
The Language of Literary Analysis

generously provided by former Consol AP English IV teacher Liz Davis

VERBS

These verbs will be especially effective *when the subject is the author or a character*. They are excellent *replacements for "be" verbs* and instrumental in the formulation of *thesis and theme* statements. Careful use of these verbs can result in precise identification of an author's *purpose*. Follow your teacher's directions to categorize the verbs as *transitive, intransitive, positive, negative, or neutral*.

VERBS FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS

accentuates	accepts	achieves	adopts	advocates*
affects	alleviates	allows	alludes*	alters*
analyzes	approaches	argues	ascertains*	assesses*
assumes	attacks	attempts	attributes*	avoids
bases	believes	challenges	changes	characterizes
chooses	chronicles	claims	comments	compares
compels*	completes	concerns	concludes	condescends
conducts	conforms	confronts*	considers	contends*
contests*	contrasts	contributes	conveys	convinces
defines	defies	demonstrates	depicts*	describes
delineates*	despises	details	determines	develops
deviates*	differentiates*	differs	directs	disappoints
discovers	discusses	displays	disputes	disrupts*
distinguishes	distorts*	downplays	dramatizes	elevates
elicits*	emphasizes	encounters	enhances	enriches
enumerates*	envisions	evokes	excludes	expands
experiences	explains	expresses	extends	extrapolates*
fantasizes	focuses	forces	foreshadows	functions
generalizes*	guides	heightens	highlights	hints
holds	honors	identifies	illustrates	illuminates
imagines	impels*	implies*	includes	indicates
infers*	inspires	intends	interprets	interrupts
inundates*	justifies	juxtaposes*	lambasts**	laments*
lampoons*	lists	maintains	makes	manages
manipulates	minimizes	moralizes*	muses*	notes
observes	opposes	organizes	overstates	outlines
patronizes*	performs	permits	personifies*	persuades
ponders*	portrays	postulates*	prepares	presents
presumes	produces	projects	promotes	proposes
provides	qualifies*	questions	rationalizes	reasons
recalls	recites	recollects	records	recounts
reflects	refers	regards	regrets	rejects
represents	results	reveals	ridicules	satirizes*
seems	sees	selects	specifies	speculates*
states	strives*	suggests	summarizes	supplies
supports	suppresses*	symbolizes	sympathizes	traces
understands	vacillates*	values	verifies*	

VERBS TO USE INSTEAD OF EXEMPLIFIES

appears	asserts	attests to	certifies	confirms
connotes*	corroborates*	defines	demonstrates	denotes*
depicts	discloses*	elucidates*	endorses*	establishes
evinces*	exhibits	expounds*	exposes	intimates*
manifests*	points to	proves	ratifies*	relates
shows	substantiates*	suggests	typifies*	upholds
validates*				

ADJECTIVES FOR USE IN LITERARY/RHETORICAL DISCUSSION

DESCRIBING THE AUTHOR

cultured	intellectual	erudite*	well-read	sagacious*
sensible	rational	philosophic*	analytical	imaginative
perceptive	visionary*	prophetic*	optimistic	broad-minded*
idealistic*	spiritual	orthodox*	unorthodox*	sympathetic
sophisticated*	original	whimsical*	humorous	conservative*
liberal*	progressive*	radical*	reactionary*	unprejudiced
realistic*	romantic*	shallow	superficial	bigoted
opinionated*	intolerant	hypocritical*	fanatical*	provincial*
narrow-minded*	sentimental	skeptical*	cynical*	

DESCRIBING STYLE/CONTENT

lucid*	graphic*	intelligible*	explicit*	precise
exact	concise*	succinct*	condensed*	pithy*
piquant*	aphoristic*	sylogistic*	allusive*	metaphorical
poetic	prosaic*	plain	simple	homespun*
pure	vigorous*	forceful	eloquent*	sonorous*
fluent	glib*	natural	restrained*	smooth
polished*	classical	artistic	bombastic*	extravagant
rhetorical*	turgid*	pompous*	grandiose*	obscure*
vague	diffuse*	verbose*	pedantic*	ponderous*
ungraceful	harsh	abrupt*	labored*	awkward
unpolished	crude*	vulgar*	formal	artificial
utilitarian*	humanistic*	pragmatic*	naturalistic*	impressionistic*
subjective*	melodramatic*	fanciful*	authentic*	plausible*
credible*	recondite*	controversial	mystical*	improbable*
absurd	trivial	commonplace	heretical*	

