

D.I.D.L.S. A mnemonic for literary analysis

Diction: the denotative and connotative meanings of words What words does the author

choose? Consider his/her word choice compared to another. Why did the author choose that particular word? What are the connotations of that word choice?

- different words for the same thing often suggest different attitudes (happy vs. content vs. ecstatic)
- denotative vs. connotative (dead vs. passed away)
- concrete vs. abstract (able to perceive with 5 senses, tangible, vs. an idea or concept that exists in one's mind, intangible)
- monosyllabic vs. polysyllabic (Cats eat meat; felines are carnivorous animals.)
- simple vs. ornate
- positive vs. negative (slender vs. skinny, determined vs. stubborn)
- colloquial / informal / formal / technical
- cacophonous vs. euphonious (e.g., harsh sounding, raucous, croak **or** pleasant sounding, languid, murmur)

Iimages: Vivid appeals to understanding through the five senses – sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. (What images does the author use? What does he/she focus on in a sensory way? How do the kinds of images the author puts in or leaves out reflect his/her style? Are they vibrant? Prominent? Plain? (NOTE: Images differ from detail in the degree to which they appeal to the senses. A farmer and a real estate developer would use different imagery to describe the same piece of land. Imagery would differ in a romantic vs. realistic description of the countryside.)

Details: Facts that are included or those that are omitted. What details does the author choose to include? What do they imply? What does the author choose to exclude? What are the connotations of the choice of details? (NOTE: Details are facts or fact-lets. They differ from images in that they don't have a strong sensory appeal. Hard Copy vs. CNN vs. NPR)

Language: The overall use of language such as formal, clinical, informal, slang. What is the overall impression of the language the author uses? Does it reflect education? A particular profession? Intelligence? Is it plain? Ornate? Simple? Clear? Figurative? Poetic? Make sure you don't skip this step. Ambassador will speak differently than a cop or a kid.

Syntax: How the author's use of syntax, or sentence structure, affects the reader.

What are the sentences like? Are they simple with one or two clauses? Do they have multiple phrases? Are they choppy? Flowing? Sinuous like a snake? Is there antithesis, chiasmus, parallel construction? What emotional impression do they leave? If we are talking about poetry, what is the meter? Is there a rhyme scheme? Long flowing sentences give us a different feeling than short choppy ones. If the narrator has awkward sentence structure, we might think he is uneducated or fearful. Sophisticated mature sentences might suggest artistic creativity.

So What?

DIDLS: The Key to TONE

DICTION:

- Laugh: guffaw, chuckle, titter, giggle, cackle, snicker, roar, chortle, guffaw, yuk
- Self-confident: proud, conceited, egotistical, stuck-up, haughty, smug, condescending
- House: home, hut, shack, mansion, cabin, home, residence, dwelling, crib, domicile
- Old: mature, experienced, antique, relic, senior, ancient, elderly, senescent, venerable
- Fat: obese, plump, corpulent, portly, porky, burly, husky, full-figured, chubby, zaftig

IMAGES: The use of vivid descriptions or figures of speech that appeal to sensory experiences helps to create the author's *tone*.

- My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. (restrained)
- An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king. (somber, candid)
- He clasps the crag with crooked hands. (dramatic)
- Love sets you going like a fat gold watch. (fanciful)
- Smiling, the boy fell dead. (shocking)

DETAILS: Details are most commonly the *facts* given by the author or speaker as support for the attitude or tone. The speaker's perspective shapes what details are given and which are not.

LANGUAGE: Like word choice, the language of a passage has control over tone. Consider language to be the entire body of words used in a text, not simply isolated bits of diction. For example, an invitation to a wedding might use formal language, while a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

- When I told Dad that I had goofed the exam, he blew his top. (slang)
- I had him on the ropes in the fourth and if one of my short rights had connected, he'd have gone down for the count. (jargon)
- A close examination and correlation of the most reliable current economic indexes justifies the conclusion that the next year will witness a continuation of the present, upward market trend. (turgid, pedantic)

SENTENCE STRUCTURE: How a sentence is constructed affects what the audience understands. Sentence structure affects *tone*.

- Parallel syntax (similarly styled phrases and sentences) creates interconnected emotions, feelings and ideas.
- Short sentences are punchy and intense. Long sentences are distancing, reflective and more abstract.
- Loose sentences point at the end. Periodic sentences point at the beginning, followed by modifiers and phrases.
- The inverted order of an interrogative sentence cues the reader to a question and creates tension between speaker and listener.
- Short sentences are often emphatic, passionate or flippant, whereas longer sentences suggest greater thought.

