictional Prose:** A literary work that is wholly or partly imagined or theoretical. Examples are novels.
- 3. Heroic Prose:** A literary work that may be written down or recited and employs many of the formulaic expressions found in oral tradition. Examples are legends and tales.
- 4. Prose Poetry:** A literary work which exhibits poetic quality using emotional effects and heightened imagery but are written in prose instead of verse.

Prose Examples in Popular Literature

Prose in Novels

This is usually written in the form of a narrative and may be entirely a figment of the author's imagination.

Example #1

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” **1984** – George Orwell

Example #2

“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.” *David Copperfield* – Charles Dickens

Example #3

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” *Anna Karenina* – Leo Tolstoy

These examples of prose have been taken from novels where writers have employed their imaginations. They are examples of fictional prose.

Prose in Speeches

Prose used in speeches often expresses thoughts and ideas of the speaker.

Example #1

“You can see that there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow (of death) again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires.” – Nelson Mandela

Example #2

“The poor are very great people. They can teach us so many beautiful things.” – Mother Teresa

Example #3

“As for the marriage laws, they are due for a sweeping reform, and an excellent beginning would be to wipe the existing ones off the books.” – Shirley Chisholm

These prose examples have been taken from speeches where prose is often crispy and persuasive and suits the occasion to convey a specific message.

Prose in Plays

Prose written in plays aims to be dramatic and eventful.

Example #1

“You can be young without money, but you can’t be old without it.” – **“Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”** – Tennessee Williams

Example #2

“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players. ” – **As You Like It** – Shakespeare

It is often in conversational mode and is delivered by a character. However, its style stays the same throughout the play according to the personality of the character.

Functions of Prose

While there have been many critical debates over the correct and valid construction of prose, the reason for its adoption can be attributed to its loosely defined structure which most writers feel comfortable using when expressing, or conveying their ideas and thoughts. It is the standard style of writing used for most spoken dialogues, fictional as well as topical and factual writing and discoursed. It is also the common language used in newspapers, magazines, literature, encyclopaedias, broadcasting, philosophy, law, history, the sciences and many other forms of communication.