

Film analysis using formalist lens

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Purposes

This unit is for 11th grade Advanced Placement English studying AP Language and Composition. It will be the first unit of the year. Students will already have read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, and that will be a final component of the unit.

I have noticed, as a teacher of AP English, that students have trouble using the formalist critical lens when analyzing writing, specifically nonfiction, which is our focus of the year. They tend to search for what to analyze, focus too much of insignificant elements of language, communicate their analyses vaguely, or lack confidence in their analysis, even when competent. To help students analyze language using a formalist lens, I have reduced the analysis to two questions that students must consider and be prepared to discuss with everything we read: what is the author's purpose and how does he or she achieve that purpose in this writing?

In our Media Studies class I noticed that studying film technique is using a formalist lens for the medium, and I found it more accessible than using a formalist lens with writing; therefore, in order to improve student analysis of writing and improve their confidence in using a formalist lens, students will analyze film technique and its effect on the film's message/mood/characterization/etc. to lead into their analyzing writing and the effect of language on their author's message.

Student Objectives

By the end of the unit students will be able to do the following:

- Understand the basic vocabulary and terminology of film technique (see appendix for full glossary to be studied throughout the year).
- Identify the use of various techniques in film.
- Explain the effect various film techniques have on the message delivered through the film.
- Distinguish between film techniques that have a significant effect on the film's message and those techniques that are not.
- Understand the terminology of language and rhetoric (see appendix for full glossary to be used during this unit).
- Identify the use of various techniques in writing.
- Explain the effect language has on the message delivered in writing.
- Distinguish between language that has a significant effect on the writing's message and the language that does not.
- Communicate analysis clearly, effectively, and succinctly orally and in writing.

In essence, students will be learning to do the same sort of analysis for film and writing, so it is essential that students transfer the thinking skills they learn when analyzing film to analyzing writing.

Activities

1. Introduction of terminology through Power Point presentation used with film clips (to be chosen later, depending on films students have seen). Homework: students will watch a TV show or film and make note of one film technique used and be prepared to talk about it with the class.
2. Guided practice and independent practice in analysis of film using film technique. We will watch a film together that students are familiar with and analyze the way that film technique delivers a particular message about setting, character, theme, plot, etc. This film will depend on what many students have seen, so it could be different from year to year. Right now I would probably show part of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings*, stopping frequently to discuss plot, character, etc. and analyzing how the film techniques enhances it. I will do initial analysis myself, then I will prompt student analysis with guided questions that students will answer in think-pair-share. Sample questions will include the following:
 - How is the character being portrayed?
 - What is the mood in this part of the film?
 - What's happening with the plot? Why is this plot point important to the overall story?
 - Why is this setting important to the overall story?
 - How does the film technique communicate any of this—lighting, camera angle, camera movement, camera positioning, framing, color, sound, etc.?

Once students demonstrate comfort and competence in guided analysis, I will stop periodically and ask students to freewrite their own analyses of the film techniques and the messages they deliver. I will call on students to share their freewrites. NOTE: Because I've learned that students don't learn the terms unless they're tested on them, I will probably give them a matching test on the terms they will need to know at this point in order to do an effective film analysis without constantly flipping back into their notebooks to find the correct term. The test will include terminology covering what was indicated above: lighting, camera angle, camera movement, camera positioning, framing, color, sound, etc.

3. Activity: alone or in pairs, students will choose a five minute clip of a film to analyze the techniques and what is being communicated about character, plot, setting, theme. I will provide a list of films as suggestions, partly because I know there is a lot to analyze, partly because I'm familiar with these films, and partly to ensure students are choosing age-appropriate films. (I know some students are 17, but most will not be at this point, and I am not sure I want to do a blanket permission slip at the start when I am not sure what films they will be analyzing.) Students will present their analysis of the clip to the class in a 10-15 minute presentation. They must give a brief summary of the film, set up the context for the clip, point out the message being delivered and how the film technique delivers that message, and show the clip.
4. Introduction to Language Terms: At the beginning of the year students are given a glossary of literary terms that tend to be used on the AP test; they will be taking a matching test on them at some point,

probably before the independent practice for *The Things They Carried*. I will focus them on the most common terms they will use when analyzing writing—diction, syntax, tone, imagery, and selection of detail.

