HOW TO WRITE: AP Rhetorical Analysis Paragraphs and Essays

Things you must know in order to accurately analyze a text:

1. SOAPS
2. Rhetorical Strategies
   a. Appeals (ethos, logos, pathos)
   b. Style (diction, syntax, details, imagery, tone, etc.)
3. Why did the author choose these strategies for the particular audience, occasion, and/or purpose?
   a. This is the analysis part! Without this, you are merely summarizing the text.
   b. Think about these questions:
      i. HOW do the rhetorical strategies help the author achieve his/her purpose?
      ii. WHY does the author chose those strategies for that particular audience and for that particular occasion?

Once you’ve identified the information above, it’s time to begin putting your thoughts and ideas into a format that proves you have accurately analyzed the text. There are many ways to write an effective rhetorical analysis essay. Below is one way that is a good, simple format to help you get started. You may find as you become more comfortable with analysis that you want to deviate from this format. That’s fine as long as you are still focusing on numbers 1-3 from above.

Introduction
The introductory paragraph to an analysis essay is usually brief. However, it must contain some essential information.

Put SOAPS in your introduction and follow this format:

FORMAT:
1. Speaker, Occasion, and Subject
   (Writer’s credentials), (writer’s first and last name), in his/her (type of text), (title of text), (strong verb – see list at end of this handout) (writer’s subject).

   Well-known essayist and writer, Joan Didion, in her essay, The Santa Ana, describes the dramatic mood altering effects of the Santa Ana winds on human behavior.

2. Purpose
   (Writer’s last name)’s purpose is to (what the writer does in the text).

   Didion’s purpose is to impress upon readers the idea that the winds themselves change the way people act and react.

3. Audience
   He/she adopts a[n] (adjective describing the attitude/feeling conveyed by the writer) tone in order to (verb phrase describing what the writer wants readers to do/think) in his/her (intended audience).

   She creates a dramatic tone in order to convey to her readers the idea that the winds are sinister and their effects inescapable.

EXAMPLE:
Novelist, Amy Tan, in her narrative essay, “Fish Cheeks,” recounts an embarrassing Christmas Eve dinner when she was 14 years old. Tan’s purpose is to convey the idea that, at fourteen, she wasn’t able to recognize the love her mother had for her or the sacrifices she made. She adopts a sentimental tone in order to appeal to similar feelings and experiences in her adult readers.

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**Body**

This is the analysis part! This is where you include a detailed explanation of strategies used by the writer.

When writing an analysis, it is crucial that you work *chronologically* through the text. This means that you start at the beginning of the text and work your way through it by discussing what the writer is saying and the effectiveness of the strategies he/she is using at the beginning, middle, and end of the text.

Sometimes this means that you will discuss each *paragraph* (one at a time), and sometimes this means that you will divide the text into *sections* and discuss the beginning, middle, and end of the text. Whether you discuss each paragraph or each section depends on the length and organization of the text itself.

To help you move chronologically through the text, there are *transition words* you can use. A few of them are listed below:

- Begins
- Shifts to
- opens
- juxtaposes
- closes
- ends
- contrasts
- moves to

**Every analysis paragraph MUST:**

- Identify the part of the text you are analyzing by using *transition words* and *strong verbs* to explain what is being said.
- Identify the *strongest rhetorical strategies* used in that particular section. This includes incorporating *specific text examples* (exact words from the text – see last page of this handout for proper format) into your own words. Do NOT try to discuss every strategy the writer uses; pick the strongest!
- Clearly and specifically explain how the rhetorical strategies are used to help the writer achieve his purpose and reach his audience.
- The above items must be woven together seamlessly into one sophisticated paragraph of the body of your analysis essay. A sample format is below:

**FORMAT and EXAMPLE** [from Pres. Reagan’s speech after the space shuttle *Challenger* explosion in the 1980s]:

1. The first sentence identifies which section of the text you are discussing and the main idea of that section.

\[(Writer’s last name) (transition word) his/her (type of text) by (strong verb) that (main idea of this section of the text).\]

Reagan begins his tribute to the *Challenger* astronauts by acknowledging that the shuttle accident has appropriately postponed his planned State of the Union address and by expressing the depth of his and his wife’s personal grief.

2. The second sentence conveys the writer’s support for the main idea by identifying and providing a specific example for one rhetorical strategy used by the writer. [This sentence is repeated if you want to discuss more than one rhetorical strategy.]

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He appeals to the mournful emotions of the audience by admitting that he and Nancy are “pained to the core” (3), that today is rightfully a “day for mourning and remembering” (2-3), and that the accident is “truly a national loss” (4).

3. The third sentence explains how the rhetorical strategies you discussed in the previous sentences help the writer achieve his purpose by using an *in order to* statement.

