

REMEMBERING MAJOR WORKS

Use this sheet to review a major work you have read that you might use for question three on the AP Lit exam.

Title:

Author:

Genre:

Literary Period, if significant:

Historical significance:

Setting: (time, place, and atmosphere, especially if the setting is a major element in the work)

Protagonist: (name, personality, appearance, etc.)

Antagonist(s):

Main conflict: (think in terms of what the protagonist wants/desires and what is keeping him/her from getting it).

Brief plot summary:

Resolution (of main conflict):

Major Themes: (What truths about life/human nature are revealed?)

Symbols:

Remarkable events/images/other elements:

Six Elements of Style: Diction, Imagery, Tone, Syntax, Point of View, and Figurative Language

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OVERVIEW

Every AP Lit exam will have questions about six main elements of style. It is important to know them for the multiple-choice section as well as for the essays. If you could study nothing else in preparation for the AP Lit exam, this would be the chapter to study.

It is far better, of course, to be familiar with all the concepts in this book as they work interdependently. So, as you read and study the other chapters, return to this one often to reinforce the big six!

DICTION

Diction is often defined as the *author's choice of words*.

There are two ways to think of diction:

- 1) Specific effect of word choice: connotation and denotation
- 2) Overall style

CONNOTATION

In analyzing word choice, you are looking at the connotation of a specific word choice and the effect of that association on the passage. Connotation is the *emotional* sense of a word or the *cultural meaning* associated with a word. Connotations evoke associations. For example, the word “cancer” evokes fear, trepidation, and more.

In the passage from Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing* (featured on the AP Lit exam, 1999), the author evokes a reverent tone, partly through his word choice. Words like “scrim,” “celebrants,” “sacred,” “sects,” and “penitent” have religious connotations. Careful readers will make spiritual associations, which will help them connect with one of the main themes of the passage, which is that all living creatures, whether animal or human, are eternally connected through spirit.



Connotation: A Simple Strategy: When you read, if you begin to notice several words that fit together in connotative meaning, make a list of them in the margin (or circle them in the text). You are noticing a series of words that create a dominant impression. While this impression may not drive an essay thesis, it is probably a key to understanding that is worth noting.

DENOTATION

Denotation refers to the *dictionary or precise meaning* of a word. Authors’ use of the right word for the passage can be key to their clarity of expression. Knowing a wide variety of words and their meanings is critical to understanding complex prose passages or even poetry.

One of the main reasons students misread a poem or a passage is that they do not understand the vocabulary in the text. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to consult a dictionary when you are taking the exam. Please see a list of potentially difficult vocabulary words in Chapter 9.

It is also important to be open-minded regarding the meanings of words. Be careful to not automatically attribute a common meaning to a word, especially when you are reading older texts, as meanings of words change over time. For example, the word “terrific” means “wonderful or great” in a contemporary context, but in the context in which it appears on a released exam, it means “terrifying.” Another example is the word “awful,” which means in its context “to be in awe of,” but a careless reader might think it simply means “horrible.”

To avoid misreading a text, especially when confronted with archaic language, try to determine word meanings from the broader context of the text.



Archaic, obscure, or overly specific language in poems or prose passages will generally be defined in footnotes.

STYLE

Word choice also impacts overall style. Think of style as the *voice of the writer*. Many decisions a writer makes—such as types and lengths of sentences (see syntax), types of words used (see diction), and the extent to which he or she uses imagery and figurative language—contribute to what is recognized as his or her style. For example, Hemingway’s style is characterized, in part, by short, simple sentence structure, while William Faulkner is known for excessively long sentences.

Style can also mean something similar to tone.

Consider the difference in the styles of these two examples:

- A) She was like, pizza is so, like, fattening. (Casual, conversational)
- B) She understood that pizza was excessively high in fat and calories. (Formal)

You will be expected to understand that style impacts other elements in a passage, like characterization, attitude of speaker, and more. In the examples above, the speaker of example A could be said to be less intelligent than the speaker of example B.

SOME TYPICAL STYLE DESCRIPTORS:

Authoritative: the voice is commanding and knowing

Emotive: the voice evokes emotion

Didactic: the voice is preachy, insistent

Objective: the voice is uncommitted, without judgment

Ornate: the voice is perhaps pretentious, flowery, or ostentatious

Plain: the voice is simple, straightforward, to the point

Scholarly: the voice is learned and authoritative, erudite

Scientific: the voice is precise and relies on the language of science (Latinate words)

You’ll find a more comprehensive list of style descriptors at the end of this chapter.