5. Guided Practice, “The Things They Carried”: Students must learn how to identify the important language elements being used and explain the effect it has on the writing. To help them see how this is done I will have students analyze with me a passage from the chapter “The Things They Carried.” This passage is the one where the platoon is searching a tunnel and the narrator is describing what that is like. After I read this passage aloud I will ask students several questions to lead them into analyzing the passage’s purpose:
 - What is this passage about?
 - What impression do you get about the tunnel searches? What are they like? After we have answered these questions, I will emphasize to them that what we’ve done is analyzed the author’s purpose in this passage. Once we have analyzed the purpose, we will examine the language being used.
 - What do you notice about the way this passage is written?
 - What details stand out?
 - What sentence structure is used most frequently?
 - What’s distinctive about the word choice?
 - What effect is created by these elements of language?
 - How does the language deliver the author’s purpose?
6. Independent Practice: group presentation of analysis of chapters from *The Things They Carried*. Once students are more familiar with analyzing writing for purpose and language, we will analyze particular chapters in the book. In small groups, students will be assigned a chapter from *The Things They Carried* to analyze: “How to Tell a True War Story,” “On the Rainy River,” “Field Trip,” “Speaking of Courage,” “The Lives of the Dead,” and “The Man I Killed.” Similar to the presentation they made on film technique, the presentations will include a brief summary of the chapter (particularly the messages or themes delivered) point out the significant elements of language being used (using quotations and page numbers as examples), and explain how the language elements deliver that message. To link the use of a formalist lens from film to writing, students will also share what film techniques they would use to share this same message in a film version of this chapter. Students will have a couple days to discuss, plan, and practice with their partners; the presentations will be between 10 and 15 minutes long. Groups will be required to use a visual aid of some sort.
7. Independent Practice: essay test for *The Things They Carried*. Until now students will have done all work with partners. I have found that helpful when students are first learning the formalist lens. Now students must demonstrate their individual mastery of the concepts by taking an in-class essay test. Since students will be taking an in-class essay test for the AP test, they must learn how to manage their time effectively. Before the test, I will provide students with the following information to help them manage their time:

- 10 minutes: read the question, understand what is being asked, and plan what you will write.
- 25 minutes: write your essay. Edit or revise minimally, if at all, as you go.
- 5 minutes: reread and edit/revise.
- **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR YOU TO DO IS ANSWER THE QUESTION BEING ASKED!**

I will give students the essay test (see appendix for questions). Students may use their books, but they may not use their notebooks. The same chapters that they did their presentations on are what they will be tested on; I believe this is the best way for them to demonstrate how well they know their stuff.

Evaluation

Three things will be evaluated: the two presentations and the essay exam. I will use a checklist-style rubric for the presentations and a holistic grading rubric for the essay. (The holistic grading rubric is modeled after the grading criteria used by the College Board to grade AP exams.) Rubrics are located in the appendix.

Appendixes:

- A. Glossary of film techniques
- B. Glossary of literary terms found on the AP test
- C. List of film choices
- D. Film presentation grading checklist
- E. List of chapters to analyze from *The Things They Carried*
- F. Chapter presentation grading checklist
- G. Formalist essay questions for *The Things They Carried*
- H. Composition grading holistic rubric

A. Glossary of Film Techniques

(page 20, *Reel Conversations*, and page 3, *Seeing and Believing*)

- A. Types of shot
 - Long shot—a shot taken from a sufficient distance to show a landscape, a building, or a large crowd.
 - Medium shot—a shot between a long shot and a close-up that might show two people in full figure or several people from the waist up.

- Close-up—a shot of one face or object that fills the screen completely.
- Extreme close-up—a shot of a small object or a part of a face that fills the screen.

B. Camera Angles

- High Angle—the camera looks down on what is being photographed.
- “Eye Level”—a shot that approximates human vision—a camera presents an object so that the line between the camera and object is parallel to the ground.
- Low angle—the camera looks up at what is being photographed.

C. Camera Movement

- Pan—the camera moves horizontally on a fixed base.
- Tilt—the camera points up or down from a fixed base.
- Tracking (Dolly) shot—the camera moves through space on a wheeled truck (or dolly), but stays in the same plane.
- Boom—the camera moves up or down through space.
- Zoom—not a camera movement, but a shift in the focal length of the camera lens to give the impression that the camera is getting closer to or farther from an object.

D. Duration of Shots

Shots also vary in time from subliminal (a few frames) to quick (less than a second) to average (more than a second but less than a minute) to lengthy (more than a minute).

E. Framing of shots (draws attention to specific aspect of the shot)

Interior framing includes windows, doorways, arches, etc. that create framing devices within a shot.

F. Arrangement (physical relationship or position of people, objects, and background in a shot)

- Foreground—field in the shot that is closer to the viewer.
- Middle ground—field that is between the foreground and the background.
- Background—field that is farthest from the viewer.

G. Editing

- Cut—the most common time of transition in which one scene ends and a new one immediately begins.
- Fade-out/Fade-in—One scene gradually grows dark and the new one gradually emerges from the darkness.

- Dissolve—a gradual transition in which the end of one scene is superimposed over the beginning of a new one.
- Wipe—an optical effect in which one shot appears to “wipe” the preceding one from the screen. Special wipes include flip wipes, iris wipes, star wipes, etc.

