

## Analyzing DICTION

**Diction** is simply the **words** the writer chooses to convey a particular meaning.

When analyzing diction, look for **specific words** or short phrases that seem stronger than the others (ex. Bragg's use of *slingshot* instead of *travel*). Diction is NEVER the entire sentence!

Also, look for a **pattern** (or similarity) in the words the writer chooses (ex. Do the words imply sadness, happiness, etc?). This pattern helps to create a particular kind of diction.

This pattern can also include **repetition** of the same words or phrases. Repeating the same word or phrase helps the reader emphasize a point, feeling, etc.

Effective diction is shaped by words that are clear, concrete, and exact. Good writers avoid words like *pretty*, *nice*, and *bad* because they are not specific enough. Instead, they rely on words that invoke a specific effect in order to bring the reader into the event being described.

**Examples:**

A coat isn't *torn*; it is *tattered*.

The US Army does not *want* revenge; it is *thirsting* for revenge.

A door does not *shut*; it *thuds*.

Diction depends on **subject**, **purpose**, **occasion**, and **audience**.

The **subject** often determines how specific or sophisticated the diction needs to be. For example, articles on computers are filled with a specialized language: e-mail, e-shopping, web, interface. Many topics generated special vocabularies to convey meaning.

The writer's **purpose** – whether to persuade, entertain, inform – partly determines diction. Words chosen to impart a particular effect on the reader reflect the writer's purpose. For example, if an author's purpose is to inform, the reader should expect straightforward diction. On the other hand, if the author's purpose is to entertain, the readers will likely encounter words used in ironic, playful, or unexpected ways.

Diction also depends on **occasion**. Formal diction is reserved for scholarly writing and serious texts. Informal diction is often used in narrative essays and newspaper editorials. Colloquial diction and slang are typically used to capture the language of a particular time frame or culture.

Finally, the type of diction a writer uses depends on the **audience** (readers, listeners). An author who uses sophisticated diction knows he is writing for an intelligent audience. An author who uses more informal diction knows he is writing for an audience of varied intelligence.

When you are **writing an essay** in which you are analyzing the diction of the writer:

Avoid saying: "The writer used diction..." – since this is obvious (diction IS the words on the page; without them, the page would be blank ☺).

Instead, say: “The writer creates a \_\_\_\_\_ diction through the use of...” OR “The language of the text is \_\_\_\_\_.”

Below are just a few words that you may use to **describe the type of diction** used by the writer. You may want to add words to this list or circle the ones you use frequently.

abstract  
academic  
ambiguous  
biting  
bombastic  
brusque  
cacophonous  
casual  
caustic  
concrete  
colloquial  
colorful  
common  
connotative  
cultured  
crisp  
curt  
denotative  
detached  
divisive  
emotional  
esoteric  
euphemistic  
euphonious  
everyday  
exact  
fanciful  
flowery  
figurative  
folksy  
formal  
grandiose  
idiomatic  
inflammatory  
inflated  
informal  
insincere  
jargon

learned  
loaded  
lyrical  
melodious  
monosyllabic  
nostalgic  
obscene  
obscure  
offensive  
ordinary  
ornate  
passionate  
patriotic  
pedantic  
picturesque  
plain  
poetic  
political  
polysyllabic  
precise  
pretentious  
provincial  
romantic  
scholarly  
sentimental  
shocking  
sincere  
slang  
subdued  
symbolic  
tame  
technical  
trite  
unifying  
uppity  
vague  
vulgar

literal

## Analyzing SYNTAX

**Syntax** refers to the way words are arranged within sentences.

### Schemes

One aspect of syntax is **schemes**. Most English sentences follow a subject-verb-object pattern (ex. I went to the store.) Deviating from this pattern can serve to add emphasize to the author's ideas. [See the **scheme** section of your Style handout for different ways authors can change the pattern of their sentences.]

### Sentence Length

Another aspect of syntax is **sentence length**. Good writers will use a variety for emphasis.

- **Short sentences** – imply straightforward
- **Long sentences** – imply descriptive, detailed

### Sentence Type

A third aspect of syntax is sentence type. Again, good writers use a variety.

- **Simple**: subject-verb (I went to the store.)
- **Compound**: 2 independent clauses joined by a conjunction (I went to the store, and I bought candy.)
- **Complex**: independent clause and dependent clause (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend.)
- **Compound-complex**: 2 independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses (While traveling to the store, I saw my friend, and she gave me money for candy.)
  