IMAGERY

Imagery is not just one of the most important elements of poetry, it is also important to prose writers. Imagery is *language that engages the senses and evokes emotion*. We relate to imagery on a gut level, responding with our emotions. The more detailed the imagery, the more we can put ourselves into the writing.

TYPES OF IMAGERY

- Visual Imagery: what we can see
- Auditory: what we can hear
- Tactile: what we can touch
- Olfactory: what we can smell

- Gustatory: what we can taste
- Kinesthetic: sense of movement
- Organic: internal sense of being (well or ill)

These sensory perceptions created through language are vicarious (through the experience of the character or the narration).

We might also consider these perceptions to be virtual. We don't actually experience them, but the emotions they evoke in us are real—the more vivid the imagery, the more real the emotion.

To become good at recognizing good imagery, become good at looking for it and studying it. Stop when you recognize a particularly imagistic passage. Study it. What kind of imagery is it? How do you feel as you experience the passage? And most important, what is the effect of the imagery?

EFFECTS OF IMAGERY

- Helps establish tone
- Creates realistic settings
- Creates empathy in readers for characters
- Helps readers imagine themselves as part of a narrative

■ TONE

Tone is the attitude of the speaker toward another character, a place, an idea or a thing. In thinking of tone in this regard, it is important to pay attention not only to what a character or speaker does, but also to what he or she says. Sometimes we know more than the character does (dramatic irony) and this impacts our understanding of tone.

A passage or paragraph has a specific tone, which refers to its emotional quality. This quality comes from details like imagery, diction (a character's speech, for example), and even syntax (short, simple sentences seem more serious and less reflective than more ornate sentence types).

Tone is created in a variety of ways. Diction and imagery are major influences on tone. This is because images evoke emotions and certain words have emotional connotations. When you recognize tone, you most likely “feel” it first. But you also have to have an intellectual understanding of what you feel.

The first key to analyzing tone is to recognize it. You must acquaint yourself with typical tone descriptors (see the list at the end of this chapter), so that you aren't fumbling for a word to express what you think you see. The wider the variety of tone descriptors you use, the better you'll be at providing a precise analysis. In other words, if you say a passage is *sad* instead of *melancholy*, you may be limiting your analysis.

MOOD

Mood is related to tone. The term “mood” is most often used in association with setting. Think of mood as the emotional quality of the setting.



Test Tip While there is most likely a prominent or dominant tone in a passage, be aware of tone shifts. If the tone changes suddenly, it can signal an epiphany or some change in a speaker or character's thinking. Tone shifts are critical markers in a passage.

See the end of this chapter for a comprehensive list of words to use when describing tone and mood.

SYNTAX

Syntax refers, in general, to the *order of words in a sentence*. Syntax results in various sentence types used for a variety of rhetorical effects. Syntax can also be thought of as the rhythm of prose. Sentence variety creates interesting, fluent, readable prose. Aspects of syntax, such as repetition and placement of ideas, are used for emphasis.

A study of syntax is important for several reasons.

- Sentences impact the narrative pace of a passage, making it read quickly or slowly, which therefore impacts the idea/theme
- Certain types of sentences are better at emphasizing ideas, so key notions become prominent through repetition or parallel structure
- There are sometimes questions in the multiple-choice section of the exam that ask you to identify types of sentences

SENTENCE TYPES AND ATTRIBUTES

Sentence type	Attributes
Periodic	The most important idea comes at the end of the sentence.
Loose	The most important idea is revealed early and the sentence unfolds loosely after that.
Parallel	<p>A parallel sentence (sometimes called a balanced sentence) contains parts of equal grammatical structure or rhetorical value in a variety of combinations.</p> <p>Some examples of parallel structures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The dog ate voraciously, joyously, and noisily. (The verb <i>ate</i> is modified by three multisyllabic adverbs, which seems somewhat lofty in style for such a mundane act as a dog eating.) 2. Joyce was worn down by the constant invasion of her co-workers, by their insistent stares, by their noisy whispers, and by their unveiled disdain. She knew she had to find another job. (The parallel phrases are set off by commas; this is also an example of anaphora.)

