

Victorian Novel vs Modernist Novel: Key Differences

	Victorian Novel	Modernist Novel
Timeline	Mid-19th century to early 20th century (1837–1901, Queen Victoria’s reign)	Early 20th century (1900s–1940s, peak of Modernism)
Form and Structure	Linear, structured narratives with clear beginnings, middles, and ends	Fragmented, non-linear narratives often with ambiguity and uncertainty
Narrative Style	Detailed, descriptive prose; omniscient narrators	Experimental language, stream-of-consciousness, and unreliable narrators
Themes	Social class, morality, industrialization, family, and domestic life	Alienation, existentialism, psychology, identity crisis, or inner conflicts
Characterization	Characters often represent moral or social ideals; clear distinctions between “good” and “bad”	Characters are complex, ambiguous, and psychologically intricate
Worldview	Optimistic about progress, morality, and the ability of society to improve	Pessimistic or sceptical, questioning truth, morality, and societal norms
Representation of Reality	Stable, objective reality, realist approach with attempts to depict society as it is	Subjective reality, with focus on internal states and perception, a flux of change
Use of Symbolism	Symbols are present but secondary to plot and character development	Heavily symbolic, with multiple layers of meaning in objects, settings, and actions
Societal Critique	Critiques society through direct depictions of social issues like poverty, inequality, and gender roles	Critiques societal and cultural norms indirectly, through abstraction and alienation
Influence of Science and Philosophy	Influenced by moral philosophy, traditional Christianity, and early science	Influenced by Freudian psychology, existential philosophy, and quantum physics
Relation to Tradition	Builds on Romantic and earlier realist traditions	Breaks away from tradition, embracing innovation and experimentation
Purpose of Literature	To instruct and entertain, often with a moral or social message	To question, provoke, and explore new forms of expression
Examples of Works	Charles Dickens’ <i>Great Expectations</i> , Charlotte Brontë’s <i>Jane Eyre</i>	James Joyce’s <i>Ulysses</i> , Virginia Woolf’s <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>