

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

#### **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.

## **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	opens	closes	contrasts
Shifts to	juxtaposes	ends	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.]

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.

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**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)**

says	relates	goes on to say	tells
this quote shows	explains	states	shows

**STRONG VERBS (Analysis)**

implies	trivializes	flatters	qualifies	processes	describes
suggests	denigrates	lionizes	dismisses	analyzes	questions
compares	vilifies	praises	supports	enumerates	contrasts
emphasizes	demonizes	establishes	admonishes	expounds	argues
defines	ridicules	minimizes	narrates	lists	warns

**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  
Discuss  
Dismiss  
Distinguish  
Duplicate  
Elaborate  
Emphasize  
Employ  
Enable

Engage  
Enhance  
Establish  
Evaluate  
Exacerbate  
Examine  
Exclude  
Exhibit  
Expand  
Explain  
Exploit  
Express  
Extend  
Facilitate  
Feature  
Forecast  
Formulate  
Fracture  
Generalize  
Group  
Guide  
Hamper  
Hypothesize  
Identify  
Illuminate  
Illustrate  
Impair  
Implement  
Implicate  
Imply  
Improve  
Include  
Incorporate  
Indicate  
Induce  
Initiate  
Inquire  
Instigate  
Integrate  
Interpret  
Intervene  
Invert  
Isolate  
Justify  
Locate  
Loosen

Maintain  
Manifest  
Manipulate  
Measure  
Merge  
Minimize  
Modify  
Monitor  
Necessitate  
Negate  
Nullify  
Obscure  
Observe  
Obtain  
Offer  
Omit  
Optimize  
Organize  
Outline  
Overstate  
Persist  
Point out  
Possess  
Predict  
Present  
Probe  
Produce  
Promote  
Propose  
Prove  
Provide  
Qualify  
Quantify  
Question  
Realize  
Recommend  
Reconstruct  
Redefine  
Reduce  
Refer  
Reference  
Refine  
Reflect  
Refute

Regard  
Reject  
Relate  
Rely  
Remove  
Repair  
Report  
Represent  
Resolve  
Retrieve  
Reveal  
Revise  
Separate  
Shape  
Signify  
Simulate  
Solve  
Specify  
Structure  
Suggest  
Summarize  
Support  
Suspend  
Sustain  
Tailor  
Terminate  
Testify  
Theorize  
Translate  
Undermine  
Understand  
Unify  
Utilize  
Validate  
Vary  
View  
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.

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

## 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	