DESCRIBING DICTION

high or formal	low or informal	neutral	precise	exact
concrete	abstract*	plain	simple	homespun
esoteric*	learned	cultured	literal*	figurative*
connotative*	symbolic	picturesque*	sensuous*	literary
provincial*	colloquial*	slang*	idiomatic*	neologistic*
inexact	euphemistic*	trite*	obscure*	pedantic*
bombastic*	grotesque	vulgar*	jargon*	emotional
obtuse*	moralistic*	ordinary	scholarly	insipid*
proper	pretentious*	old-fashioned		

DESCRIBING SYNTAX

loose*	periodic*	balanced*	interrupted	simple*
compound*	complex*	compound-complex*	declarative*	interrogative*
imperative*	exclamatory*	telegraphic*	antithetic*	inverted*
euphonic*	rhythmical	epigrammatic*	emphatic	incoherent
rambling	tortuous	jerky	cacophonous*	monotonous
spare	austere*	unadorned*	jumbled	chaotic
obfuscating*	journalistic*	terse*	laconic*	mellifluous*
musical	lilting*	lyrical*	elegant	solid
thudding	dry	ornate*	elaborate	flowery
erudite*	grating*	staccato*	abrupt*	sprawling

DESCRIBING ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE/POINT OF VIEW

spatial*	chronological	flashback	flash forward*	in media res*
step-by-step	objective*	subjective*	nostalgic*	reminiscent
contemplative*	reflective*	clinical*	impersonal*	dramatic*
omniscient*	limited*			

DESCRIBING IMAGERY (Substitute these precise adjectives for less precise ones such as *vivid*, *colorful*, and *powerful*.)

bucolic*	pastoral*	gustatory*	olfactory*	tactile*
kinetic*	kinesthetic*	sensual*	sacred	chaotic
auditory*	religious	animal	war/military	
of death, decay, decomposition				

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS (Great substitutions for *pretty* and *ugly*!)

Physical Qualities

manly	virile*	robust*	hardy*	sturdy
strapping*	stalwart*	muscular	brawny*	lovely
fair	comely*	handsome	dainty	delicate
graceful	elegant	shapely	attractive	winsome*
ravishing*	dapper*	immaculate	adroit*	dexterous*
adept*	skillful	agile*	nimble*	active
lively	spirited*	vivacious*	weak	feeble*
sickly	frail	decrepit*	emaciated*	cadaverous*
effeminate*	unwomanly	hideous	homely*	course*
unkempt*	slovenly*	awkward	clumsy	ungainly*
graceless	bizarre*	grotesque	incongruous*	ghastly
repellent*	repugnant*	repulsive	odious*	invidious*
loathsome*				

Mental Qualities (Great substitutions for *smart* and *stupid*! Which comments would you like to see on your papers?)

educated	erudite*	scholarly	wise	astute*
intellectual	precocious*	capable	competent	gifted
apt*	rational	reasonable	sensible	shrewd*
prudent*	observant	clever	ingenious*	inventive
subtle*	cunning*	crafty*	wily*	unintelligent
unschooled*	unlettered*	ignorant	illiterate*	inane*
irrational	puerile*	foolish	fatuous*	vacuous*
simple	thick-skulled*	idiotic	imbecilic*	witless*
deranged*	demented*	articulate*	eloquent*	

Moral Qualities (Great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

idealistic*	innocent	virtuous*	faultless	righteous*
guileless*	upright*	exemplary	chaste*	pure
undefiled*	temperate*	abstentious*	austere*	ascetic*
puritanical*	truthful	honorable	trustworthy	straightforward*
decent	respectable	wicked	corrupt*	degenerate*
notorious*	vicious	incorrigible*	dissembling*	infamous*
immoral*	unprincipled*	reprobate*	depraved*	indecent*
ribald*	vulgar*	intemperate*	sensual*	dissolute*
deceitful	dishonest	unscrupulous*	dishonorable*	base*
vile*	foul*	recalcitrant*	philandering*	opportunistic*

Spiritual Qualities (More great substitutions for *good* and *bad*!)

religious	reverent	pious*	devout*	faithful
regenerate*	holy	saintly	angelic	skeptical*
agnostic*	atheistic*	irreligious*	impious*	irreverent*
profane*	sacrilegious*	materialistic	carnal*	godless
diabolic*	fiendlike*	blasphemous*	unregenerate*	altruistic*
charitable				

Social Qualities (Terrific substitutions for *nice* and *mean*!)

