

# The D-I-D-L-S Approach

## DICTION

**The author's choice of words and their connotations** (See handout.)

What words appear to have been chosen specifically for their effects?

What effect do these words have on your mood as the reader?

What do they seem to indicate about the author's tone?

## IMAGERY

**The use of descriptions that appeal to sensory experience**

What images are especially vivid? To what sense do these appeal?

What effect do these images have on your mood as a reader?

What do they seem to indicate about the author's tone?

## DETAILS

**Facts included or those omitted**

What details has the author specifically included?

What details has the author apparently left out?

(NOTE: This is only for analysis. Do not write about these omitted details in an essay.)

What effect do these included and excluded details have on your mood as a reader?

What do these included and excluded details seem to indicate about the author's tone?

## LANGUAGE

**Characteristics of the body of words use  
(slang, jargon, scholarly language, etc.)**

How could the language be described?

How does the language affect your mood as a reader?

What does the language seem to indicate about the author's tone?

## SYNTAX

**The way the sentences are constructed** (See extended handout.)

Are the sentences simple, compound, declarative, varied, etc.?

How do these structures affect your mood as a reader?

What do these structures seem to indicate about the author's tone?

## Literary Analysis

**TONE:** Author's attitude toward the subject, toward himself, or toward the audience.

**DIDLS:** Diction, Imagery, Details, Language, and Syntax. Use *diction* to find tone. Use *imagery, details, language* and *syntax* to support tone.

**DICTION:** Adjectives, nouns, verbs, adverbs, negative words, positive words, synonyms, contrast.

Look at the words that jump out at you - Evaluate *only those words* to find tone

### Also look at:

Colloquial (Slang)

Old-Fashioned

Informal (Conversational)

Formal (Literary)

Connotative (Suggestive meaning)

Denotative (Exact meaning)

Concrete (Specific)

Abstract (General or Conceptual)

Euphonious (Pleasant Sounding)

Cacophonous (Harsh sounding)

Monosyllabic (One syllable)

Polysyllabic (More than one syllable)

Describe diction (choice of words) by considering the following:

1. Words can be *monosyllabic* (one syllable in length) or *polysyllabic* (more than one syllable in length). The higher the ratio of polysyllabic words, the more difficult the content.
2. Words can be mainly *colloquial* (slang), *informal* (conversational), *formal* (literary) or *old-fashioned*.
3. Words can be mainly *denotative* (containing an exact meaning, e.g., dress) or *connotative* (containing suggested meaning, e.g., gown)
4. Words can be *concrete* (specific) or *abstract* (general or conceptual).
5. Words can be *euphonious* (pleasant sounding, e.g., languid, murmur) or *cacophonous* (harsh sound, e.g., raucous, croak).

**IMAGERY:** Creates a vivid picture and appeals to the senses

Alliteration	repetition of consonant sounds at the start of a word
Assonance	repetition of vowel sounds in the middle of a word
Consonance	repetition of consonant sounds in the middle of a word
Onomatopoeia	writing sounds as words
Simile	a direct comparison of unlike things using like or as
Metaphor	a direct comparison of unlike things
Hyperbole	a deliberate exaggeration for effect
Understatement	represents something as less than it is
Personification	attributing human qualities to inhuman objects
Metonymy	word exchanged for another closely associated with it
Pun	play on words – Uses words with multiple meanings
Symbol	something that represents/stands for something else
Analogy	comparing two things that have at least one thing in common
Oxymoron	Use of words seemingly in contradiction to each other

The giggling girl gave gum.  
Moths cough and drop wings.  
The man has kin in Spain.  
The clock went tick tock.  
Her hair is like a rat's nest.  
The man's suit is a rainbow.  
I'd die for a piece of candy.  
A million dollars is okay.  
The teapot cried for water.  
Uncle Sam wants you!  
Shoes menders mend soles.  
the American Flag  
A similar thing happened...  
bittersweet chocolate

**DETAILS:** specifics the author includes about facts – his opinion

**LANGUAGE:** Words that describe the entire body of words in a text – not isolated bits of diction

Artificial	false	Literal	apparent, word for word
Bombastic	pompous, ostentatious	Moralistic	puritanical, righteous
Colloquial	vernacular	Obscure	unclear
Concrete	actual, specific, particular	Obtuse	dull-witted, undiscerning
Connotative	alludes to; suggestive	Ordinary	everyday, common
Cultured	cultivated, refined, finished	Pedantic	didactic, scholastic, bookish
Detached	cut-off, removed, separated	Plain	clear, obvious
Emotional	expressive of emotions	Poetic	lyric, melodious, romantic
Esoteric	understood by a chosen few	Precise	exact, accurate, decisive
Euphemistic	insincere, affected	Pretentious	pompous, gaudy, inflated
Exact	verbatim, precise	Provincial	rural, rustic, unpolished
Figurative	erving as illustration	Scholarly	intellectual, academic
Formal	academic, conventional	Sensuous	passionate, luscious
Grotesque	hideous, deformed	Simple	clear, intelligible
Homespun	folksy, homey, native, rustic	Slang	lingo, colloquialism
Idiomatic	Peculiar, vernacular	Symbolic	representative, metaphorical
Inspid	uninteresting, tame, dull	Trite	common, banal, stereotyped
Jargon	vocabulary for a profession	Informal	casual, relaxed, unofficial
Learned	educated, experienced	Vulgar	coarse, indecent, tasteless

