

Realism

In literature, realism is representing the world as it actually appears. Therefore, it "has been a significant element in almost every school of writing" ("Realism" 421). But the realist school of art is much more complicated than simply describing what is plausible.

In general, realism...

- explores the possibility of multiple truths within a society and/or the possibility that truth is relative for individuals within a society
- represents those truths based on possible outcomes experienced by members of that society
- evaluates those outcomes through the representation of that which is common, average, or ordinary in middle-class life

Typically (but not always), the realist...

- focuses on the present, rather than the historical or speculative
- reproduces life through a one-to-one correspondence between life and art
- is aware of the possible impact of his or her work on an audience
- avoids symmetry and plot to reflect the lack of symmetry or plot in everyday life
- considers ethical issues of central importance, and therefore presents the ethical struggles of his or her characters through an emphasis on characterization
- depicts the misfortunes of the middle-class, rather than tragic or catastrophic circumstances
- adopts a comic or satiric tone, rather than one that is serious or somber
- values the individual, pragmatism, and democracy

Adapted from "Realism." [A Handbook to Literature](#). Ed. William Harmon. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, 2003.

Not to be confused with the philosophical definition of realism or with common usage definitions of the adjective realistic.