civil*	amicable*	contentious*	unpolished*	sullen*
tactful*	courteous	cooperative	genial*	affable*
hospitable*	gracious*	amiable*	cordial*	congenial*

convivial*
anti-social*
discourteous
ill-mannered
brusque*
grumpy
waspish*

jovial*
acrimonious*
impudent*
unrefined
churlish*
fractious*
taciturn*

jolly
quarrelsome
impolite
rustic*
fawning*
crusty*
reticent*

urbane*
antagonistic*
insolent*
provincial*
obsequious*
peevish*
gregarious*

suave*
misanthropic*
ill-bred
boorish*
sniveling*
petulant*
garrulous*

THE LANGUAGE OF ARGUMENT

VERBS

attack
challenge
validate
answer
assert

charge
qualify
confirm
agree/disagree
generalize

claim
counter
affirm*
verify
specify

propose
repudiate*
argue
resolve
debate

defend
allege*
assume
concede*
dispute

NOUNS

warrant
solution
vested interest
logos*
induction*
audience
rebuttal*
refutation
invective*
qualifier*

validity
resolution
conflict of interests
counterargument
fallacy*
purpose
antithesis*
slippery slope*
proponent*
begging the question*

plausibility*
bias
enthymeme*
premise*
ad hominem
message
*non sequitur**
anecdote*
assertion
justification

practicality
credibility
pathos*
syllogism*
exigence*
precedent*
circular reasoning*
advocacy*
adherent*
cause/effect

proposal
accountability
ethos*
deduction*
speaker
testimonial*
bandwagon*
rhetoric*
red herring*

WORDS TO DESCRIBE DICTION

Don't just say "the author uses diction" - EVERY writer uses words!

We MUST use adjectives to describe diction. Describe the effect of this writer's word choice.

1) **Abstract** vs. **Concrete**
 refers to intangible things refers to tangible things
(understood by the mind, not the senses) (identified by the 5 senses)
Ex: "God is love." "Truth is the highest aspiration." Ex: "dog," "burp," "salty," "sharp," "smelly"

2) **Elevated** vs. **Colloquial**
 complex words, superior tone everyday jargon
Ex: "Ensure that you wear the appropriate attire." Ex: "You'll wanna wear the right thing."

3) **Convolutd** vs. **Simple**
 complex words, difficult to follow easy, clear words (short, basic words)

4) **Denotative** vs. **Connotative**
 containing an exact meaning containing a suggested meaning
Ex: "dress," "house," "young" Ex: "gown," "home," "juvenile"

5) **Euphonious** vs. **Cacophonous**
 pleasant sounding harsh sounding
Ex: "melodic Southern speech," Ex: "raucous," "croak," "rasping"
"silver laughter," "soft voices"

More Definitions

Ambiguous	vague	Informal	conversational
Bombastic	arrogant,	Loaded	heavy emotional charge
Convolutd	complex, difficult to follow	Moralistic	puritanical, righteous
Didactic	instructional; intended to teach	Pedantic	scholarly, bookish
Elevated	complex words, superior tone	Poetic	melodious, romantic
Emotional	expressive of emotions	Pretentious	pompous, arrogant
Esoteric	understood by a chosen few	Sharp	harsh
Formal	academic, conventional	Simple	clear (short, easy words)
Figurative	words serving to illustrate	Verbose	talkative and wordy
Idiomatic	peculiar	Vivid	full of life and animation

Other, More Common Adjectives!

Casual	Ordinary	Sarcastic
Harsh	Passionate	Shocking
Humorous	Patriotic	Sincere
Offensive	Political	

WORDS TO DESCRIBE SYNTAX

Syntax is the order of words and phrases in creating a sentence.

Sentence Types

Declarative
Assertive – a statement

Imperative
Authoritative – command

Interrogative
Asks a question

Exclamatory
Expresses emotion

Sentence Length

Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?

What variety of lengths is present?

Why is the sentence length effective?

Staccato Syntax – a series of short, very abrupt sentences (1-2 words)

Example: "Freedom is running. Going outside. It's basketball."

Effect: Forceful, direct, to the point

Telegraphic Syntax – fewer than 8 words in a sentence, typically omit grammatical/function words.

Example: "Leave on doorstep." or "Will arrive tomorrow 5pm."

Effect: Forceful, direct (especially when surrounded by longer sentences)

Long and Involved Syntax – more than 30 words in sentence

Example: "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius."

Effect: Meaning not completed until end of sentence; marked by suspended syntax

Sentence Structure

Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?

What variety of lengths is present?

Simple Sentence – one independent clause (**Effect:** child-like quality; highlights importance among longer sentences)

Compound Sentence – two independent clauses combined by conjunction (**Effect:** balance; ideas of equal importance)

Complex Sentence – one independent and 1+ dependent clause(s) (**Effect:** longer, more complex)

Compound-Complex Sentence – 2+ independent clauses and 1+ dependant clause(s) (**Effect:** longer, more complex)

Loose Sentence – a sentence in which the main idea is elaborated on by successive clauses or phrases.

