

Define Contrived

Defining Contrived: Unmasking Artificiality in Language, Art, and Life

We encounter "contrived" situations, dialogue, and even emotions regularly, often without explicitly recognizing them. This word, carrying a subtle yet powerful negative connotation, describes something artificial, forced, or unnatural. But what precisely constitutes "contrived"? Understanding this requires delving into its nuances, examining its use across various contexts, and recognizing its impact on communication and perception. This article aims to provide a comprehensive definition and exploration of "contrived," equipping readers with the tools to identify and analyze its presence in their own lives and the world around them.

1. The Core Meaning: Artificiality and Lack of Spontaneity

At its heart, "contrived" signifies something lacking in genuineness or authenticity. It implies a deliberate attempt to create a particular effect, often to an excessive or unnatural degree. This artificiality stems from a lack of spontaneity; it feels manufactured rather than organically arising. Think of a meticulously planned birthday surprise that feels overly staged and lacks the warmth of a genuine expression of affection – that's contrived. The essence is the process of creation, which overshadows the natural outcome. The focus is on the how rather than the what.

2. Contrived in Literature and Film: Plotting and Dialogue

In creative writing and filmmaking, "contrived" frequently describes plot devices, character motivations, or dialogue that feels forced or unrealistic. A classic example is a Deus ex Machina, where an improbable event unexpectedly resolves a seemingly unsolvable conflict. While sometimes used effectively for comedic

effect, it often indicates lazy storytelling, sacrificing believability for convenient resolution. Consider a thriller where the protagonist miraculously escapes a seemingly inescapable trap, only to find a conveniently placed escape route – this feels contrived. Similarly, dialogue that feels unnatural or overly dramatic, filled with exposition instead of natural conversation, can be described as contrived. The characters don't act but perform, pushing the narrative forward rather than organically participating in it.

3. Contrived in Art and Design: Form Over Substance?

In the arts, "contrived" can critique works where the technical skill or aesthetic elements overshadow the underlying meaning or emotional impact. A painting might be technically brilliant, with perfect brushstrokes and composition, but if it lacks emotional depth or originality, it can be labelled contrived. The artist's focus on the technique rather than the message results in a work that feels artificial and lacks soul. Similarly, a design might be visually striking but impractical or uncomfortable; the form triumphs over the function, resulting in a contrived outcome.

4. Contrived in Everyday Life: Relationships and Behavior

The concept of "contrived" extends beyond artistic domains. We can observe contrived behavior in social interactions. A forced laugh, an overly effusive compliment, or a carefully constructed persona can all be considered contrived. These actions feel inauthentic because they lack genuine emotion or spontaneity. Similarly, relationships built on superficiality or based solely on calculated self-interest can be described as contrived. The lack of genuine connection renders the relationship artificial and ultimately unsustainable.

5. Recognizing and Avoiding Contrivance: Striving for Authenticity

Identifying contrivance requires careful observation and critical thinking. It's about recognizing the gap between the intended effect and the actual impact. In writing, revising for natural dialogue and believable plot points is crucial. In art, reflecting on the core message and emotional resonance is essential. In daily life, practicing authenticity and genuine self-expression helps avoid contrived behavior. This involves embracing spontaneity, focusing on genuine connection, and avoiding overly calculated actions.

Conclusion

The term "contrived" highlights the crucial difference between genuine expression and artificial imitation. It's a warning sign of a lack of authenticity, highlighting the importance of naturalness, spontaneity, and genuine emotional connection in all aspects of life, from artistic endeavors to interpersonal relationships. By understanding its nuances, we can better appreciate authenticity and strive for genuine expression in our own creations and interactions.

FAQs:

1. Is everything planned inherently contrived? No. Careful planning doesn't automatically equal contrivance. The difference lies in whether the planning feels forced or natural. A well-planned event can feel organic and spontaneous if the planning respects the natural flow of events. 2. How can I avoid writing contrived dialogue? Listen to real conversations. Avoid overly formal language or exposition dumps. Focus on creating believable characters with distinct voices and motivations. Let the dialogue arise naturally from the characters' interactions and personalities. 3. Can a contrived piece of art still be considered "good"? This is subjective. While a technically skilled but emotionally empty work might be admired for its technical brilliance, it often lacks the deeper impact of a more authentic piece. 4. How can I tell if a relationship is contrived? Look for a lack of genuine emotional connection, superficiality, and an emphasis on outward appearances over substance. Are the interactions driven by self-interest rather than mutual respect and affection? 5. Is there ever a positive use for "contrived"? While predominantly negative, "contrived" can sometimes be used ironically or playfully to highlight the artificiality of something. For instance, describing a highly stylized and intentionally theatrical performance as "delightfully contrived" acknowledges its artificiality while appreciating its artistic merit.

The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film John C. Lyden
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