

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.

- 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 _____."

Words to describe DICTION

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	colloquial
colorful	common	concrete	connotative	conversational
crisp	cultured	curt	denotative	detached
divisive	elevated	emotional	esoteric	euphemistic
euphonious	everyday	exact	fanciful	figurative
flowery	folksy	formal	grandiose	idiomatic
inflammatory	inflated	informal	insincere	jargon
learned	literal	loaded	lyrical	melodious
monosyllabic	nostalgic	obscene	obscure	offensive
ordinary	ornate	passionate	patriotic	pedantic
picturesque	plain	poetic	political	precise
pretentious	provincial	romantic	scholarly	sentimental
shocking	sincere	slang	subdued	symbolic
tame	technical	trite	unifying	uppity
vague	vulgar			