SHIFT IN TONE: Good authors are rarely monotone. A speaker's attitude can shift on a topic, or an author might have one attitude toward the audience and another toward the subject. The following are some clues to watch for shifts in tone:

- key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
- paragraph divisions
- changes in sentence length
- sharp contrasts in diction

TONE

Tone is defined as the writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and the audience. Understanding tone in prose and poetry can be challenging because the reader doesn't have voice inflection to obscure or to carry meaning. Thus, an appreciation of word choice, details, imagery, and language all contribute to the understanding of tone. To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning.

Angry	Sad	Sentimental	Afraid
Sharp	Cold	Fanciful	Detached
Upset	Urgent	Complimentary	Contemptuous
Silly	Joking	Condescending	Happy
Boring	Poignant	Sympathetic	Confused
Apologetic	Hollow	Childish	Humorous
Joyful	Peaceful	Horrific	Allusive
Mocking	Sarcastic	Sweet	Objective
Nostalgic	Vexed	Vibrant	Zealous
Tired	Frivolous	Irrelevant	Bitter
Audacious	Benevolent	Dreamy	Shocking
Seductive	Restrained	Somber	Candid
Proud	Giddy	Pitiful	Dramatic
Provocative	Didactic	Lugubrious	Sentimental

Students need to use dictionaries for definitions of the tone words listed above. Students need explicit dictionary meanings to establish subtle differences between tone words such as *emotional*, *sentimental*, and *lugubrious*, so that they can accurately comment on a work that appeals to the emotions, emphasizes emotion over reason, or becomes emotional to the point of being laughable. Keeping a list of precise tone words, and adding to it, sharpens students' articulation in stating tone.

Tone/Attitude Vocabulary

The nuances of these words are important!

Anger

accusatory
belligerent
bitter
disappointed
disgusted
furious
grouchy
incredulous
indignant
inflammatory
insulting
irritated
outraged
petulant
querulous
savage
sullen
threatening
wrathful

Happiness

amiable
amused
cheery
contented
ecstatic
elated
enthusiastic
exuberant
hopeful
jovial
joyful
jubilant
lighthearted
optimistic
positive
sanguine

Humor / Sarcasm (Satire)

belittling
caustic
comical
cynical
facetious
flippant
haughty
insulting
ironic
irreverent
malicious
mock-heroic
mocking
obsequious
ribald
ridiculing
sarcastic
scornful
taunting

Arrogance

authoritative
boastful
bold
condescending
contemptuous
critical
disdainful
haughty
insolent
judgmental
mordant
patronizing
pompous
pretentious
supercilious

Sadness / Fear

apprehensive
concerned
despairing
elegiac
foreboding
gloomy
hopeless
melancholy
morose
mournful
pessimistic
regretful
serious
sober
solemn
somber
tragic

Neutral

apathetic
authoritative
candid
cautionary
ceremonial
clinical
detached
didactic
distant
erudite
factual
formal
forthright
informative
instructive
matter-of-fact
objective
restrained

Tranquility

calm
hopeful
meditative
nostalgic
optimistic
peaceful
relaxed
reminiscent
sentimental
serene
soothing
spiritual
staid

Romance

affectionate
amorous
compassionate
erotic
fanciful
ideal
intimate
loving
lustful
lyrical
reflective
sensual
tender
whimsical

Logic

argumentative
didactic
doubtful
explanatory
informative
persuasive
rational
thoughtful