H. Sources of Sound in Film

Voice-over narration, dialogue, sound effects, and soundtrack music (underscoring).

I. Lighting

- Spot—intense pool of light that isolates a small field of the shot, usually focused on a face, a key element of the subject of the shot.
- Concentrated—bright light source to draw attention to aspect of the shot.
- Diffused—lighting that is altered by fog, smoke, or a filter to create mood, to obscure an aspect of the shot.

J. Color

- Saturation—intensification of a specific color within a shot.

B. TERMS FOR THE MULTIPLE-CHOICE ESSAY SECTIONS (from Cliff's AP)

Some of the following terms may be used in the multiple-choice questions and/or answers or in essay section instructions. Others you might choose to incorporate into your essay writing—for example, to help explain the effect of literary device mention in the essay prompt.

■ allegory

The device of using a character and/or story element symbolically to represent an abstraction in addition to the literal meaning. In some allegories, for example, an author may intend the characters to personify an abstraction like hope or freedom. The allegorical meaning usually deals with moral truth or a generalization about human existence.

■ alliteration

The repetition of sounds, especially initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words (as in “she sell sea shells”). Although the term is not used in the multiple-choice section, you can look for alliteration in any essay passage. The repetition can reinforce meaning, unify ideas, and/or supply a musical sound.

■ allusion

A direct or indirect reference to something which is presumably commonly known, such as an event, book, myth, place, or work of art. Allusions can be historical, (like referring to Hitler), literary (like referring to Kurtz in the Heart of Darkness), religious (like referring to Noah and the flood), or mythical (like referring to Atlas). There are, of course, many more possibilities, and a work may simultaneously use multiple layers of allusion.

■ ambiguity

The multiple meaning, either intentional or unintentional, of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage.

■ analogy

A similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them. An analogy explains something unfamiliar by associating it with or pointing out its similarity to something more familiar. Analogies can also make writing more vivid, imaginative, or intellectually engaging.

■ analogy

The word, phrase, or clause referred to by a pronoun. The AP language exam occasionally asks for the antecedent of a given pronoun in a long, complex sentence or in a group of sentences.

■ aphorism

A terse statement of known authorship which expresses a general truth or a moral principle. (If the authorship is unknown the statement is generally considered to be a folk proverb.) An aphorism can be a memorable summation of the author's point.

■ apostrophe

A figure of speech that directly addresses an absent or imaginary person or a personified abstraction, such as liberty or love. The effect may add familiarity or emotional intensity. William Wordsworth addresses John Milton as he writes, "Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need thee."

■ atmosphere

The emotional mood created by the entirety of a literary work, established partly by the setting and partly by the author's choice of objects that are described. Even such elements as a description of the weather can contribute to the atmosphere. Frequently, atmosphere foreshadows events. See mood.

■ clause

A grammatical unit that contains both a subject and a verb. An independent, or main, clause expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence. A dependant, or subordinate, clause cannot stand alone as a sentence and must be accompanied by an independent clause. Examine this ample sentence: "Because I practiced hard, my AP scores were high." in this sentence the independent clause is "my AP scores were high," and the dependant clause is "Because I practiced hard."

■ colloquial / colloquialism

The use of slang or the informalities in speech or writing. Not generally acceptable for formal writing, colloquialisms give a work a conversational, familiar tone. Colloquial expressions in writing include local or regional dialects.

■ conceit

A fanciful expression, usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects. A conceit displays intellectual cleverness due to the unusual comparison being made.

■ connotation

The non-literal, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning. Connotations may involve ideas, emotions, or attitudes. See denotation.

■ denotation

The strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, devoid of any emotion, attitude, or color. See connotation.

■ diction

Related to the style, diction refers to the writer's word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness. For the AP exam, you should be able to describe an author's diction (for example, formal or informal, ornate or plain) and understand the ways in which diction can complement the author's purpose. Diction, combined with syntax, figurative language, literary devices, etc., creates an author's style. See syntax.

■ didactic

From the Greek, didactic literally means "teaching." Didactic works have the primary aim of teaching or instructing, especially the teaching of moral or ethical principles.

■ euphemism

From the Greek for "good speech," euphemisms are a more agreeable or less offensive substitute for a generally unpleasant word or concept. The euphemism may be used to adhere to standards of social or political correctness or to add humor or ironic understatement. Saying "earthly remains" rather than "corpse" is an example of euphemism.

■ extended metaphor

A metaphor developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout a work. See metaphor.

■ figurative language

Writing or speech that is not intended to carry literal meaning and is usually meant to be imaginative and vivid. See figure of speech.

■ figure of speech

A device used to produce figurative language. Many compare dissimilar things. Figures of speech include, for example, apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, paradox, personification, simile, synecdoche, and understatement.

