

**Style Analysis  
Diction Packet  
Week 2- Day 1**

1. The words diction, language, and figurative language are terms that you will use interchangeably when you analyze an author's style. These words all refer to the concept of an author's WORD CHOICE.

Word choice is probably the most powerful element of style for you to understand. If the directions in the prompt do not give you any specific terms to start your analysis, always begin with diction--You won't be wrong. Many words in our language have strong connotations, and authors learn to use them on purpose to elicit certain responses from the reader.

These 3 terms are also used when the areas to analyze include many metaphors, similes, and other forms of figurative language. Watch for these as some common forms of word choice.

2. The word DENOTATION means the literal, dictionary definition of a word.

Example: The words "plump" and "obese" both literally describe a person who is overweight. This is the dictionary definition of both words. It is the hard meaning of these 2 synonyms.

3. The word connotation means the implied or suggested meaning attached to a word, or the emotional "tag" that goes along with a word.

Example: The word "plump" has the connotation of being pleasantly fat, almost cutely overweight. Its connotation describes women more often than men. It is this extra "emotional" feeling that shows how we use the word.

The word "obese," often used by medical personnel, has a more technical denotation. It carries a less emotional, more scientific emotional tag. Both "plump" and "obese" have the same literal definition, but the connotations are different.

Connotation is important because it shows differences between synonyms and suggests specific ways in which we use a word. You must understand connotations of the words you read and write in order to analyze style well.

**Style Analysis  
Diction Packet  
Week 2**

4. Here is an example of a sentence with strong connotative diction:

The boy surveyed the class, congratulating himself for snatching the highest grade on the test.

Two words are important here: surveyed and snatching. They are the words with the strongest connotations.

5. Once you identify an author's diction, you must analyze it. This means that you write commentary about the word or phrase and the effect that the word or phrase had on you. Synonyms for commentary are analysis, interpretation, and explication.

You must discuss the connotation of the word or phrase to do a good job of diction analysis. You comment on the reaction you had to the word choice and what emotional response it brought out in you. Here is an example of diction analysis and commentary on the word surveyed:

Commentary #1: Conveys the idea of someone looking around as if he were a kink looking at slowly subjects.

Commentary #2: The boy sees himself on a kind of Mt. Olympus, sitting with other gods and looking down on lesser mortals.

This last point of commentary is especially good because the writer made an allusion to another bit of information—a reference to mythology.

## The Rattler

After sunset... I walked out into the desert...Light was thinning; the scrub's dry savory odors were sweet on the cooler air. In this, the first pleasant moment for a walk after long blazing hours, I thought I was the only thing abroad. Abruptly I stopped short.

The other lay rigid, as suddenly arrested, his body undulant; the head was not drawn back to strike, but it was merely turned a little to watch what I do. It was a rattlesnake and knew it. I mean that were a six-foot blacksnake thick as my wrist, capable of long-range attack and armed with powerful fangs, will flee at sight of man, the rattler felt no necessity of getting out of anybody's path. He held his ground in calm watchfulness; he was not even rattling yet, much less was he coiled; he was waiting for me to show my intentions.

My first instinct was to let him go his way and I would go mine, and with this he would have been well content. I have never killed an animal I was not obliged to kill; the sport in taking life is a satisfaction I can't feel. But I reflected that there were children, dogs, horses at a ranch, as well a men and women lightly shod; my duty, plainly, was to kill the snake. I went back to the ranch house, got a hoe, and returned.

The rattler had not moved; he lay there like a live wire. But he saw the hoe. Now indeed his tail twitched, the little tocsin sounded; he drew back his head and I raised my weapon. Quicker than I could strike, he shot into a dense bush and set up his rattling. He shook and shook his fair but furious signal, quite sportingly warning me that I had made an unprovoked attack, attempted to take his life, and if I persisted he would have no choice but to take mine if he could. I listened for a minute to this little song of death. It was not ugly, though it was ominous. It said that life was dear, and would be dearly sold. And I reached into the paper-bag bush with my hoe and, hacking about, soon dragged him out of it with his back broken.