Attitude Words

1. accusatory - charging of wrongdoing
2. apathetic - indifferent due to lack of energy or concern
3. awe - solemn wonder
4. bitter - exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief
5. caustic - intense use of sarcasm; stinging; biting
6. callous - unfeeling; insensitive to feelings
7. choleric - hot-tempered; easily angered
8. condescension - a feeling of superiority
9. contemplative - thinking; reflecting on an issue
10. contemptuous - showing or feeling that something is worthless
11. conventional - lacking spontaneity, originality, and individuality
12. critical - finding fault
13. cynical - questioning of the basic sincerity and goodness of people
14. derision - ridicule; mocking
15. didactic - educational; instructional
16. disdainful - scornful
17. earnest - intense; a sincere state of mind
18. erudite - learned; polished; scholarly
19. fanciful - using the imagination
20. forthright - directly frank without hesitation
21. haughty - proud and vain to the point of arrogance
22. incredulous - expressive of extreme disbelief
23. indignant - marked by anger aroused by injustice
24. intimate - very familiar
25. jovial - happy
26. lyrical - expressive of a poet's feelings; song-like; full of images
27. matter-of-fact - accepting of conditions; unemotional
28. melancholy - gloomy or sad
29. mocking - treating with contempt or ridicule
30. morose - sullen; surly; despondent
31. malicious - purposely hurtful
32. objective - unbiased
33. obsequious - polite and obedient for hope of gain or favor
34. patronizing - air of condescension
35. pessimistic - seeing the worst side of things
36. quizzical - odd; eccentric; amusing
37. reflective - illustrating innermost thoughts or feelings
38. reverent - treating a subject with honor and respect
39. ribald - offensive in speech or gesture
40. sanguine - optimistic; cheerful
41. sarcastic - sneering; caustic
42. sardonic - scornfully and bitterly sarcastic
43. sincere - without deceit or pretense
44. solemn - deeply earnest
45. whimsical - fanciful; unusual

Terms to Describe Language

(different from tone, language describes the force or quality of the diction, images, details, etc.)

academic	flat	particular
allusive	folksy	pedantic
antiquated	formal	picturesque
archaic	grotesque	plain
artificial	hackneyed	poetic
bombastic	homely	pompous
bookish	homespun	practical
casual	idiomatic	precise
charming	imprecise	pretentious
clear	incisive	provincial
coarse	incongruous	quaint
colloquial	inflated	reasoned
commonplace	informal	refined
concrete	informative	relaxed
connotative	insipid	righteous
conventional	intellectual	rustic
conversational	ironic	satiric
convoluted	jargon	scholarly
crude	learned	sensuous
cultivated	literal	showy
cultured	lyrical	simple
deflated	manipulative	slang
denotative	mature	sophisticated
detached	melodious	specific
dialect	metaphorical	straightforward
didactic	moralistic	subjective
educated	mundane	suggestive
emotional	narrow	symbolic
erudite	objective	tasteless
esoteric	obscure	transparent
euphemistic	obtuse	trite
exact	orderly	unpolished
factual	ordinary	unsophisticated
fanciful	ostentatious	vague
fantastic	overblown	vernacular
figurative	overused	vulgar

Words to Use instead of “Says”

accentuates	demonstrates	illustrates	quotes
accepts	denigrates	imagines	rationalizes
achieves	depicts	impels	reasons
adds	describes	implies	recalls
adopts	details	includes	recites
advises	determines	indicates	recollects
advocates	develops	infers	records
affects	deviates	informs	recounts
affirms	differentiates	injects	refers
alleges	differs	inspires	reflects
alleviates	directs	intends	refutes
allows	disappoints	interprets	regales
alludes	discerns	interrupts	regards
analyzes	discovers	inundates	regrets
announces	discusses	justifies	rejects
approaches	dispels	lampoons	relates
argues	displays	lists	remarks
ascertains	disputes	maintains	reminds
asserts	disrupts	makes	represents
assesses	distinguishes	manages	repudiates
assumes	distorts	manipulates	results
attacks	downplays	masters	reveals
attempts	dramatizes	meanders	reverts
attributes	echoes	mentions	ridicules
avoids	elevates	minimizes	satirizes
bases	elicits	moralizes	scoffs
believes	elucidates	muses	sees
challenges	embodies	notes	selects
changes	emphasizes	objects	serves
characterizes	empowers	observes	solidifies
chooses	encounters	opposes	specifies
chronicles	enhances	organizes	speculates
claims	enriches	outlines	states
clarifies	enumerates	overstates	strives
comments	envisions	paints	suggests
compares	evokes	patronizes	summarizes
completes	excludes	performs	supplies
concerns	exemplifies	permits	supports
concludes	expands	persists	suppresses
condescends	experiences	personifies	sustains
conducts	explains	persuades	symbolizes
conforms	expresses	pervades	sympathizes
confronts	extends	ponders	thinks
considers	extrapolates	portrays	traces
constrains	fantasizes	postulates	transcends
constructs	focuses	predicts	transforms
contends	forces	prepares	understands
contests	foreshadows	presents	understates
conveys	functions	presumes	uses
corrects	generalizes	proclaims	vacillates
creates	guides	produces	values
debates	heightens	projects	verifies
declares	highlights	promotes	views
defends	hints	proposes	wants
defers	holds	provides	wishes
defies	honors	qualifies	wonders
defines	identifies	questions	writes