He joins in this time of mourning *in order to* unify the nation and humbly admit that “we share this pain with all of the people of our country” (4).

4. The fourth sentence identifies the effect of the writer’s use of these rhetorical strategies on the audience.

This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the Nation that their grief is both understandable and proper.

**Put it all together and this is what one paragraph of the body of a rhetorical analysis essay might look like:**
Reagan begins his tribute to the *Challenger* astronauts by acknowledging that the shuttle accident has appropriately postponed his planned State of the Union address and by expressing the depth of his and his wife’s personal grief. He appeals to the mournful emotions of the audience by admitting that he and Nancy are “pained to the core” (3), that today is rightfully a “day for mourning and remembering” (2-3), and that the accident is “truly a national loss” (4). He joins in this time of mourning *in order to* unify the nation and humbly admit that “we share this pain with all of the people of our country” (4). This outpouring of emotion from the president conveys a calming tone that reassures the Nation that their grief is both understandable and proper.

**Conclusion**
The conclusion is probably the easiest part. Be brief. In one-two sentences, simply remind your reader of the things you said in the introduction.
Strong vs. Weak Verbs

To help you move away from summary and toward ANALYSIS, you need to begin to incorporate strong verbs into your writing when discussing the writer’s rhetorical choices. Below is a list of verbs that are considered weak because they imply summary and a list of verbs that are considered strong because they imply analysis. Strive to use the stronger verbs in your essays to help push yourself away from summary and toward analysis: “The writer flatters…” NOT “The writer says…”

**WEAK VERBS (Summary)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>says</th>
<th>relates</th>
<th>goes on to say</th>
<th>tells</th>
<th>this quote shows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>explains</td>
<td>states</td>
<td>shows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRONG VERBS (Analysis)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>implies</th>
<th>trivializes</th>
<th>flatters</th>
<th>qualifies</th>
<th>processes</th>
<th>describes</th>
<th>suggests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>denigrates</td>
<td>lionizes</td>
<td>dismisses</td>
<td>analyzes</td>
<td>contrasts</td>
<td>emphasizes</td>
<td>demonizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praises</td>
<td>supports</td>
<td>enumerates</td>
<td>argues</td>
<td>defines</td>
<td>ridicules</td>
<td>minimizes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admonishes</td>
<td>expounds</td>
<td>warns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Powerful and meaningful verbs to use in your analyses:**

**Alternatives to “show”**

- Acknowledge
- Address
- Analyze
- Apply
- Argue
- Assert
- Augment
- Broaden
- Calculate
- Capitalize
- Characterize
- Claim
- Clarify
- Compare
- Complicate
- Confine
- Connect
- Consider
- Construct
- Contradict
- Correct
- Create
- Convince
- Critique
- Declare
- Deduce
- Defend
- Demonstrate
- Deny
- Describe
- Determine
- Differentiate
- Disagree
- Discard
- Discover

**Optimize**

- Represent
- Organize
- Outline
- Retrieve
- Persist
- Revise
- Point out
- Separate
- Possess
- Shape
- Predict
- Signify
- Probe
- Solve
- Produce
- Specify
- Promote
- Structure
- Propose
- Suggest
- Prove
- Summarize
- Provide
- Support
- Qualify
- Sustain
- Quantify
- Tailor
- Question
- Realize
- Terminate
- Recommend
- Testify
- Reconstruct
- Theorize
- Redefine
- Translate
- Reduce
- Undermine
- Referee
- Understand
- Reference
- Unify
- Refine
- Utilize
- Reflect
- Validate
- Refute
- Vary
- Regard
- View
- Reject
- Vindicate
- Yield
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>abstract</th>
<th>curt</th>
<th>inflammatory</th>
<th>passionate</th>
<th>subdued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>denotative</td>
<td>inflated</td>
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<td>detached</td>
<td>informal</td>
<td>pedantic</td>
<td>tame</td>
</tr>
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<td>divisive</td>
<td>insincere</td>
<td>picturesque</td>
<td>technical</td>
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<tr>
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<td>emotional</td>
<td>jargon</td>
<td>plain</td>
<td>trite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brusque</td>
<td>esoteric</td>
<td>learned</td>
<td>poetical</td>
<td>unifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cacophonous</td>
<td>euphemistic</td>
<td>literal</td>
<td>political</td>
<td>uppity</td>
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<tr>
<td>casual</td>
<td>euphonious</td>
<td>loaded</td>
<td>polysyllabic</td>
<td>vulgar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| caustic | everyday | lyrical | precise | others:
| colloquial | exact | melodious | pretentious |
| colorful | fanciful | monosyllabic | provincial |
| common | figurative | nostalgic | romantic |
| concrete | flowery | obscene | scholarly |
| connotative | folksy | offensive | sentimental |
| conversational | formal | obscure | shocking |
| crisp | grandiose | ordinary | sincere |
| cultured | idiomatic | ornate | slang |

**OTHERS:**
- abstract diction
- concrete diction
- elevated/formal
- low/informal
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.