■ generic conventions

This term describes traditions for each genre. These conventions help to define each genre; for example, they differentiate between an essay and journalistic writing or an autobiography and political writing. On the AP language exam, try to distinguish the unique features of a writer's work from those dictated by convention.

■ genre

The major category into which a literary work fits. The basic divisions of literature are prose, poetry, and drama. However, genre is a flexible term; within these broad boundaries exist many subdivisions that are often called genres themselves. For example, prose can be divided into fiction (novels and short stories) or nonfiction (essays, biographies, autobiographies, etc.). Poetry can be divided into lyric, dramatic, narrative, epic etc. Drama can be divided into tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, etc. On the AP language exam, expect the majority of the passages to be from the following genres: autobiography, biography, diaries, criticism, essays, and journalistic, political, scientific, and nature writing.

■ homily

This term literally means "sermon," but more informally, it can include any serious talk, speech, or lecture involving moral or spiritual advice.

■ hyperbole

A figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement. Hyperboles often have a comic effect; however, a serious effect is also possible. Often, hyperbole produces irony at the same time.

■ imagery

The sensory details or figurative language used to describe, arouse emotion, or represent abstractions. On a physical level, imagery uses terms related to the five senses; we refer to visual auditory, tactile, gustatory, or olfactory imagery. On a broader and deeper level, however, one image can represent more than one thing. For example, a rose may present visual imagery while also representing the color in a woman's cheeks. An author, therefore, may use complex imagery while simultaneously employing other figures of speech, especially metaphor and simile. In addition, this term can apply to the total of all the images in a work. On the AP exam, pay attention to how an author creates imagery and to the effect of that imagery.

■ inference / infer

To draw a reasonable conclusion from the information presented. When a multiple-choice question asks for an inference to be drawn from a passage, the most direct, most reasonable inference is the safest answer choice. If an inference is implausible, it's unlikely to be the correct answer. Note that if the answer choice is directly stated, it is not inferred and is wrong.

■ invective

An emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language.

■ irony / ironic

The contrast between that is stated explicitly and what is really meant. The difference between what appears to be and what is actually true. In general, there are three major types of irony used in language: (1) In verbal irony, the words literally state the opposite of the writer's (or speaker's) true meaning. (2) In situational irony, events turn out the opposite of what was expected. What the characters and readers think ought to happen is not what does happen. (3) In dramatic irony, facts or events are unknown to a character in a play or piece of fiction but known to the reader, audience, or other characters in the work. Irony is used for many reasons, but frequently, it's used to create poignancy or humor.

■ loose sentence

A type of sentence in which the main idea (independent clause) comes first, followed by dependant grammatical units such as phrases and clauses. If a period were placed at the end of the independent clause, the clause would be a complete sentence. A work containing many loose sentences often seems informal, relaxed, and conversational. See periodic sentence.

■ metaphor

A figure of speech using implied comparison of seemingly unlike things or the substitution of one for the other, suggesting some similarity. Metaphorical language makes writing more vivid, imaginative, thought provoking, and meaningful. See simile.

■ metonymy

A term from the Greek meaning "changed label" or "substitute name," metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of one object is substituted for that of another closely associated with it. A news release that claims "the White House declared" rather than "the President declared" is using metonymy. This term is unlikely to be used in the multiple-choice section, but you might see examples of metonymy in an essay passage.

■ mood

This term has two distinct technical meanings in English writing. The first meaning is grammatical and deals with verbal units and a speaker's attitude. The indicative mood is used for factual sentences. For example, "Joe eats too quickly." The subjunctive mood is used for a doubtful or conditional attitude. For example, "If I were you, I'd get another job." The imperative mood is used for commands. For example, "Shut the door!" The second meaning of mood is literary, meaning the prevailing atmosphere or emotional aura of a work. Setting, tone, and events can affect the mood. In this usage, mood is similar to tone and atmosphere.

■ narrative

The telling of a story or an account of an event or series of events.

■ onomatopoeia

A figure of speech in which natural sounds are imitated in the sounds of words. Simple examples include such words as buzz, hiss, hum, crack, whinny, and murmur. This term is not used in the multiple-choice section. If you identify examples of onomatopoeia in an essay passage, note the effect.

■ oxymoron

From the Greek for “pointed foolish,” an oxymoron is a figure of speech wherein the author groups apparently contradictory terms to suggest a paradox. Simple examples include “jumbo shrimp” and “cruel kindness.” This term does not appear in the multiple-choice questions, but there is a slight chance you will see it used by an author in an essay passage or find it useful in your own essay writing.

■ paradox

A statement that appears to be self-contradictory or opposed to common sense but upon closer inspection contains some degree of truth or validity. The first scene of *Macbeth*, for example, closes with the witches’ cryptic remark “Fair is foul, and foul is fair....”