- **Declarative**: statement (I went to the store.)
- **Exclamatory**: strong feeling (What a wonderful candy store!)
- **Interrogative**: question (Is this a store?)
- **Imperative**: command (Go to the store.)

### Punctuation

A final aspect of syntax is punctuation. Yes, good writers use a variety here too.

- **Semicolon(;)** gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence. Writers use this to reinforce parallel ideas and show how both ideas are equally important
- **Colon(:)** directs the reader's attention to the words that follow. Writers use this to show the reader that the information after the colon is important.
- **Dash (-)** marks a sudden change in thought or tone or sets off a brief summary

## Analyzing TONE

**Tone** is the writer's attitude or feeling about the subject of his text.

It is a special kind of rhetorical strategy because **tone is created by the writer's use of all of the other rhetorical strategies.**

- Diction & Tropes
- Syntax & Schemes
- Details & Lack of Details

When discussing an author's tone, you must be careful to **choose the right word**. Below is a small list of tone words (there are hundreds). Use them in your essays to describe the tone of the piece but only if you are sure you know the word's meaning (not sure – look it up in a dictionary).

When **writing your essay**, avoid saying: "The writer uses tone" since ALL writers use a tone of some kind. Instead, say: "The writer creates a \_\_\_\_\_ tone..."

Angry	sad	sentimental	cloying	bitter
Sharp	cold	fanciful	dramatic	audacious
Upset	urgent	complimentary	provocative	benevolent
Silly	joking	condescending	didactic	tired
Boring	poignant	sympathetic	proud	frivolous
Afraid	detached	contemptuous	giddy	irreverent
Happy	confused	apologetic	pitiful	seductive
Hollow	childish	humorous	restrained	sweet
Joyful	peaceful	horrific	somber	objective
Allusive	mocking	sarcastic	candid	nostalgic
Vexed	vibrant	zealous	dreamy	shocking
Sarcastic	patriotic	serious	mocking	satiric
Motivational	tactful	respectful	humorous	

## **ETHOS / LOGOS / PATHOS**

<b>To Appeal to LOGOS (logic, reasoning)</b>	<b>To Develop or Appeal to ETHOS (character, ethics)</b>	<b>To Appeal to PATHOS (emotion)</b>
the argument itself; the reasoning the author uses; logical evidence	how an author builds credibility & trustworthiness	words or passages an author uses to activate emotions
<b>Types of LOGOS Appeals</b>	<b>Ways to Develop ETHOS</b>	<b>Types of PATHOS Appeals</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theories / scientific facts</li> <li>• Factual data &amp; statistics</li> <li>• Citations from experts &amp; authorities</li> <li>• Indicated meanings or reasons (because...)</li> <li>• Literal or historical analogies</li> <li>• Definitions</li> <li>• Quotations</li> <li>• Informed opinions</li> <li>• Examples (real life examples)</li> <li>• Personal anecdotes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author's profession / background</li> <li>• Factual data &amp; statistics</li> <li>• Citations from experts &amp; authorities</li> <li>• Author's publication</li> <li>• Appearing sincere, fair minded, knowledgeable</li> <li>• Morally / ethically likeable</li> <li>• Appropriate language for audience and subject</li> <li>• Appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>• Correct grammar</li> <li>• Professional format</li> <li>• Conceding to opposition where appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotionally loaded language</li> <li>• Emotionally loaded statistics</li> <li>• Vivid descriptions</li> <li>• Emotional examples</li> <li>• Anecdotes, testimonies, or narratives about emotional experiences or events</li> <li>• Figurative language</li> <li>• Emotional tone (humorous, sarcastic, ominous, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Effect on <u>Audience</u></b>	<b>Effect on <u>Audience</u></b>	<b>Effect on <u>Audience</u></b>
Evokes a cognitive, rational response Readers get a sense of, "Oh, that makes sense" or "Hmm, that really doesn't prove anything."	Helps reader to see the author as reliable, trustworthy, competent, and credible. The reader might respect the author or his/her views.	Evokes an emotional response Persuasion by emotion (usually evoking fear, sympathy, empathy, anger)

**Hint: Often more than one appeal is taking place at the same time. (For example, while an author may be revealing rational arguments based on statistics, those statistics may also produce an emotional reaction.)**

## **SYNTAX**

**SYNTAX:** The way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses and sentences. Students will need to be able to analyze how syntax produces effects. They should first try to classify the kind of sentences used, and then try to determine how the author's choices amplify meaning, in other words why they work well for the author's purpose.

