**APE Literature Ms. Feldmann**

**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 as 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 generate 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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 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 literal learned

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 pretention

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