■ parallelism

Also referred to as a parallel construction or parallel structure, this term comes from Greek roots meaning “beside on another.” It refers to the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to give structural similarity. This can involve, but is not limited to, repetition of a grammatical element such as parallelism begins Charles Dickens’s novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity....” The effects of parallelism are numerous, but frequently, they act as an organization, or simply provide a musical rhythm.

■ parody

A work that closely imitates the style or content of another with the specific aim of comic effect and/or ridicule. As comedy, parody distorts or exaggerates distinctive features of the original. As ridicule, it mimics the work by repeating and borrowing words, phrases, or characteristic order to illuminate weaknesses in the original. Well-written parody offers enlightenment about the original, but poorly written parody offers only intellectual imitation. Usually an audience must grasp literary allusion and understand the work being parodied in order to fully appreciate the nuances of the newer work. Occasionally, however, parodies take on a life of their own and don’t require knowledge of the original.

■ pedantic

An adjective that describes words, phrases, or general tone that is overly scholarly, academic, or bookish.

■ periodic sentence

A sentence that presents its central meaning in a main clause at the end. This independent clause is preceded by a phrase or clause that cannot stand alone. For example: “Ecstatic with my AP scores, I let out a loud shout of joy!” The effect of a periodic sentence is to add emphasis and structural variety. See loose sentence.

■ personification

A figure of speech in which the author presents or describes concepts, animals, or inanimate objects by endowing them with human attributes or emotions. Personification is used to make these abstractions, animals, or objects appear more vivid to the reader.

■ point of view

In literature, the perspective from which a story is told. There are two general divisions of point of view and many subdivisions within those. (1) The first person narrator tells the story with the first person pronoun, “I,” and is a character in the story. This narrator can be the protagonist (the hero or heroine), a participant (a character in a secondary role), or an observer (a character who merely watches the action). (2) the third person narrator relates the events with the third person pronouns, “he,” “she,” and “it.” There are two main subdivisions to be aware of: omniscient and limited omniscient. In the “third person omniscient” point of view, the narrator, with godlike knowledge, presents the thoughts and actions of any or all characters. This all-knowing narrator can reveal what each character feels and thinks at any given moment. The “third person limited omniscient” point of view, as its name implies, presents the feelings and thoughts of only one character, presenting only the actions of all remaining characters. This definition applies in question in the multiple-choice section. However, on the essay portion of the exam, the term “point of view” carries a different meaning. When you’re asked to analyze an author’s point of view, the appropriate point for you to address is the author’s attitude.

■ predicate adjective

One type of subject complement — an adjective, group of adjectives, or adjective clause that follows a linking verb. It is in the predicate of the sentence, and modifies, or describes, the subject. For example, in the sentence “My boyfriend is tall, dark, and handsome,” the group of predicate adjectives (“tall, dark, and handsome”) describes “boyfriend.”

■ predicate nominative

A second type of subject complement — a noun, group of nouns, or noun clause that renames the subject. It, like the predicate adjective, follows a linking verb and is located in the predicate of the sentence. For example, in the sentence “Abe Lincoln was a man of integrity,” the predicate nominative is “man of integrity,” as it renames Abe Lincoln. Occasionally, this term or the term predicate adjective appears in a multiple-choice question.

■ prose

One of the major divisions of genre, prose refers to fiction and nonfiction, including all its forms, because they are written in ordinary language and most closely resemble everyday speech. Technically, anything that isn’t poetry or drama is prose. Therefore, all passages in the AP language exam are prose. Of course, prose writers often borrow poetic and dramatic elements.

■ repetition

The duplication, either exact or approximate, of any element of language, such as sound, word, phrase, clause, sentence, or grammatical pattern. When repetition is poorly done, it bores, but if well done, it links and emphasizes ideas while allowing the reader the comfort of recognizing something familiar.

■ rhetoric

From the Greek for “orator,” this term describes the principles governing the art of writing effectively, eloquently, and persuasively.

■ rhetorical modes

This flexible term describes the variety, the conventions, and the purposes of the major kinds of writing. The four most common rhetorical modes and their purposes are as follows: (1) The purpose of exposition (or expository writing) is to explain and analyze information by presenting an idea, relevant evidence, and appropriate discussion. The AP language exam essay questions are frequently set up as expository topics. (2) The purpose of argumentation is to prove the validity of an idea, or point of view, by presenting sound reasoning, discussion, and argument that thoroughly convince the reader. Persuasive writing is a type of argumentation having an additional aim of urging some form of action. (3) The purpose of description is to re-create, or invent, or visually present a person, place, event, or action so that the reader can picture that being described. Sometimes an author engages all five senses in description; good descriptive writing can be sensuous and picturesque. Descriptive writing may be straightforward and objective or highly emotional and subjective. (4) The purpose of narration is to tell a story or narrate an event or series of events. This writing mode frequently uses the tools of descriptive writing. These four writing modes are sometimes referred to as modes of discourse.