Example: We reached Edmonton / that morning / after a turbulent flight / and some exciting experiences.

Effect:

Periodic Sentence – a sentence whose meaning is not complete until the end of the clause or phrase.

Example: That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton.

Effect: Builds up to climax/meaning slowly, keeps reader in suspense.

Balanced Syntax – employs parallel structure of approximately the same length and importance

Example: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Effect: Creates symmetry and balance between ideas in sentence; often involves repetition.

Other Techniques that Characterize Syntax

Parallelism
Juxtaposition

Repetition
Rhetorical question

Anaphora

WORDS TO DESCRIBE TONE

Tone	Meaning
Absurd	illogical; ridiculous; silly; implausible; foolish
Accusatory	suggesting someone has done something wrong, complaining
Acerbic	sharp; forthright; biting; hurtful; abrasive; severe
Admiring	approving; think highly of; respectful; praising
Aggressive	hostile; determined; forceful; argumentative
Aggrieved	indignant; annoyed; offended; disgruntled
Ambivalent	having mixed feelings; uncertain; in a dilemma; undecided
Amused	entertained; diverted; pleased
Angry	incensed or enraged; threatening or menacing
Animated	full of life or excitement; lively; spirited; impassioned; vibrant
Apathetic	showing little interest; lacking concern; indifferent; unemotional
Apologetic	full of regret; repentant; remorseful; acknowledging failure
Appreciative	grateful; thankful; showing pleasure; enthusiastic
Ardent	enthusiastic; passionate
Arrogant	pompous; disdainful; overbearing; condescending; vain; scoffing
Assertive	self-confident; strong-willed; authoritative; insistent
Awestruck	amazed, filled with wonder/awe; reverential
Belligerent	hostile; aggressive; combatant
Benevolent	sympathetic; tolerant; generous; caring; well meaning
Bitter	angry; acrimonious; antagonistic; spiteful; nasty
Callous	cruel disregard; unfeeling; uncaring; indifferent; ruthless
Candid	truthful, straightforward; honest; unreserved
Caustic	making biting, corrosive comments; critical
Cautionary	gives warning; raises awareness; reminding
Celebratory	praising; pay tribute to; glorify; honour
Chatty	informal; lively; conversational; familiar
Colloquial	familiar; everyday language; informal; colloquial; casual
Comic	humorous; witty; entertaining; diverting

Compassionate	sympathetic; empathetic; warm-hearted; tolerant; kind
Complex	having many varying characteristics; complicated
Compliant	agree or obey rules; acquiescent; flexible; submissive
Concerned	worried; anxious; apprehensive
Conciliatory	intended to placate or pacify; appeasing
Condescending	stooping to the level of one's inferiors; patronising
Confused	unable to think clearly; bewildered; vague
Contemptuous	showing contempt; scornful; insolent; mocking
Critical	finding fault; disapproving; scathing; criticizing
Cruel	causing pain and suffering; unkind; spiteful; severe
Curious	wanting to find out more; inquisitive; questioning
Cynical	scornful of motives/virtues of others; mocking; sneering
Defensive	defending a position; shielding; guarding; watchful
Defiant	obstinate; argumentative; defiant; contentious
Demeaning	disrespectful; undignified
Depressing	sad, melancholic; discouraging; pessimistic
Derisive	snide; sarcastic; mocking; dismissive; scornful
Detached	aloof; objective; unfeeling; distant
Dignified	serious; respectful; formal; proper
Diplomatic	tactful; subtle; sensitive; thoughtful
Disapproving	displeased; critical; condemnatory
Disheartening	discouraging; demoralising; undermining; depressing
Disparaging	dismissive; critical; scornful
Direct	straightforward; honest
Disappointed	discouraged; unhappy because something has gone wrong
Dispassionate	impartial; indifferent; unsentimental; cold; unsympathetic
Distressing	heart-breaking; sad; troubling
Docile	compliant; submissive; deferential; accommodating
Earnest	showing deep sincerity or feeling; serious

