

Diction

Diction Definition

Diction can be defined as [style](#) of speaking or writing, determined by the choice of words by a [speaker](#) or a writer. Diction, or choice of words, often separates good writing from bad writing. It depends on a number of factors. Firstly, the word has to be right and accurate. Secondly, words should be appropriate to the [context](#) in which they are used. Lastly, the choice of words should be such that the listener or reader understands easily.

Proper diction, or proper choice of words, is important to get the message across. On the other hand, the wrong choice of words can easily divert listeners or readers, which results in misinterpretation of the message intended to be conveyed.

Types of Diction

Individuals vary their diction depending on different contexts and settings. Therefore, we come across various types of diction.

Formal diction – formal words are used in formal situations, such as press conferences and presentations.

Informal diction – uses informal words and conversation, such as writing or talking to friends.

Colloquial diction – uses words common in everyday speech, which may be different in different regions or communities.

[Slang](#) diction – is the use of words that are newly coined, or even impolite.

Examples of Diction in Literature

Depending on the topics at hand, writers tend to vary their diction. Let us see some examples of diction in literature:

Example #1: *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (By John Keats)

John Keats, in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, uses formal diction to achieve a certain effect. He says:

“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ...”

Notice the use of the formal “ye,” instead of the informal “you.” The formality here is due to the respect the urn inspires in Keats. In the same poem he says:

“Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu.”

It is more formal to use “adieu” than to say “goodbye.”

Example #2: *The Sun Rising* (By John Donne)

In sharp [contrast](#) to Keats, John Donne uses [colloquialism](#) in his poem *The Sun Rising*:

“Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers’ seasons run?
Saucy [pedantic](#) wretch, go chide. “

Treating the sun as a real human being in this excerpt, the poet speaks to the sun in an informal way, using colloquial expressions. He rebukes the sun because it has appeared to spoil the good time he is having with his beloved. Further, he orders the “saucy pedantic sun” to go away.

Example #3: *The School* (By Donald Barthelme)

Writers skillfully choose words to develop a certain tone and [atmosphere](#) in their works. Read the following excerpt from a short story *The School* by

Donald Barthelme:

“And the trees all died. They were orange trees. I don’t know why they died, they just died. Something wrong with the soil possibly or maybe the stuff we got from the nursery wasn’t the best. We complained about it. So we’ve got thirty kids there, each kid had his or her own little tree to plant and we’ve got these thirty dead trees. All these kids looking at these little brown sticks, it was depressing.”

The use of the words “died,” “dead,” “brown sticks,” and “depressing” gives a gloomy tone to the passage.

Example #4: *A Tale of Two Cities* (By Charles Dickens)

Sometimes writers repeat their chosen words or phrases to achieve an artistic effect, such as in the following example from *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens:

“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, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

By repeating the phrase “It was the ...” throughout the passage, the writer ensures that the readers will give more consideration to the characteristic of the era they are going to read about in the novel.

Function of Diction

In literature, writers choose words to create and convey a typical mood, tone, and atmosphere to their readers. A writer’s choice of words, and his selection of graphic words, not only affect the reader’s [attitude](#), but also conveys the writer’s feelings toward the literary work. Moreover, poetry is known for its unique diction, which separates it from [prose](#). Usually, a poetic diction is marked by the use of figures of speech, rhyming words,

