

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.

S.O.A.P.S.Tone: *Analyzing point of view*

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 be made about the speaker? What age, gender, class, emotional state, education, or...? In nonfiction, how does the speaker's background shape his/her point of view? Can you make some assumptions about this person? What socio-economic class does the author come from? What political bias can be inferred? What gender? 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 or...? 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; it may be a certain person or a certain people. What assumptions can you make about the intended audience? Is it a mixed group in terms of race, politics, gender, social class, relation, etc.? Who was the document created for? Does the speaker use language that is specific for a unique audience? 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 etc.?

Purpose: Why was this text written? You should ask yourself, "What does the speaker want the audience to think or do as a result of reading this text?" How is this message conveyed? What is the message? How does the speaker try to spark a reaction in the audience? What techniques are used to achieve a purpose? How does the text make the audience feel? What is its intended effect? Consider the purpose of the text in order to examine the argument and its logic. What is the speaker's purpose? In what ways does the author convey this message? What seems to be the emotional state of the speaker? How is the speaker trying to spark a reaction in the audience? How is this document supposed to make you feel?

Subject: What is the subject of the piece? How do you know this? 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. How does the author present the subject? Is it introduced immediately or 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? What is the attitude of the author? The spoken word can convey the speaker's attitude, and, thus, help to impart meaning, 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 diction point to tone? How do the author's diction imagery, language, and sentence structure (*syntax*) convey his or her feeling?

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

Diction: the denotative (*dictionary meaning*) and connotative (*emotional meaning*) meanings of words.

- different words for the same thing often suggest different attitudes (e.g. *happy vs. content, happy vs. ecstatic*)
- denotative vs. connotative (e.g. *dead vs. passed away*)
- concrete vs. abstract (e.g. *able to perceive with five senses, tangible, vs. and idea or concept that exists in one's mind, intangible*)
- cacophonous vs. euphonious (e.g. *harsh sounding—raucous, croak vs. pleasant sounding – languid, murmur*).

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

Details: facts that are included or those that are omitted. If a narrator witnesses a horrible sight and withholds the 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: the overall use of language such as formal, informal, clinical, slang, dialect, etc.

Syntax: how the author's use of sentence structure affects the reader, promotes 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.

S.O.L.L.I.D.D.D: Analyzing rhetorical elements

Syntax: sentence structure: Does the author use a variety of sentence lengths (e.g. *compound, compound-complex sentences, etc.*) How does the author use punctuation? Is there repetition in the sentences (e.g. *parallel structure*)?

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

Literary Devices: does the author use metaphor, simile, personification, irony, hyperbole, understatement, allusion, alliteration, satire, etc.

Levels of discourse: cultural levels of language: Does the narrator's voice represent a particular social, political, or cultural viewpoint or perspective?

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

Diction: word choice: What is the denotative and connotative significance of the vocabulary used?

Detail: descriptive items selected for inclusion: How does the author show instead of tell?

Dialogue: spoken exchange selected for inclusion: Does the author create tension or drama with dialogue?
What does dialogue reveal about a character or the author?

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

Sender/receiver relationship: Who is the speaker? Who is the audience? What is the tone directed from one to the other?

Message: What is the content and /or claim?

Evidence: What kind of evidence is given and to what extent?

Logic: What is the quality of the reasoning? What types of appeals are being used? (*e.g. logos, ethos, pathos*)

Language: What stylistic and rhetorical devices are being employed? (*e.g. What kinds of figures of speech are used*)?

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

Overview: write down a few notes on what the visual appears to be about.

Parts: zero in on the **parts** of the visual. Write down any elements or details that seem important.

Title: highlight the words of the **title** of the visual (*if one is available*).

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: draw a conclusion about the visual as whole. What does the visual mean? Summarize the message of the visual in one or two sentences.

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