

AP Language Rhetorical Analysis Essay Example

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.

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.]

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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)

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	Discuss	Implement	Optimize	Represent
Address	Dismiss	Implicate	Organize	Resolve
Analyze	Distinguish	Imply	Outline	Retrieve
Apply	Duplicate	Improve	Overstate	Reveal
Argue	Elaborate	Include	Persist	Revise
Assert	Emphasize	Incorporate	Point out	Separate
Augment	Employ	Indicate	Possess	Shape
Broaden	Enable	Induce	Predict	Signify
Calculate	Engage	Initiate	Present	Simulate
Capitalize	Enhance	Inquire	Probe	Solve
Characterize	Establish	Instigate	Produce	Specify
Claim	Evaluate	Integrate	Promote	Structure
Clarify	Exacerbate	Interpret	Propose	Suggest
Compare	Examine	Intervene	Prove	Summarize
Complicate	Exclude	Invert	Provide	Support
Confine	Exhibit	Isolate	Qualify	Suspend
Connect	Expand	Justify	Quantify	Sustain
Consider	Explain	Locate	Question	Tailor
Construct	Exploit	Loosen	Realize	Terminate
Contradict	Express	Maintain	Recommend	Testify
Correct	Extend	Manifest	Reconstruct	Theorize
Create	Facilitate	Manipulate	Redefine	Translate
Convince	Feature	Measure	Reduce	Undermine
Critique	Forecast	Merge	Refer	Understand
Declare	Formulate	Minimize	Reference	Unify
Deduce	Fracture	Modify	Refine	Utilize
Defend	Generalize	Monitor	Reflect	Validate
Demonstrate	Group	Necessitate	Refute	Vary
Deny	Guide	Negate	Regard	View
Describe	Hamper	Nullify	Reject	Vindicate
Determine	Hypothesize	Obscure	Relate	Yield
Differentiate	Identify	Observe	Rely	
Disagree	Illuminate	Obtain	Remove	
Discard	Illustrate	Offer	Repair	
Discover	Impair	Omit	Report	

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

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

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..."

abhorrence	blunt	contemptuous	effective	forthright
abrasive	bold	contented	effusive	fresh
abrupt	bookish	contrived	elated	frivolous
abstract	boring	corny	elated	funny
accusatory	bucolic	critical	elegant	furious
admiring	callous	critical	elegiac	giddy
admonitory	calm	curious	elitist	gimmicky
affected	candid	cynical	eloquent	glib
afraid	candid	dark	embittered	gloomy
ambivalent	cautious	delightful	endearing	graceful
amused	cautious	dense	energetic	grandiose
amusing	cerebral	derisive	enlightening	grim
analytical	ceremonial	despairing	entertaining	gritty
angry	cheery	desperate	enthusiastic	grudging
annoyed	childish	detached	erudite	gutsy
anxious	childish	detached	exaggerating	hackneyed
apathetic	cliché	didactic	exuberant	happy
apologetic	clinical	disappointed	facetious	harsh
apprehensive	cold	disbelieving	factual	haughty
approving	comic	disdainful	factual	haunting
argumentative	compassionate	disgusted	fanciful	hollow
artful	compelling	dismayed	fascinated	hollow
audacious	complementary	disparaging	fearful	honest
austere	complicated	distinctive	flippant	hopeful
authentic	complimentary	disturbed	fluent	hopeless
authoritative	concerned	down-to-earth	focused	horrific
awe	conciliatory	dramatic	forced	humorous
awkward	concise	dreamy	forceful	hyperbolic
baffled	condemning	dreary	foreboding	idealistic
bantering	condescending	dull	forgettable	idiosyncratic
bemused	confident	earnest	forgiving	imaginative
benevolent	confiding	economical	formal	impartial
bitter	confused	edgy	formulaic	impassioned

impulsive	lucid	pensive	restrained	subtle
incisive	lush	persuasive	revealing	superficial
incredulous	lyrical	pessimistic	reverent	surprise
indifferent	matter of fact	pessimistic	rhapsodic	surprising
indignant	maudlin	piquant	sad	suspicious
indulgent	meditative	pitiful	sanctimonious	sweet
inflammatory	melancholic	pitiful	sarcastic	sweet
informal	melancholy	plaintive	sardonic	sympathetic
informative	melodramatic	plaintive	satiric	talky
insightful	memorable	playful	satisfied	taunting
insisting	mock-heroic	poetic	scornful	thorough
insolent	mocking	pompous	seductive	thoughtful
instructive	mock-serious	preachy	self-indulgent	thought-
instructive	moralizing	predictable	sensuous	provoking
insubstantial	morbid	pretentious	sentimental	threatening
intellectual	mordant	profound	sentimental	tired
interesting	mournful	prosaic	serene	tiresome
intimate	narrow	proud	serious	tolerant
inviting	nostalgic	provocative	severe	trite
irate	objective	provocative	shallow	troubled
ironic	obvious	purple	sharp	unconvincing
irrelevant	offbeat	puzzled	shocked	underdone
irreverent	offensive	querulous	silly	uneven
irritated	opinionated	questioning	simple	unsympathetic
joking	optimistic	rambling	simplistic	upset
jovial	ordinary	reader-friendly	sincere	urbane
joyful	ostentatious	realistic	sober	urgent
judgmental	outraged	reflective	solemn	vexed
labored	outrageous	refreshing	somber	vibrant
lackadaisical	overdone	regretful	sophomoric	wary
lackluster	paradoxical	reminiscent	spicy	whimsical
laudatory	passionate	repetitive	spiteful	wise
learned	patronizing	repressed	stiff	wistful
light	peaceful	reproachful	strident	witty
lighthearted	pedantic	resigned	striking	wordy
lofty	pedestrian	resigned	strong	wry
loving	pejorative	respectful	substantive	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, naïve, nervous, noble, outgoing, patient, picky, scrupulous, self-involved, sincere, sloppy, spontaneous, suspicious, talkative, testy, uninvolved, unpredictable, vindictive, welcoming, wise, worried