Egotistical	self-absorbed; selfish; conceited; boastful
Empathetic	understanding; kind; sensitive
Encouraging	optimistic; supportive
Enthusiastic	excited; energetic
Evasive	ambiguous; cryptic; unclear
Excited	emotionally aroused; stirred
Facetious	inappropriate; flippant
Farcical	ludicrous; absurd; mocking; humorous and highly improbable
Flippant	superficial; glib; shallow; thoughtless; frivolous
Forceful	powerful; energetic; confident; assertive
Formal	respectful; stilted; factual; following accepted styles/rules
Frank	honest; direct; plain; matter-of-fact
Frustrated	annoyed; discouraged
Gentle	kind; considerate; mild; soft
Ghoulish	delighting in the revolting or the loathsome
Grim	serious; gloomy; depressing; lacking humour; macabre
Gullible	naïve; innocent; ignorant
Hard	unfeeling; hard-hearted; unyielding
Humble	deferential; modest
Humorous	amusing; entertaining; playful
Hypercritical	unreasonably critical; hair splitting; nitpicking
Impartial	unbiased; neutral; objective
Impassioned	filled with emotion; ardent
Imploring	pleading; begging
Impressionable	trusting; child-like
Inane	silly; foolish; stupid; nonsensical
Incensed	enraged
Incredulous	disbelieving; unconvinced; questioning; suspicious
Indignant	annoyed; angry; dissatisfied

Informative	instructive; factual; educational
Inspirational	encouraging; reassuring
Intense	earnest; passionate; concentrated; deeply felt
Intimate	familiar; informal; confidential; confessional
Ironic	the opposite of what is meant
Irreverent	lacking respect for things that are generally taken seriously
Jaded	bored; having had too much of the same thing; lack enthusiasm
Joyful	positive; optimistic; cheerful; elated
Judgmental	critical; finding fault; disparaging
Laudatory	praising; recommending
Light-Hearted	carefree; relaxed; chatty; humorous
Loving	affectionate; showing intense, deep concern
Macabre	gruesome; horrifying; frightening
Malicious	desiring to harm others or to see others suffer; ill-willed; spiteful
Mean-Spirited	inconsiderate; unsympathetic
Mocking	scornful; ridiculing; making fun of someone
Mourning	grieving; lamenting; woeful
Naïve	innocent; unsophisticated; immature
Narcissistic	self-admiring; selfish; boastful; self-pitying
Nasty	unpleasant; unkind; disagreeable; abusive
Negative	unhappy, pessimistic
Nostalgic	thinking about the past; wishing for something from the past
Objective	without prejudice; without discrimination; fair; based on fact
Obsequious	overly obedient and/or submissive; fawning; grovelling
Optimistic	hopeful; cheerful
Outraged	angered and resentful; furious; extremely angered
Outspoken	frank; candid; spoken without reserve
Pathetic	expressing pity, sympathy, tenderness
Patronising	condescending; scornful; pompous

Pensive	reflective; introspective; philosophical; contemplative
Persuasive	convincing; eloquent; influential; plausible
Pessimistic	seeing the negative side of things
Philosophical	theoretical; analytical; rational; logical
Playful	full of fun and good spirits; humorous; jesting
Pragmatic	realistic; sensible
Pretentious	affected; artificial; grandiose; rhetorical; flashy
Regretful	apologetic; remorseful
Resentful	aggrieved; offended; displeased; bitter
Resigned	accepting; unhappy
Restrained	controlled; quiet; unemotional
Reverent	showing deep respect and esteem
Righteous	morally right and just; guiltless; pious; god-fearing
Satirical	making fun to show a weakness; ridiculing; derisive
Sarcastic	scornful; mocking; ridiculing
Scathing	critical; stinging; unsparing; harsh
Scornful	expressing contempt or derision; scathing; dismissive
Sensationalistic	provocative; inaccurate; distasteful
Sentimental	thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past
Sincere	honest; truthful; earnest
Sceptical	disbelieving; unconvinced; doubting
Solemn	not funny; in earnest; serious
Subjective	prejudiced; biased
Submissive	compliant; passive; accommodating; obedient
Sulking	bad-tempered; grumpy; resentful; sullen
Sympathetic	compassionate; understanding of how someone feels
Thoughtful	reflective; serious; absorbed
Tolerant	open-minded; charitable; patient; sympathetic; lenient
Tragic	disastrous; calamitous

Unassuming	modest; self-effacing; restrained
Uneasy	worried; uncomfortable; edgy; nervous
Urgent	insistent; saying something must be done soon
Vindictive	vengeful; spiteful; bitter; unforgiving
Virtuous	lawful; righteous; moral; upstanding
Whimsical	quaint; playful; mischievous; offbeat
Witty	clever; quick-witted; entertaining
Wonder	awe-struck; admiring; fascinating
World-Weary	bored; cynical; tired
Worried	anxious; stressed; fearful
Wretched	miserable; despairing; sorrowful; distressed