He struck passionately once more at the hoe; but a moment later his neck was broken, and he was soon dead. Technically, that is; he was still twitching, and when I picked him up by the tail, some consequent jar, some mechanical reflex made his jaws gape and snap once more-proving that a dead snake may still bite. There was blood in his

mouth and poison dripping from his fangs; it all a nasty sight, pitiful now that it was done.

I did not cut off the rattles for a trophy; I let him drop into the close green guardianship of the paper-bag bush. Then for a moment I could see him as if I might have let him go, sinuous and self-respecting in departure over the twilit sands.

**Style Analysis**  
**Diction Packet**  
**Days 4-7**

“The Rattler”

Sample Introduction and Diction Paragraphs

The author’s techniques used in “The Rattler” convey not only a feeling of sadness and remorse but also a sense of the man’s acceptance of the snake’s impending death. A human being has confronted nature, and in order for him to survive, the snake must be killed. The reader feels sympathy for the man’s plight and a reluctant agreement with him for his decision.

The author’s diction heightens the power and force behind the snake as it responds to the man. “Arrested” at first, the snake becomes a “live wire” as he shakes his little “tocsin” at the man. Unmoving at first, the snake plays a waiting game as adversary meets adversary across an imaginary line drawn in the desert. Then a feeling of electricity jolts the reader, heart beating faster from the noise of the warning that, like battle stations aboard a ship, the snake knows its life has been “dearly sold,” but it remains “sinuous and self-respecting” in the man’s mind. The hiding place is an illusion, and a costly one. The reader admires the valiant behavior of the snake’s last moments and the dignity, which the man offers. All involved recognize the strength of both the man and the almost-human snake, but know that responsibility and duty to others make the killing necessary.

**Style Analysis**  
**Diction Practice**  
**Fredrick Douglass Passage**  
**Student Sample**

Fredrick Douglass' techniques used in the passage convey his elation toward his freedom yet his fear of capture and his inability of trust. After being tortured by his white owners, Douglass relishes his liberty, but he is constantly cowering in the shadows, knowing that the possibility of enslavement is always there.

The author's use of diction enables the reader to experience Douglass' plight in his new world and his feeling about a society created by unscrupulous and untrustworthy slave owners. "The wretchedness of slavery" had motivated his escape, but he ended up in a "den of hungry lions" which extinguished the "ardor of [his] enthusiasm." Viewing slavery first-hand-actually experiencing it for so long-Douglass had witnessed the evils and the corruptions associated with cotton plantations, physical abuse, and inhuman toil. As Daniel was thrown to the lions, so too was Douglass, but these were unrelenting, greedy lions whose very existence lessened the freedom he had just acquired. Douglass' knew that by "speaking to the wrong one," he could easily "[fall] into the hands of money-loving kidnappers" who lurked around every turn like "ferocious beasts of the forests [that] lie in wait for their prey." In fearing capture, the speaker put himself into his own personal slavery and did not allow him self to live. The white man took all the human instincts from him, and he lost the ability to trust even those closest to him. We finish the passage feeling Douglass' dilemma between the euphoria of freedom and the fear that confronted each day.

**Style Analysis**  
**Diction Practice**  
**Frederick Douglass**

Read the following passage carefully. Then write an introductory paragraph that identifies two different but complementary tones or attitudes in the piece. Then write a paragraph that analyzes the author's diction.

The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom, were perpetually before me. It was life and death with me. But I remained firm, and according to my solution, on the third day of September 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. How I did so- what means I adopted- what direction I traveled, and by what mode of conveyance- I must leave unexplained, for the reasons before mentioned.

I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free state. I have never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself. It has a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate. In writing to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival at New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind, however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all tortures of slavery. This in itself was enough to damp the ardor of my enthusiasm. But the loneliness overcame me. There I was in the midst of thousand, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren- children of a common father, and yet I dared to unfold to any of them my sad condition. I was afraid to speak to anyone for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnapers, whose business was lie in wait of the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey. The motto that I adopted when I started from slavery was this- "Trust no man!!" I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine him self in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land- a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slave-holders-whose inhabitants are legalized kidnapers-where he is every moment subjected of the terrible liability of being seized upon his fellow-men, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey!- I say, let him place himself in my situation-without home or friends-without money or credit-wanting shelter, and no one to give it-wanting bread, and no money to buy it,-and at the same time let him feel that he pursued by merciless men-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go, or where to stay- perfectly helpless as to the mans of defense and means of escape,-in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawing of hunger,-in the midst of houses, yet having no home,- among fellow men, yet feeling as if in the midst of wild beasts, whose greediness to swallow up the trembling and half-famished fugitive is only equaled by that with which

the monsters of the deep swallow up the helpless fish upon which they subsist,-I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation,-the situation in which I placed,- then and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.

