

Writer's Style and Literary Devices Guide

Big Ideas

How does it affect the meaning of the text? What is the author trying to accomplish, convey or achieve by using this? What is the impact of this choice?

Alliteration: repetition of consonant (non-vowel) sounds at the beginning of the words, used for emphasis and for musical (lyrical) quality. What is the author trying to accomplish by using them?

“Say to them,/ Say to the down-keepers, / The sun-slappers,/The self-soilers...” from “Speech to the Young” by Gwendolyn Brooks

Analogy: comparing two situations to explain one of them better. How do they affect the meaning of the text? What is the author trying to accomplish by using them?

The girl in “Checkouts” liked grocery shopping like some people like to drive on long, country roads.

Characterization: how an author develops a character through physical descriptions, motivations, reactions, changes, thoughts and emotions, traits, interaction with other characters and dialogue. Character motivation can guide the plot of the emotion, or character can reveal the attitude or theme. See how the author uses the various characters, both primary and secondary. What role are they playing?

Dialect: a form of language spoken in a particular place featuring unique pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

To speak to a group of people, someone from the southern United States might use “y’all” while someone from the North might say, “you’sse guys.”

Dialogue: conversation between two or more people as a feature in a book or movie. Authors might use dialogue to reveal character traits or point out themes.

Diction: choice of words the author uses: slang, colloquial (everyday), dialect, concrete, abstract, denotation (dictionary definitions like a science article), connotation (implied meanings), formal, informal. Think about what effect the author is trying to achieve through the use of a specific type of diction. What does the author’s word choice suggest about his attitude toward the subject?

Extended metaphor: takes the basic metaphor of comparing two things with a common link, but continues with a series of references throughout the text.

Figurative Language/ figures of speech: Expressions that are not literally true to create original descriptions—similes, metaphors, analogies, personification. How do they affect the meaning of the text? What is the author trying to accomplish by using them?

“The captain looked up to see a blanket of white coming down the river...It turned out to be a sea of white feathers...” *from Undaunted Courage, Stephen Ambrose*

Idiom: an expression whose meaning is different than the literal meaning. How do they affect the meaning of the text? What is the author trying to accomplish by using them?

Does the cat have your tongue?

Imagery/Sensory Details: words or phrases that help the reader see, hear, taste, feel or smell what an author or poet is describing. What sensory information do I find in the language: color, scents, sounds, tastes, or textures? What is the author trying to convey or achieve by using this imagery? Are these images part of a larger pattern or structure within the text(e.g.,does it connect to one of the major themes)?

“Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair. //It’s had tacks in it, /And splinters, /And boards torn up...” from “Mother to Son” Langston Hughes

Irony: a contrast between what happens and what was expected to happen. What is the author accomplishing with its use?

Juxtaposition: The author places a person, concept, place, idea or theme parallel to another. The purpose of juxtaposing two directly or indirectly related entities close together in literature is to highlight the contrast between the two and compare them.

Metaphor: a comparison between two things with a common link.

School is a prison, and I am incarcerated.

Mood: a feeling that the literary work gives the **reader**.

The mood of a horror novel would be scary.

Heritage/tradition/attitudes and beliefs how one’s background shapes his/her writing. Think about what role different languages, food, or culture plays in the story.

Hyperbole: the truth is exaggerated for comedic effect.

My dog rules my entire world and I am but his pooper scooper.

Literary Elements: the basics parts of the story: setting, characterization, plot, theme, point of view, tone/attitude.

- How does the author’s use of these different elements contribute to the text’s meaning?
- Do the different elements interact with or otherwise affect the meaning of the others? Do you notice any significant shifts in any of the elements at any point? If so, what changes, how, and why? What is the importance and meaning of this change? What words best describe the

different use of these elements? For example, how would you describe the point of view and the effect it has on the meaning of the text?

Organizational patterns of the text: how the author chooses to present the information: compare/contrast, ranking, description, chronology, narrative, cause-effect, classification. •

Which organizational pattern does the author use?

- Why does the author choose to use that particular organizational strategy?
- Are there places where the author blends or alternates between different organizational patterns? If so, what is the author trying to accomplish by mixing them in these ways?
- To what extent and in what ways do you think the author's organizational strategy is effective? Why?

Paradox: The term Paradox is from the Greek word "*paradoxon*" that means *contrary to expectations, existing belief or perceived opinion*. It is a statement that appears to be self-contradictory or silly but may include a latent truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement contrary to accepted traditional ideas. A paradox is often used to make a reader think over an idea in innovative way.

"What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young." – George Bernard Shaw

"I must be cruel to be kind." *Hamlet*, Shakespeare

Personification: giving a nonhuman object, a human quality.

My alarm clock kept yelling at me to get out of bed.

Point of View: the perspective the story is told. Think about the impact of the choice of point of view as you read or write. How does the point of view affect your responses to the characters? How is your response influenced by how much the narrator knows and how objective he or she is? First person narrators are not always trustworthy. It is up to you to determine what is the truth and what is not.

- **Third Person:** The narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know exactly how the characters feel. We learn about the characters through this outside voice.
- **First Person:** the narrator does participate in the action of the story. When reading stories in the first person, we need to realize that what the narrator is recounting might not be the objective truth. We should question the trustworthiness of the accounting.
- **Omniscient and Limited Omniscient** A narrator who knows everything about all the characters is all knowing, or omniscient.
- A narrator whose knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor, has a

limited omniscient point of view.

Pun: the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound. What is the author trying to accomplish by using them? *When a clock is hungry it goes back four seconds.*

Repetition: Repeating of lines, words or phrases for effect or emphasis.

“Rage, rage against the dying of the light.” “ I have a dream”

Simile: a comparison between two things with a common link using “like” or “as”.

Her voice was as shrill as a cat being forced to take a bath.

Symbolism: a person, place, object or action that stands for something beyond itself.

The scarlet letter symbolizes Hester’s sin and secret.

Syntax: the sentence structures and sentence patterns of a text. Authors make certain choices for different effects. Consider these:

- *Punctuation:* How does the author punctuate the sentence and to what extent does the punctuation affect the meaning?
- *Structure:* How are words and phrases arranged within the sentence? What is the author trying to accomplish through this arrangement?
- How would you characterize the author’s syntax in this text?
- *Changes:* Are there places where the syntax clearly changes? If so, where, how, and why?
- *Sentence length:* How many words are in the different sentences? Do you notice any pattern (e.g., a cluster of short sentences of a particular type)? What is the impact?

Theme: the message or universal truth that comes from the story, poem or novel. Universal themes can be found in all disciplines: relationships, conflict, patterns, order, systems, change, and/or structure.

Tone: the writer’s **attitude or approach** to the topic of the literary work. Think about how the author’s word choice creates a feeling for the character, subject matter, etc. Also consider formal vs. informal tone. Tone word examples: angry, serious, encouraging, anxious, critical, pressing, witty, humorous, dry, uplifting,

Voice: An author’s or narrator’s distinctive style or manner of expression, revealing his/her personality.