■ sarcasm

From the Greek meaning “to tear flesh,” sarcasm involves bitter, caustic language that is meant to hurt or ridicule someone or something. It may use irony as a device, but not all ironic statements are sarcastic, that is, intending to ridicule. When well done, sarcasm can be witty and insightful; when poorly done, it’s simply cruel.

■ satire

A work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule. Regardless of whether or not the work aims to reform humans or their society, satire is best seen as a style of writing rather than a purpose for writing. It can be recognized by the many devices used effectively by the satirist, such as irony, wit, parody, caricature, hyperbole, understatement, and sarcasm. The effects of satire are varied, depending on the writer’s goal, but good satire, often humorous, is thought provoking and insightful about the human condition.

■ semantics

The branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of words, their historical and psychological development, their connotations, and their relation to one another.

■ style

The consideration of style has two purposes. (1) And evaluations of the sum of the choices an author makes in blending diction, syntax, figurative language, and other literary devices. Some authors’ styles are so idiosyncratic that we can quickly recognize works by the same author (or a writer emulating that author’s style). Compare, for example, Jonathan Swift to George Orwell or William Faulkner to Ernest Hemingway. We can analyze and describe an author’s personal style and make judgments on how appropriate it is to the author’s purpose. Styles can be called flowery, explicit, succinct, rambling, bombastic, commonplace, incisive, or laconic, to name only a few examples. (2) Classification of authors to a group and comparison of an author to similar authors. By means of such classification and comparison, one can see how an author’s style reflects and helps to define a historical period, such as Renaissance or the Victorian period, or a literary movement, such as the romantic, transcendental, or realist movement.

■ subject complement

The word (with any accompanying phrases) or clause that follows a linking verb and complements, or completes, the subject of the sentence by either (1) renaming it or (2) describing it. The former is technically called a predicate nominative, the latter a predicate adjective. See predicate nominative and predicate adjective for examples of sentences. This term is occasionally used in a multiple-choice question.

■ subordinate clause

Like all clauses, this word group contains both a subject and a verb (plus any accompanying phrases or modifiers), but unlike the independent clause, the subordinate clause cannot stand alone; it does not express a complete thought. Also called a dependent clause, the subordinate clause depends on a main clause, sometimes called an independent clause, to complete its meaning. Easily recognized key words and phrases usually begin these clauses—for example; although, because, unless, if, even though, since, as soon as, while, who, when, where, how, and that.

■ syllogism

From the Greek for “reckoning together,” a syllogism (or syllogistic reasoning) is a deductive system of formal logic that presents two premises (the first one called “major” and the “minor”) that inevitably lead to a sound conclusion. A frequently cited example proceeds as follows: major premise: All men are mortal. minor premise: Socrates is a man. conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal. A syllogism’s conclusion is valid only if each of the two premises is valid. Syllogisms may also present the specific idea first (“Socrates”) and the general second (“All men”).

■ symbol/symbolism

Generally, anything that represents, stands for, something else. Usually, a symbol is something concrete - such as an object, action, character, or scene - that represents something more abstract. However, symbols and symbolism can be much more complex. One system classifies symbols in three categories: (1) Natural symbols use objects and occurrences from nature to represent ideas commonly associated with them (dawn symbolizing hope or a new beginning, a rose symbolizing love, a tree symbolizing knowledge). (2) Conventional symbols are those that have been invested with meaning by a group (religious symbols, such as a cross or Star of David; national symbols, such as a flag or an eagle; or group symbols, such as a skull and crossbones for pirates or the scales of justice for lawyers). (3) Literary symbols are sometimes also conventional in the sense that they are found in a variety of works and are generally recognized. However, a work’s symbols may be more complicated as is the whale in *Moby Dick* and the jungle in *Heart of Darkness*. On the AP exam, try to determine what abstraction an object is a symbol for and to what extent it is successful in representing that abstraction.

■ syntax

The way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax is similar to diction, but you can differentiate them by thinking of syntax as the groups of words, while diction refers to the individual words. In the multiple-choice section of the AP exam, expect to be asked some questions about how an author manipulates syntax. In the essay section, you will need to analyze how syntax produces effects.

■ theme

The central idea or message of a work, the insight it offers into life. Usually, theme is unstated in fictional works, but in nonfiction, the theme may be directly stated, especially in expository or argumentative writing.

■ thesis

In expository writing, the thesis statement is the sentence or group of sentences that directly expresses the author's opinion, purpose, meaning, or proposition. Expository writing is usually judged by analyzing how accurately, effectively, and thoroughly a writer has proven the thesis.

■ tone

Similar to mood, tone describes the author's attitude toward his or her material, the audience, or both. Tone is easier to determine in spoken language than in written language. Considering how a work would sound if it were read aloud can help in identifying an author's tone. Some words describing tone are playful, serious, businesslike, sarcastic, humorous, formal, ornate, and somber.