Fredrick Douglass  
NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE  
OF FREDRICK DOUGLASS

**Style Analysis**  
**Diction Practice**  
**Days4-7**

Write an introductory paragraph that identifies two different but complementary tones in the following passage. Then write a paragraph that analyzes the author's diction.

The element of the grotesque was very noticeable to me in the most striking collection of the shabbier English types that I had since I came to London. The occasion of my seeing them was the funeral of Mr. George Odger, which befell four or five weeks before the Easter period. Mr. George Odger, it will be remembered, was an English radical agitator, of a humble origin, who had distinguished himself by a perverse desire to get into parliament. He exercised, I believe, the useful profession of shoemaker, and he knocked in vain at the door that opens but to golden keys. But he was a useful and honorable man, and his own people gave an honorable burial. I emerged accidentally into Piccadilly at the moment they were so engaged, and the spectacle was one I should have been sorry to miss. The crowd was enormous, but I managed to squeeze through it and to get into a hansom that was drawn up beside the pavement, and here I looked on as from a box at a play. Though it was a funeral that was going on I will not call it a tragedy; but it was a very serious comedy. The day happened to be magnificent—the finest of the year. The funeral had been taken in hand by the classes who are socially unrepresented in parliament, and it had been the character of a great popular “manifestation.” The hearse was followed by very few carriages, but the cortege of pedestrians stretched away in the sunshine, up and down the classic gentility of Piccadilly, on a scale that was highly impressive. Here and there the line was broken by a small brass band—apparently one of those bands of itinerant Germans that play for copper beneath lodging-house windows; but for the rest it was compactly made up of what the newspapers call the dregs of the population. It was the London rabble, the metropolitan mob, men and women, boys and girls, the indecent poor and the indecent, who had scrambled into the ranks as they gathered them up on their passage, and were making a sort of solemn spree of it.

Henry James

**Style Analysis**  
**Diction Practice**  
**Henry James Passage**  
**Student Sample**  
**Days 4-7**

The techniques used by the author in “The funeral” express both feelings of sarcastic amusement and entertainment as well as arrogance and superiority toward the less acceptable of the classes. As the reader, we feel sympathy for the deceased while at the same time sense the amusement and smugness of the man looking from a distance at the trivial spectacle.

The author’s diction expresses the feelings of audacity and sheer foolishness that the funeral brings to the observer. Looking around, he notices the “element of the grotesque” in the “serious comedy” as the attempt to honor this man of “humble origin.” The reader can see the humor that this man sees in the ironically outlandish attempts by the funeral-goers to pay tribute to their hero. To them, it is the most gallant and exclusive of affairs, but to the observer an unsightly and pitiful gesture of sympathy. Emerging upon this “honorable lark.” The man’s feeling of superiority as well as snobbish arrogance surrounds the reader as he looks down at the impoverished masses with a patronizing and sarcastic attitude. Staring blatantly, amused and entertained by the pathetic crowd, the observer almost pities them as he begins to rise above them. Pride , ego, and the act of human nature force the observer to give himself strength by playing on the weakness of others.

**Style Analysis**  
**Unit 2: Diction Practice**  
**MacWhirr Passage**

Write an introductory paragraph that identifies two different but complementary tones in the following passage. Then write a paragraph that analyzes the author's diction.

Captain MacWhirr, of the steamer Nan-Shan, had a physiognomy that, in the order of material appearances, was the exact counterpart of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary, irresponsible, and unruffled....