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Sentence type	Attributes
Repetition	<p>Types of repetition in sentences:</p> <p>Anaphora: the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of a series of phrases, clauses, or sentences</p> <p>Antistrophe: the repetition of the same word or words at the end of successive phrases or clauses</p> <p>Asyndeton: conjunctions are omitted between words, phrases, or clauses</p> <p>Chiasmus: two corresponding pairs ordered this way a/b/b/a</p> <p>Polysyndeton: the use of conjunctions between each word, phrase, or clause</p>
Grammatical sentence types	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple: 1 subject, 1 verb, modifiers, complements. Simple sentences are short, direct, and in combination with more complex sentences can be used for emphasis. 2. Compound: 2 independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (use the mnemonic “fanboys:” <i>for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</i>) 3. Complex: contains an independent clause and a (dependent) subordinate clause 4. Compound-complex: contains two independent clauses and a dependent (subordinate) clause
Grammatical sentence purposes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Declarative sentence: makes a statement. 2. Imperative sentence: makes a command. 3. Interrogative sentence: asks a question. 4. Exclamatory sentence: makes an emphatic or emotion-filled statement.

MORE ASPECTS OF SYNTAX

1. Climax: the main idea or most important point in a sentence. The position of the climax may be varied for effect.
2. Cadence: the rhythm or “music” of a sentence that comes through parallel elements and repetition
3. Narrative pace: the pace or speed of a passage that comes through the following elements:
 - length of words
 - omission of words or punctuation
 - length of sentences
 - number of dependent/subordinate clauses
 - repetition of sounds

The shorter the words (fewer syllables) and the shorter and simpler the sentences, the faster the pace. Conversely, the longer the words (more syllables) and the longer, more complex the sentences, the slower the pace.

The 3 P's of Syntax

Prominence: Prominence refers to the *importance given an idea in a sentence*. Prominence is achieved both by placement and by repetition. Sometimes an idea is isolated in a short sentence where it is given sole prominence. If a word is ever set off alone as a fragment, it is being given prominence that best not be ignored. Instead, ask the question, “Why is this word isolated?”

Position: Position means *where the key idea is located*. It will most often come at the beginning of the sentence (loose sentence) or at the end of the sentence (periodic sentence). But sometimes, writers use nonstandard syntax, or inverted word order (especially in poems), to draw attention to certain words or ideas.

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Pace: Pace is the speed of the text and generally complements the author's purpose. For example: Quentin's section in Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* is presented primarily in stream of consciousness, with fast-paced narration that emphasizes the character's frenetic and fragile state of mind. Another great example of how pace complements the writer's purpose is Maya Angelou's poem *Woman Work*. The first stanza in which she describes all the tasks to be done is meant to be read so fast that the reader actually feels tired after reading it. The rest of the poem is composed of four-line stanzas that read much, much more slowly. The images in these stanzas evoke peace, coolness, and rest.



Your own syntax is important in the essay section of the exam. See Chapter 15 for more on using sentence variety in your own writing.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is one of the most important elements of literature that you need to understand for the AP Lit exam. Most of the essay prompts imply an analysis of point of view, such as the speaker's response to an event, the speaker's attitude about an idea, etc. See Chapter 14 for a detailed analysis of prompts. Further, see Chapter 13 for more on point of view.

MAIN POINTS OF VIEW

First person: the narrator tells his/her own story using first person pronouns (*I, me, we, us*). This point of view is limited by what the narrator can know, see, or understand. First person narrators cannot always be trusted to assess the situation honestly. They may be blind to their own faults.

Second person: the narrator uses second person pronouns (*you*) to make immediate connections with readers (very rare point of view in fiction)

Third person-limited: a third person narrator tells the story from one character's point of view using third person pronouns (*she, her, he, him, it, they, them*); limited by the same constraints as first person narrators

Third person-omniscient: this third person narrator is god-like, seeing and knowing all without constraints of time or space, seeing even beyond earthly existence. Third person narrators often digress into contemplative or philosophical forays.

Objective: an objective narrator tells a story like a camcorder would, simply revealing the sights and sounds it perceives (though not, of course, as strictly as that). You can recognize an objective narrator by that person's lack of emotion or personal interest in the subject.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

The last element of style is figurative language, or *language not meant to be taken literally*. If we were to narrow down figurative language to one element, it would be metaphor. But, of course, it is more than that. Being able to recognize figurative language and its effects is a key skill necessary for success on the AP Lit exam.

Authors and poets use figurative language to lead us to a deeper level of understanding and to see things in a new or even startling way. When confronted with complex metaphors, it is important to ask “what” and “why.” What are we to see that we would not have seen without it? Why is it there in the first place?

