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).

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

<h1 align="center">Analyzing DICTION</h1>

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 t**one 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	