

Diction refers to the author's choice of words.

Words are the writer's basic tools:

- They create the color and texture of the written work.
- They both reflect and determine the level of formality.
- They shape the reader's perceptions.

Student should rarely skip words they do not know when studying serious literature. (It's like wearing earplugs to a symphony.) To understand voice, students must "hear" the words and "feel" their effects.

**Diction reflects the writer's vision and steers the reader's thought.

Effective voice is shaped by words that are clear, concrete and exact.

Good writers eschew words like pretty, nice, and bad. Instead, they use words that invoke a specific effect:

- A coat isn't *torn*; it is *tattered*.
- The U.S. Army does not *want* revenge; it is *thirsty* for revenge.
- A door does not *shut*; it *thuds*.

Specific diction brings the reader into the scene, enabling full participation in the writer's world.

Diction depends on topic, purpose, and occasion. The topic often determines the specificity and sophistication of diction.

The writer's purpose—whether to convince, entertain, amuse, inform, or plead—partly determines diction. Words chosen to impart a particular effect on the reader reflect and sustain the writer's purpose.

If the author's purpose is to inform, the reader should expect straightforward diction.

If the writer's purpose is to entertain, the reader will likely encounter words used in ironic, playful, or unexpected ways.

Diction also depends on the occasion. As with clothes, level of formality influences appropriate choices.

Formal diction is largely reserved for scholarly writing and serious prose or poetry. Informal diction is the norm in expository essays, newspaper editorials, and works of fiction.

Colloquial diction and slang borrow from informal speech and are typically used to create a mood or capture a particular historic or regional dialect.

Appropriateness of diction is determined by the norms of society.

When studying diction, students must understand both connotation (the meaning suggested by the word) and denotation (the word's literal meaning).

When a writer calls a character slender, the word evokes a different feeling from calling the character gaunt.

A word's power to produce a strong reaction in the reader lies mainly in its connotative meaning.

Diction can impart freshness and originality to writing.

Words used in surprising or unusual ways make us rethink what is known and re-examine meaning. Good writers often opt for complexity rather than simplicity, for multiple meanings rather than precision.

Thus diction, the foundation of voice, shapes a reader's thinking while guiding reader insight into the author's idiosyncratic expression of thought: the writer's voice.

**3 important things I learned about diction (in my own words):

1.

2.

3.

Practice!

Assignment #1: Choose 1 passage from *The Great Gatsby* where you feel Fitzgerald uses strong diction and type out the entire passage, including a proper citation. (Note: a passage is 1-3 paragraphs, a solid "chunk" of text). Underline/highlight examples of his strong diction. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain WHY you think the diction is strong. How does it impact your enjoyment/understanding of the text?

Assignment #2: Write an imitation of your chosen passage. Your imitation should be similar in length and should include similar sentence structures. Make sure to incorporate strong diction! Try to include one or more of the rhetorical devices that you learned this week in your imitation (and annotate for those in parenthesis after the device). (Note: you have complete freedom of subject matter for your imitation).

** Assignments should be typed and should utilize proper MLA formatting.