[E.g. A series of long sentences followed by a brief sentence places emphasis on the ideas presented in the brief sentence. How are those ideas central to the meaning of the text? A series of short, simple sentences or phrases can produce a feeling of speed or chopiness, which may suit the author's purpose. Or long, meandering sentences can slow the movement.]

**As you read, look for appearances of the following syntax elements; then discuss what they do to amplify meaning of the content.**

**Repetition:** duplication, either exact or approximate, of any sentence elements.

Effect: links and emphasizes ideas or creates a sense of rhythm

**Parallelism:** involves structural similarity. May involve, but not limited to, repetition of a grammatical element. ("It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...")

Effects: numerous possible---attract the reader's attention, set up a comparison or contrast, add emphasis, provide a musical rhythm

**Balanced Sentence:** construction in which both halves of the sentence are about the same length and importance ("Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures." Samuel Johnson; also the example above by Dickens)

Effect: emphasis, rhythm

**Sentence Length:** the length of a sentence has a strong impact on how it's read, playing with the rhythm and sound of the ideas within the sentence or sentences.

**-Long sentences** – Force the reader to combine many thoughts into one sentence, stretching their capacity to understand the tangible and abstract elements of the sentence.

*(Example = "Feeling like an ethereal angel chided by its master and no longer bound by its spiritual guardianship, I silently glided back to my home across the impossibly dismal corridors of the neighborhood's alleyways. Having no particular reason to arrive at my destination in any hurry, or at all, I faintly tumbled over the grass and hills and desolately awkward streets, dejectedly lumbering after an immortal, gloating dream whose author had forgotten it the moment he awoke.")*

**-Short sentences** – typically accomplish the opposite of long sentences. A short sentence can stand out when it is unique from the sentences around it. It indicates the author wants to isolate the idea within that sentence.

**Paragraph Length:** like sentences, the length of paragraphs can also make a unique impression that is relevant to its text.

**-Long paragraphs** – like long sentences, are meant to incorporate a long string of interrelated ideas. Possibly the author attempts to "overwhelm" the reader with a flood of information. The length can also indicate a particularly long or lazy moment in a story.

**-Short paragraphs** – like short sentences, the ideas stand out. It is typically uncommon to see a short paragraph consisting of only one or two sentences, so the author likely wants to call attention to the ideas there.

**Lists:** Lists offer a “string” of related ideas, usually indicating a sense of rhythm or sound to the items within the list. Lists sometimes are incorporated with REPETITION.

**-Words strung together** – Look for lists of nouns, verbs, adjectives, names, places, or just about anything else to be strung together in sentences, separated by commas. These often work to create a sense of rhythm, provide detailed descriptions, and often impress or overwhelm readers.

*(Example = Everything about Tiffany was amazing: her hair, her eyes, her ears, her lips, her hands, her face, her shoulders, her kneecaps, and even her feet were all immaculate.)*

**-Phrases strung together** – Very similar to words strung together, only this time with similar groups of words.

*(Example = They tackled my legs, tickled my stomach, pinched my cheeks, punched my chest, and laughed at my face the whole time. Gosh, I love my kids!)*

**-Sentences strung together** – Like words and phrases, sentences can be strung together as well to create various effects. Usually strings of sentences go along with the long or short sentences techniques so that there is a sense of rhythm and certain degree of flow.

**Stop and Go/Interruptions:** This is really a variation of previous techniques, playing with the reader’s sense of timing and rhythm. Here, the author may switch between long and short or fast and slow sentences, focusing on contrast and interruption. They may even intentionally add punctuation or phrases that interrupt the flow.

*(Example = “I...never know that...never knew that my mother...was...that she was...the killer!” or “My sister never shares her toys and always keeps them for herself, even though I beg her and sometimes even wrestle with her, she never gives them to me. She’s a stink.)*

**Isolated Words:** For emphasis at certain points of the sentence, certain words or phrases may be separated from the rest of the sentence.

*(Example = Trembling, I slowly began backing away from the bully.” or “I sighed as I wished that, someday, my dreams would come true.)*

**Sentence Fragments and Runons:** You’ve been taught all those rules of grammar, but have you ever noticed that authors break those rules? It’s not that they’re idiots; it’s that they’re trying to do something specific with language, rhythm, and structure at these points.