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

SYNTAX WORDS
balanced sentence
complex sentence
compound sentence
compound-complex sentence
declarative
exclamatory
imperative
interrogative
interruption

inversion
juxtaposition
loose/cumulative sentence
parallel structure
periodic sentence
repetition
rhetorical question
simple sentence

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## 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 list of tone words. 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…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>abhorrence</th>
<th>blunt</th>
<th>contemptuous</th>
<th>effective</th>
<th>forthright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>bold</td>
<td>contented</td>
<td>effusive</td>
<td>fresh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>bookish</td>
<td>contrived</td>
<td>elated</td>
<td>frivolous</td>
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<td>boring</td>
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<td>elated</td>
<td>funny</td>
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<td>critical</td>
<td>elegant</td>
<td>furious</td>
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<tr>
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<td>critical</td>
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<td>giddy</td>
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<td>derisive</td>
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<td>despairing</td>
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<td>compelling</td>
<td>dismayed</td>
<td>fascinated</td>
<td>hollow</td>
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<td>complementary</td>
<td>disparaging</td>
<td>fearful</td>
<td>honest</td>
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<td>complicated</td>
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<td>forced</td>
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<td>concise</td>
<td>dreamy</td>
<td>forceful</td>
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<td>condescending</td>
<td>dull</td>
<td>forgettable</td>
<td>idiosyncratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bemused</td>
<td>confident</td>
<td>earnest</td>
<td>forgiving</td>
<td>imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>economical</td>
<td>formal</td>
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<td>confused</td>
<td>edgy</td>
<td>formulaic</td>
<td>impassioned</td>
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</table>
impulsive, incisive, indelible, incredulous, indignant, inflammatory, informal, insightful, insisting, insolent, instructive, instructive, insubstantial, intellectual, interesting, intimate, inviting, ironic, irrelevant, irreverent, irritated, joking, jovial, joyful, judgmental, labored, lackadaisical, lackluster, laudatory, learned, light, light-hearted, lofty, loving, lucid, lush, lyrical, matter of fact, maudlin, meditative, melancholic, melancholy, melodramatic, memorable, mock-heroic, mocking, mock-serious, moralizing, morbid, mordant, mournful, narrow, nostalgic, objective, obvious, offbeat, offensive, opinionated, optimistic, ordinary, ostentatious, outraged, outrageous, overdosed, passionate, patronizing, peaceful, pedantic, pedestrian, pejorative, pensive, persuasive, pessimistic, pessimistic, piquant, pitiful, plaintive, plaintive, playful, poetic, pompous, preachy, predictable, pretentious, profound, prosaic, proud, provocative, provocative, purple, puzzled, querulous, questioning, rambling, reader-friendly, real, realistic, reflective, refreshing, regretful, reminiscent, repetitious, repressed, reproachful, resigned, resigned, respectful, restrained, revealing, reverent, rhapsodic, sad, sanctimonious, sarcastic, sardonic, satiric, satisfied, scornful, seductive, self-indulgent, sensuous, sentimental, sentimental, sentimental, serene, serious, severe, shallow, sharp, shocked, silly, simple, simplistic, sincere, sober, solemn, somber, sophomoric, sophomoric, spiced, spiteful, stiff, strident, striking, strong, substantive, subtle, superficial, surprise, surprising, suspicious, suspicious, sweet, sweet, sympathetic, talky, taunting, thorough, thoughtful, thoughtful, thought-provoking, threatening, tired, tiresome, tolerant, trite, troubled, unconvincing, underdone, uneven, unsympathetic, upset, urbane, urgent, vexed, vibrant, wary, whimsical, wise, wistful, witty, wordy, wry, zealous,

MOOD WORDS: Sometimes the TONE will set a MOOD.
bleak, dark, delirious, dismal, eerie, elegiac, haunting, lonely, ominous, peaceful, playful, quizzical, reproachful, satiric, serene, soothing, suspenseful, tense, threatening, uplifting, whimsical

CHARACTER WORDS: Sometimes you need to describe the SPEAKER.
absorbed, aggressive, aloof, ambitious, amorous, anxious, apathetic, argumentative, arrogant, bitter, bored, carefree, careless, cautious, churlish, compassionate, conceited, conniving, curious, deceitful, demure, detached, devious, devoted, dishonest, easygoing, envious, exacting, frantic, fretful, gregarious, intelligent, irritable, loquacious, manipulative, mendacious, naive, nervous, noble, outgoing, patient, picky, scrupulous, self-involved, sincere, sloppy, spontaneous, suspicious, talkative, testy, uninvolved, unpredictable, vindictive, welcoming, wise, worried

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