

## Mnemonics for Literary Analysis: Annotation Acronyms

Every day you have tons of information thrown at you in English class that you have to be able to recall and utilize at a moment's notice. So what can you do to remember? This list of common mnemonic devices for literary analysis will help you remember important strategies to use in reading and annotating many different kinds of literature. These strategies will strengthen your interaction with and comprehension and analysis of texts.

### Analyzing Point of View: **S.O.A.P.S.Tone**

**Speaker:** Who is the voice that tells the story? The author and the speaker are NOT necessarily the same. An author may choose to tell the story from any number of different points of view. Is someone identified as the speaker? What assumptions can you make about the speaker? What age, gender, class, emotional state, education? In nonfiction, how does the speaker's background shape his/her point of view? What socio-economic class does the speaker come from? What political bias or gender can you infer? Is the speaker/narrator reliable or unreliable?

**Occasion:** What is the time and place of the piece – the context that encouraged the writing to happen? Is it a memory, a description, an observation, a valedictory (a farewell address), satire, an elegy (a poem for the dead), a critique, a journal entry? Writing does not occur in a vacuum. There is the larger occasion: an environment of ideas and emotions that swirl around a broad issue. Then there is the immediate occasion: an event or situation that catches the writer's attention and triggers a response. What may have prompted the author to write this piece? What event led to its publication or development?

**Audience:** Who is the audience – the (group of) readers to whom this piece is directed? The audience may be one person, a small group, or a large group. What assumptions can you make about the intended audience? Is it a mixed group in terms of race, politics, gender, social class, relationship? Does the speaker use language that is specific for a unique audience? For example, does the speaker evoke Nation? Liberty? God? History? Hell? Does the speaker allude to any particular time in history, such as ancient times? The Industrial Revolution? World Wars?

**Purpose:** Why was this text written? What does the speaker want the audience to think or do as a result of reading this text? What is the message? How is the speaker trying to spark a reaction in the audience? How does the text make the audience feel? What techniques are used to convey this message? Consider the purpose of the text in order to examine the argument and its logic. What is the speaker's purpose? What is the emotional state of the speaker?

**Subject:** What is the subject? How has the subject been selected and presented by the writer? What are the general topics, content, and ideas contained in the text? You should be able to state the subject in a few words or a phrase. Is the subject introduced immediately or is it delayed? Is the subject hidden? Is there more than one subject?

**Tone:** What is the author's attitude toward the subject? How is the writer's attitude revealed? What words or phrases show the speaker's tone? In conversation the spoken word can convey the speaker's attitude through tone of voice. With the written work, it is tone that extends meaning beyond the literal. If the author were to read aloud the passage, describe the likely tone of that voice. What emotional sense pervades the piece? How does the word choice (diction) point to tone? How do the author's diction, imagery, language, and sentence structure convey feeling?

### Analyzing Style: **D.I.D.L.S**

**Diction:** How do the denotative (dictionary) meanings and connotative (emotional) meanings of words compare? Different words for the same thing often suggest different attitudes (for example, *happy* vs. *content* or *happy* vs. *ecstatic*). Similarly, *dead* and *passed away* both denote death, but have different connotations. *Cacophonous* and *euphonious* both describe sound, but the first is a harsh-sounding, raucous croak while the second is a pleasant-sounding, languid murmur. Is the diction concrete and tangible, appealing to the five senses, or is it abstract and intangible, referring mostly to ideas or concepts that exist in one's mind?

**Images:** How are vivid appeals to understanding made through the five senses (hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling)? If a narrator visiting a farm describes the awful smells rather than the beautiful countryside, that would tell us something about her attitude about farm life.

**Details:** Which facts are included and which are omitted? If a narrator withholds gory details, his attitude would be different than that of a narrator who focuses mostly on the gory details (e.g. *Dateline* vs. *CNN*)

**Language:** What is the overall use of language? Is it formal, informal, clinical, slang, dialect? What is the effect?

**Syntax:** How does the sentence structure promote the message? Long, flowing sentences give a different feeling than short, choppy ones. If the narrator has awkward sentence structure, we might think he is uneducated, while long, flowing sentences might suggest sophistication or artistic creativity.

### **Analyzing Rhetorical Elements: S.O.L.L.I.D.D.D**

**Syntax:** How does the author use syntax, or sentence structure? Does the author use a variety of sentence lengths (for example, simple, compound, and complex sentences)? How does the author use punctuation? Is there repetition (parallel structure) within the sentences?

**Organization:** How does the author structure sections within passages and as a whole? Does the author write in chronological order? Is a thesis statement embedded within or near the beginning? Why does the author choose this structure?

**Literary Devices:** Does the author use metaphor, simile, personification, irony, hyperbole, understatement, allusion, alliteration, satire? What effect do they create?

**Levels of discourse:** What seem to be the cultural levels of the language used? Does the narrator's voice represent a particular social, political, or cultural viewpoint or perspective?

**Imagery:** How does the author deliberately appeal to the audience's five senses using sensory details (seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, hearing)?

**Diction:** What is the effect of the author's word choice? What is the denotative and connotative significance?

**Detail:** Which descriptive details are included and why? What is excluded? How does the author show instead of tell?

**Dialogue:** How does the author use spoken exchanges between characters? Does the author create tension or drama with dialogue? What does dialogue reveal about a character or the author?

### **Evaluating argument and persuasion: S.M.E.L.L.**

**Sender/receiver relationship:** Who is the speaker? What is his or her authority? Who is the audience? What is the tone directed from the speaker to the audience? Is it a respectful relationship? A disdainful one?

**Message:** What is the content and /or claim?

**Evidence:** What kind and how much evidence does the author give? Is it ample and clearly cited, or thin and unattributed?

**Logic:** What is the quality of the reasoning? What types of appeals are used (for example, logos, ethos, or pathos)?

**Language:** What stylistic and rhetorical devices are employed? What of figures of speech? Does the word choice suggest irony or does it seem intended to stir up emotion?

### **Evaluating visual texts: O.P.T.I.C.**

**Overview:** What does the visual appear to be about? What is the topic, subject, or issue it addresses?

**Parts:** Zero in on the parts of the visual. Which elements or details seem most important? Why?

**Title:** Notice the title if there is one. How does the title support the topic or subject? Does the title hint at the author's attitude or opinion about the topic? How does the title reveal tone?

**Interrelationships:** Use the title as the theory and the parts of the visual as clues to detect and specify the interrelationships in the graphic.

**Conclusion:** What can you conclude about the visual as whole? What does it mean? What is the author's opinion about the topic? Summarize the message of the visual in one or two sentences.

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