Having just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of himself; and from the very same cause he was not in the least conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy, over-bearing, and difficult to please; but every ship Captain MacWhirr commanded was the floating abode of harmony and peace. It was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of fancy, as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and a whipsaw in the way of tools. Yet the uninteresting lives of men so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence have their mysterious side. It was impossible in Captain MacWhirr's case, for instance, to understand what under heaven could have induced that perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer I Belfast to run away to sea. And yet he had done that very thing at the age of fifteen. It was enough, when you thought it over, to give you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions.

His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity. "We could have got on without him," he used to say later on, "but there's the business. And he an *only* son, too!" His mother wept very much after his disappearance. As it had never occurred to him to leave word behind, he was mourned over for dead till, after eight months, his first letter arrived from Talcahuano. It was short, and contained the statement: "We had very fine weather on our passage out." But evidently, in the writer's mind, the only important intelligence was to the effect that his captain had, on the very day of writing, entered him regularly on the ship's articles as Ordinary

Seaman. "Because I can do the work," he explained. The mother again wept copiously, while the remark, "Tom's an ass," expressed the emotions of the father. He was a corpulent man, with a gift for sly chaffing, which to end of his life he exercised in his intercourse with his son, a little pityingly, as if upon a half-witted person.

MacWhirr's visits to his home were necessarily rare, and in the course of the years he dispatched other letters to his parents, informing them of his successive promotions and of his movements upon the vast earth. In this missives could be found sentences like this: "The heat here is very great." Or: "On Christmas day at 4 p.m. we fell in with some icebergs." The old people ultimately became acquainted with a good many names of ships, and with the names of the skippers who commanded them-with the names of Scots and English ship owners-with the names of seas, oceans, straits, promontories-with the names of islands-with the name of their son's young woman. She was called Lucy. It did not suggest itself to him to mention whether he thought the name pretty. And then they died.

Joseph Conrad  
TYPHOON  
1902

**STYLE ANALYSIS**  
**UNIT 2: DICTION PRACTICE**  
**MACWHIRR PASSAGE**  
**STUDENT SAMPLES**

Student #1:

The passage about Captain MacWhirr emphasized ones of apathy and responsibility as the author juxtaposed MacWhirr's leadership with his parent's shame. His parents raised him devoid of imagination, and they resented his lack of communication when he is an adult.

The author's diction gave insight into the formality captain MacWhirr assumed to escape childhood memories. His ship was his "abode of harmony and peace," his respite from "the ant-heap of the earth" as he led a "bare existence." MacWhirr ran away from his parents and their judgment of his failure to the archetypal symbol of a mother's womb-the sea. There, he lived simply and contentedly, away from the artificiality of society. His "flight of fancy" was merely one to achieve greater peace, away from his father's "sly chaffing" to which he always responded with "undutiful stupidity." Although his parents viewed his departure as a foolish, adolescent decision, MacWhirr knew he was escaping the constant, subtle criticism that his father doled out. He remembered as well how he always failed to win his father's approval and love. At the end of the passage, it was MacWhirr who lived a fruitful and rewarding life; at his funeral, more would be said than simply, "and then he died."

Student #2:

The passage about Captain MacWhirr uses tones of contentment and disappointment to convey the parent's objection to their son's ambitions. To see the mother cry and hear the father belittle his son is a wrenching sight, knowing that the boy chooses his own path despite his parent's pressures.

The author's diction juxtaposes Captain MacWhirr's peaceful simplicity with his father's resentment. The "ordinary Seaman" feels "induced to run away to see" and grow up "tranquilly sure of himself" upon the waters. With neither pride nor arrogance, MacWhirr has no desire to defy his parents but he feels a driving motivation to follow his heart. This mediocre man comes to understand the ships and the seas as a marked

tradesman, with his sweet passion fulfilled and content. Yet his father, begrudges his “undutiful [stupid]” son, the “half-witted one, for deserting the family business and causing his poor mother to “weep.” Their only son, having left no trace or word, ungratefully leaves behind all that his parents have taught and instilled in him to pursue a foolish and dangerous life on unsteady waters. They did not understand, nor did they want to accept, the intentions of their son’s dream. Sadly, the parents die without the satisfaction they could have had in a successful and happy son.