HOW TO RECOGNIZE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

- Learn the patterns of types of figurative language so that when you encounter them, you recognize them.
- Be open to finding it: know that when a passage seems to be saying more than what appears on the surface, there is probably figurative language at work. Learn to read under the surface or, as is often said, “between the lines.”
- Remember that poetry is almost a synonym for figurative language, meaning that there is a great deal of it in poetry. Always be looking for it.
- Read carefully and don’t settle for the most obvious interpretation.

SPECIFIC TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

(See also Chapters 6 and 7.)

Allegory: a type of symbolism. An allegory is a *description or a narrative (poetry or prose) with a secondary, or underlying, meaning*. An excellent example of allegory is George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. In that book, the situation, the characters, and the plot all have allegorical connections. (Briefly, the overthrow of a cruel farmer by the farm’s animals is meant to parallel the Russian Revolution where the proletariat revolted against their dictator.)

Character allegory: In Dante’s *Inferno*, characters often represent various ideal qualities. Vergil, for example, stands for human reason. This meaning extends throughout the epic.

- Human virtues and vices were common character allegories in medieval literature, though they were generalized and not necessarily specific characters.

Apostrophe (related to personification): *addressing something (or someone) non-living or incapable of response as if it could hear and respond*, such as “O, howling wind. . . .”

Irony: Irony exists when there is a *discrepancy between what is perceived and what is real*. There are three types of irony:

Verbal irony—when what is said is different from what is meant

Dramatic irony—when the reader knows something a character does not know

Situational irony—when some aspect of the situation seems incongruous to either what seems appropriate or to what is expected



Being able to recognize irony and its effect is an excellent skill to cultivate. There are always several questions on the AP Lit exam regarding irony.

Metaphor: a comparison of two dissimilar things in order to see one in a new way

Metonymy (see also synecdoche): the use of a closely related detail for the thing actually meant, such as using The White House to refer to the president.

Overstatement (hyperbole): saying more than the situation warrants. The contrast illuminates the truth.

Paradox: a statement that consists of two contradictory or incompatible elements; paradoxical statements are startling and get us to think. They are a kind of metaphor that reveals the truth.

Personification: attributing human qualities or characteristics to non-living or non-human things in order to create empathy

Simile: essentially a metaphor that uses “like” or “as”

Epic or Homeric simile: an extended simile used in epic poems and Greek dramas. A typical construction of an epic simile uses “just as” or “so then” to signal the comparison, though that is not always the case. The following example is from Homer’s *Odyssey* (Fitzgerald translation):

*A man in a distant field, no heartfires near,
will hide a fresh brand in his bed of embers
to keep a spark alive for the next day;
so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,
while over him Athena showered sleep
that his distress should end, and soon, soon
in quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.*

Synecdoche: the use of a part for the whole, such as “all hands on deck” or “the meeting can begin now that all the suits are here.” Note: Synecdoche is sometimes represented as metonymy.

Symbol: a thing, person, or idea that stands for something else. Some symbols become iconic, that is, so well known that they’re an accepted part of culture. Ex: water is a symbol of purity and or rebirth.

Understatement: saying less than the situation warrants. The contrast illuminates the truth.



Create an annotation symbol for metaphors, such as a star. Mark all metaphors as you read so they are easy to find and assess later.

STYLE DESCRIPTORS

The descriptors in the following lists come from questions about tone, style, attitude, and mood from released exams.

Tone

candid	laconic	sanctimonious	speculative
cynical	melancholy	sardonic	trite
detached	nostalgic	sinister	

Style

candid	detached	scornful	smug
cynical	sardonic	sinister	

Attitude

arrogant	eloquent	indifferent	vindictive
ambivalent	disdainful	pretentious	whimsical
anxious	fanciful	remorseful	
contemptuous	flippant	satirical	

Mood

apprehensive	quizzical	reproachful	solemn
elegiac	rapturous	satiric	suspenseful

MORE STYLE AND TONE WORDS

Style

accusatory	despairing	obsequious
acerbic	disdainful	patronizing
ambivalent	earnest	pessimistic
apathetic	gloomy	petulant
bitter	haughty	quizzical
conciliatory	indignant	reverent
condescending	judgmental	ridiculing
callous	joyful	reflective
contemplative	mocking	sarcastic
critical	morose, focusing on death	sardonic
choleric	malicious	self-deprecating
churlish	objective	sincere
contemptuous	objective	solemn
derisive	optimistic	

Tone

caustic	matter-of-fact	ribald
colloquial	informal	satiric
didactic	intimate	scholarly
effusive	lyrical	terse
erudite	objective	scholarly
fanciful	pedantic	terse
formal	poignant	whimsical
forthright		