Rhetorical Devices -- The use of language that creates a literary effect – enhance and support

Rhetorical Question	food for thought; create satire/sarcasm; pose dilemma
Euphemism	substituting a milder or less offensive sounding word(s)
Aphorism	universal commends, sayings, proverbs – convey major point
Repetition	also called refrain; repeated word, sentence or phrase
Restatement	main point said in another way
Irony	Either verbal or situational – good for revealing attitude
Allusion	refers to something universally known
Paradox	a statement that can be true and false at the same time

### **SYNTAX:**

Consider the following patterns and structures:

- Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?
- Why is the sentence length effective?
- What variety of sentence lengths are present?
- Sentence beginnings – Variety or Pattern?
- Arrangement of ideas in sentences
- Arrangement of ideas in paragraph – Pattern?

Construction of sentences to convey attitude

Declarative	assertive – A statement
Imperative	authoritative - Command
Interrogative	asks a question
Simple Sentence	one subject and one verb
Loose Sentence	details after the subject and verb – happening now
Periodic Sentence	details before the subject and verb – reflection on a past event
Juxtaposition	normally unassociated ideas, words or phrases placed next together
Parallelism	show equal ideas; for emphasis; for rhythm
Repetition	words, sounds, and ideas used more than once – rhythm/emphasis
Rhetorical Question	a question that expects no answer

Punctuation is included in syntax

- Ellipses: a trailing off; equally etc.; going off into a dreamlike state
- Dash: interruption of a thought; an interjection of a thought into another
- Semicolon: parallel ideas; equal ideas; a piling up of detail

- Colon: a list; a definition or explanation; a result
- Italics: for emphasis
- Capitalization: for emphasis
- Exclamation Point: for emphasis; for emotion

SHIFTS IN TONE: Attitude change about topic/Attitude about topic is different than the attitude toward subject

Key Words (but, nevertheless, however, although)  
Changes in the line length  
Paragraph Divisions  
Punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)  
Sharp contrasts in diction

### **SYNTAX** (SENTENCE STRUCTURE)

Describe the sentence structure by considering the following:

1. Examine the sentence length. Are the sentences *telegraphic* (shorter than 5 words in length), *short* (approximately 5 words in length), *medium* (approximately 18 words in length), or *long and involved* (30 or more words in length)? Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? What variety of lengths is present? Why is the sentence length effective?
2. Examine sentence beginnings. Is there a good variety or does a patterning emerge?
3. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. Are they set out in a special way for a purpose?
4. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a paragraph. Is there evidence of any pattern or structure?
5. Examine the sentence patterns. Some elements to consider are listed below:
  - a. A *declarative (assertive) sentence* makes a statement: e.g., The king is sick.
  - b. An *imperative sentence* gives a command: e.g., Stand up.
  - c. An *interrogative sentence* asks a question: e.g., Is the king sick?
  - d. An *exclamatory sentence* makes an exclamation: e.g., The king is dead!
  - e. A *simple sentence* contains one subject and one verb: e.g., The singer bowed to her adoring audience.
  - f. A *compound sentence* contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or) or by a semicolon: e.g., The singer bowed to the audience, but she sang no encores.
  - g. A *complex sentence* contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., You said that you would tell the truth.
  - h. A *compound-complex sentence* contains two or more principal clauses and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., The singer bowed while the audience applauded, but she sang no encores.
  - i. A *loose sentence* makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending: e.g., We reached Edmonton/that morning/after a turbulent flight/and some exciting experiences.
  - j. A *periodic sentence* makes sense only when the end of the sentence is reached: e.g., That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton.
  - k. In a *balanced sentence*, the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure, meaning, or length: e.g., He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.
  - l. *Natural order of a sentence* involves constructing a sentence so the subject comes before the predicate: e.g., Oranges grow in California.
  - m. *Inverted order of a sentence (sentence inversion)* involves constructing a sentence so that the predicate comes before the subject: e.g., In California grow oranges. This is a device in which normal sentence patterns are reverse to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect.
  - n. *Split order of a sentence* divides the predicate into two parts with the subject coming in the middle: e.g., In California oranges grow.
  - o. *Juxtaposition* is a poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another creating an effect of surprise and wit: e.g., "The apparition of these faces in the crowd:/ Petals on a wet, black bough" ("In a Station of the Metro" by Ezra Pound)
  - p. *Parallel structure (parallelism)* refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased: e.g., He was walking, running, and jumping for joy.
  - q. *Repetition* is a device in which words, sounds, and ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and create emphasis: e.g., "...government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" ("Address at Gettysburg" by Abraham Lincoln)
  - r. A *rhetorical question* is a question that expects no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point that is generally stronger than a direct statement: e.g., If Mr. Chambers is always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mr. Julien's arguments?