■ transition

A word or phrase that links different ideas. Used especially, although not exclusively, in expository and argumentative writing, transitions effectively signal a shift from one idea to another. A few commonly used transitional words or phrases are furthermore, consequently, nevertheless, for example, in addition, likewise, similarly, and on the contrary.

■ understatement

The ironic minimalizing of fact, understatement presents something as less significant than it is. The effect can frequently be humorous and emphatic. Understatement is the opposite of hyperbole.

■ wit

In modern usage, intellectually amusing language that surprises and delights. A witty statement is humorous, while suggesting the speaker's verbal power in creating ingenious and perceptive remarks. Wit usually uses terse language that makes a pointed statement. Historically, wit originally meant basic understanding. Its meaning evolved to include speed of understanding, and finally (in the early seventeenth century), it grew to mean quick perceptions including creative fancy.

TERMS FOR THE ESSAY SECTION

The following words and phrases have appeared in recent AP language exam topics. While not a comprehensive list of every word or phrase you might find unfamiliar, it will help you to understand what you're being asked to do for a topic.

■ attitude

A writer's intellectual position or emotion regarding the subject of the writing. In the essay section, expect to be asked what the writer's attitude is and how his or her language conveys that attitude.

■ concrete detail

Strictly defined, “concrete” refers to nouns that name physical objects - a bridge, a book, a coat. Concrete nouns are the opposite of abstract nouns (which refer to concepts like freedom and love). However, as used in the essay portion of the AP test, this term has a slightly different connotation. The directions may read something like this: “Provide concrete detail that will convince the reader.” This means that your essay should include details and evidence that relate to the topic. At times, you’ll find the detail in the passage; at times, you’ll be asked to provide detail from your own life (reading, observation, experience, etc.).

■ descriptive detail

When an essay question uses this phrase, look for the writer’s sensory description. Descriptive detail appealing to the visual sense is usually the most predominant, but don’t overlook other sensory detail. As usual, after you identify a passage’s descriptive detail, analyze its effect.

■ devices

The figures of speech, syntax, diction, and other stylistic elements that collectively produce a particular artistic effect.

■ language

When you’re asked to “analyze the language,” concentrate on how the elements of language combine to form a whole - how diction, syntax, figurative language, and sentence structure create a cumulative effect.

■ narrative devices

This term describes the tools of the storyteller (also used in nonfiction), such as ordering events so that they build to a climactic moment or withholding information until a crucial or appropriate moment when revealing it creates a desired effect. On the essay exam, this term may also apply to biographical and autobiographical writing.

■ narrative technique

The style of telling the “story,” even if the passage is nonfiction. Concentrate on the order of events and on their detail in evaluating a writer’s technique.

■ persuasive devices

When asked to analyze an author’s persuasive devices, look for the words in the passage that have strong connotations, words that intensify the emotional effect. In addition, analyze how these words complement the writer’s argument as it builds logically. Speeches are often used in this context, since they are generally designed to persuade.

■ persuasive essay

When asked to write a persuasive essay, you should present a coherent argument in which the evidence builds to a logical and relevant conclusion. Strong persuasive essays often appeal to the audience’s emotions or ethical standards.

■ resources of language

This phrase refers to all the devices of composition available to a writer, such as diction, syntax, sentence structure, and figures of speech. The cumulative effect of a work is produced by the resources of language a writer chooses.

■ rhetorical features

The tools of rhetoric, such as tone, diction, and imagery.

■ rhetorical structure

This phrase refers to how a passage is constructed. If asked to consider rhetorical structure, look at the passage's organization and how the writer combines images, details, or arguments to serve his or her purpose.

■ sentence structure

When an essay question asks you to analyze sentence structure, look at the type of sentences the author uses. Remember that the basic sentence structures are simple, compound, and complex and variations created with sentence combining. Also consider variation or lack of it in sentence length, any unusual devices in sentence construction, such as repetition or inverted word order, and any unusual word or phrase placement. As with all devices, be prepared to discuss the effect of the sentence structure. For example, a series of short, simple sentences or phrases can produce a feeling of speed and choppiness, which may suit the author's purpose.

■ stylistic devices

An essay question that mentions stylistic devices is asking you to note and analyze all of the elements in language that contribute to style, such as diction, syntax, tone, attitude, figures of speech, connotations, and repetition.

C. List of Film Choices

October Sky

Gattaca

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Clueless

Romeo and Juliet

Spiderman

Searching for Bobby Fisher

X-Men

X-Men 2

Field of Dreams

Who Framed Roger Rabbit?

Pirates of the Caribbean

Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Titanic

Amadeus

Jaws

Hunt for Red October

Batman

Jurassic Park

Any Indiana Jones movie

Whale Rider

Stand By Me

* Other films may be used, but check with me first.

D. Film presentation grading checklist

1 point for each item checked off in numbers 1-6.

- _____ 1. Summarizes the film
- _____ 2. Sets up the context for the clip
- _____ 3. Points out the message being delivered
- _____ 4. Explains how the film technique delivers that message
- _____ 5. Shows the clip
- _____ 6. Meets the time limit (10-15 minutes)
- _____ 7. Accuracy 2 3 4
- _____ 8. Quality insight into how technique delivers message 2 3 4
- _____ 9. Clear, accessible delivery 2 3 4
- _____ 10. Succinct explanations 2 3 4

Total: _____/22 points

E. List of chapters to analyze, The Things They Carried

“On the Rainy River”

“How to Tell a True War Story”

“The Man I Killed”

“Field Trip”

“The Lives of the Dead”

“Speaking of Courage”

F. Chapter presentation grading checklist

1 point for each item checked off in numbers 1-6.

- _____ 1. Summarizes the chapter
- _____ 2. Explains theme(s) of chapter
- _____ 3. Points out significant elements of language
- _____ 4. Reads quotations, including page numbers
- _____ 5. Explains how the language elements deliver the theme

- _____ 6. Meets the time limit (10-15 minutes)
- _____ 7. Accuracy 2 3 4
- _____ 8. Quality insight into how language delivers theme 2 3 4
- _____ 9. Clear, accessible delivery 2 3 4
- _____ 10. Succinct explanations 2 3 4

Total: _____/22 points

G. In-Class Essay: The Things They Carried

Directions: Choose one of the following sections of *The Things They Carried* to analyze. In a well thought out and well constructed essay, analyze the style, connecting the language to the content. Avoid reader response, and be precise in your analysis, evidence, and language. You may prewrite on this sheet.

- I. “How To Tell a True War Story” pp. 86-88 (from “How do you generalize?” to “nothing is ever absolutely true.”)

How does the author’s style, particularly syntax, juxtaposition, and figurative language, contribute to his message about war stories?

- II. “The Man I Killed” pp. 139 +

Examine the way the author wrote this chapter, making particular note of his syntax, use of detail, repetition, and imagery. How do these elements contribute to the author’s tone?

- III. “Speaking of Courage” pp. 157 +

This chapter contains two story lines, Norman in America and Norman at war. Examine the concrete imagery and detail in Norman’s story in America; how do the imagery and detail combine to symbolize Norman’s postwar life and feelings?

- IV. “Field Trip” pp. 211-213 (from “I took off my shoes and socks” to “she’ll probably make you sleep in the garage.”)

What message is communicated in this passage? How does the writing—including sensory imagery, attention to detail, and syntax—convey and enhance the message?

- V. “On the Rainy River” pp. 58-62

How does O’Brien use stylistic elements, including detail, syntax, and repetition, to convey the power and significance of this moment to him?

- VI. “The Lives of the Dead” pp. 269-270

In the scene at the funeral home, how does O’Brien’s writing, especially his imagery, diction, and syntax, contribute to his feelings about death?

H. Composition Grading (from the College Board)

Score Explanation

- A In a well-written essay, the writer clearly demonstrates an understanding of the stylistic element(s). The essay is unified and evidence is specific, accurate, adequate, and relevant to the topic. The writer illustrates understanding with concise and mature use of the language. The organization of the essay is sophisticated with insightful observations.
- B Well presented, this essay accurately describes the stylistic elements, but may be less explicit than the higher scoring essay. The essay is unified and evidence is specific and accurate. While stating a clear thesis, evidence may be less relevant and analysis less significant than the higher scoring essay.
- C The average paper recognizes the stylistic elements, but may be imprecise in discussion. While evidence is adequate, it is backed up with minimal or simplistic analysis. Inconsistencies in command of the language may be present.
- D The essay attempts to address the essay question, but may fail to accurately discuss the elements of style. The tasks of the question may not be complete. Evidence is inadequate. Insights may be inaccurate or superficial. The essay may convey ideas, but weak control over language may distract the reader's attention. Frequent errors in mechanics may be present.
- F The essay fails to respond sufficiently to the question or the passage so as to distort it. With little or no evidence offered, the essay may fail to persuade the reader and the connection between the evidence and the thesis may be shallow or nonexistent. Persistent weaknesses may be evident in the basic elements of composition or writing skills. Weak sentence construction and persistent weaknesses in command of the language may be present.

Strong writing includes:

- A wide-ranging vocabulary used appropriately and effectively;
- A variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordination and coordination;
- A logical organization enhanced by specific techniques to increase coherence, such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis;
- A balance of generalization and specific illustrative detail; and
- An effective use of rhetoric including controlling tone, establishing and maintaining voice, and achieving appropriate emphasis through diction and sentence structure.