AP Language and Composition Terms

Terms to use for primary targets of analysis

In the world of AP exams, the pneumonic device DIDLS is used to help students remember the devices they can (or should) analyze. DIDLS represents the first five of these terms. Tone is an important additional device for this list.

1. **Diction**—The choice of words in oral and written discourse. Remember that you will need to modify this word as you use it, so that you won't merely refer to the writer's general use of diction (since all writers use diction—a synonym for "words"), but you'll refer to the writer's use of some particular form of diction, such as the diction of common speech, poetic diction, lofty diction, lowly diction, common diction, academic diction, theological diction, etc. Look at the words that jump out at you. Here are some more ways to evaluate diction: words can be monosyllabic (one syllable in length) or polysyllabic (more than one syllable in length). Words can be mainly colloquial (slang), informal (conversational), formal (literary) or old-fashioned. Words can be mainly denotative (containing an exact meaning, but it's rare to need to include the dictionary definition in your analysis) or connotative (containing suggested meaning). Words can be concrete (specific) or abstract (general or conceptual). Words can euphonious (pleasant sounding, e.g., languid, murmur) or cacophonous (harsh sound, e.g., raucous, croak). You aren't going far enough at all in precision if you only note that a word sounds negative or positive. Be precise in defining its diction. Also, diction isn't the same as imagery. If you point out a word like "beating" and call it diction, you're misusing the term. It's a tactile *image*. Note the imagery definition and see the distinction.

2. **Image**—A word or phrase representing something that can be seen, touched, tasted, smelled, or felt. Remember that any writer worth reading will be using vivid imagery, so your pointing out that the writer is using "vivid imagery" doesn't take you very far. Also, you can just assume that it's known that a writer uses vivid imagery so the reader can sense it. That, too, isn't something to note. Instead, examine the imagery and see if any one of the senses is being imaged more than the others. Then you could write about the writer's gustatory images, or her visual images, or her kinetic images, or her auditory images, etc. Once you've decided what sense is being accessed, then think about the appropriateness of that sense for conveying the meaning of the image. Remember, the anatomy of an image—the tenor (the idea being conveyed) and vehicle (the concrete image that carries the meaning). Image is the global term that covers figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, personification and allegory. Hence, if you note that you'll analyze imagery and metaphor, you're misunderstanding that a metaphor *is* an image.
3. **Details**—facts that are included as well as those that are omitted. AP essay prompts sometimes ask you to evaluate the writer's use of details. In this form of analysis, you'll look critically at what the writer chose to include as a way of telling the story or painting the picture. Equally important will be your assessment of what the writer chose to leave out of the picture or the story. You’ll find that your treatment of detail gets very close to your treatment of imagery.

4. **Language**—the overall use of language. These are words that describe the entire body of words in a text, not isolated bits of diction. AP essay prompts will also ask you to evaluate a writer's use of language. Examples of descriptions of language include the following: artificial, pompous, ostentatious, moralistic, puritanical, righteous, colloquial, vernacular, obscure, concrete, obtuse, dull-witted, undiscerning, connotative, suggestive, everyday, common, cultured, cultivated, refined, pedantic, didactic, scholastic, bookish, detached, plain, emotional, poetic, lyric, melodious, romantic, esoteric, precise, euphemistic, insincere, affected, pretentious, exact, precise, provincial, rustic, unpolished, figurative, scholarly, intellectual, academic, formal, academic, conventional, sensuous, passionate, luscious, grotesque, simple, clear, intelligible, homespun, folksy, homey, native, rustic, slang, idiomatic, insipid, tame, dull, trite, common, banal, stereotyped, informal, casual, relaxed, unofficial, learned, educated, experienced, vulgar, coarse, indecent, tasteless. It has some similarities with diction, but it's a more global impression of a whole piece. Also, some prompts will ask you to analyze how the writer uses the "resources of the language." In this case, you should analyze all the techniques you see that apply.

5. **Syntax**—The organization of language into meaningful structure; every sentence has a particular syntax, or pattern of words, the way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax—structural or grammatical elements—is not the same as diction. 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. Consider the following patterns and structures:
   - Sentence length. Why is the sentence length effective for conveying the idea or theme? What variety of sentence lengths are present?
   - Sentence beginnings: do you see variety or pattern in the arrangement of ideas in sentences or in paragraphs.
   - Sentence type: simple sentence: one subject and one verb. Compound sentence (two phrases joined by a conjunction). Complex sentence (clauses placed in subordination). Loose Sentence: details after the subject and verb, happening now.
Periodic Sentence: details before the subject and verb, reflection on a past event. Rhetorical question a question that expects no answer.

- Syntactic structures: Juxtaposition: normally unassociated ideas, words or phrases placed next together. Parallelism show equal ideas; for emphasis; for rhythm. Repetition: words, sounds, and ideas used more than once, for rhythm and/or for emphasis.

- Punctuation is also included in the evaluation of syntax. Ellipses: a trailing off; going off into a dreamlike state. Dash: interruption of a thought; an interjection of a thought into another. Semicolon: parallel ideas; equal ideas; a piling up of detail. Colon: a list; a definition or explanation; a result. Italics for emphasis. Capitalization for emphasis (unless it's written in the time period before the regularization of spelling). Exclamation point for emphasis, for emotion.

6. **Tone**—The author's attitude toward the subject begin written about. The tone is the characteristic emotion that pervades a work or part of a work—the spirit or quality that is the work's emotional essence. In analyzing literature, look for shifts in tone. Good authors are rarely monotone. A speaker's attitude can shift on a topic, or an author might have one attitude toward the audience and another toward the subject. The following are some clues to watch for shifts in tone:

- key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although),
- punctuation (dashes, periods, colons),
- paragraph divisions,
- changes in sentence length,
- sharp contrasts in diction.

An appreciation of word choice, details, imagery, and language all contribute to the understanding of tone. To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning. A list of tone words is one practical method of providing a basic tone vocabulary. An enriched vocabulary enables students to use more specific and subtle descriptions of an attitude they discover in a text. Here is a short list of simple but helpful tone words:

- angry, sad, sentimental, afraid, sharp, cold, fanciful, detached, upset, urgent, complimentary, contemptuous, silly, joking, condescending, happy, boring, poignant, sympathetic, confused, apologetic, hollow, childish, humorous, joyful, peaceful, horrific, allusive, mocking, sarcastic, sweet, objective, nostalgic, vexed, vibrant, zealous, tired, frivolous, irrelevant, bitter, audacious, benevolent, dreamy, shocking, seductive, restrained, somber, candid proud, giddy, pitiful, dramatic, provocative, didactic, lugubrious, sentimental.

7. **Mood**—the emotional tone in a work of literature. Think of the mood of Edgar Allen Poe’s stories versus the mood of Jonathan Edwards’ sermon.
8. **Point of view**—The relation in which a narrator or speaker stands to the story or subject matter of a poem. A story told in the first person has an *internal* point of view; an observer uses an *external* point of view.

9. **Voice**—Real or assumed personality used by the writer or speaker. Example: "*She assumes the voice of a housewife.*" The dominating ethos or tone of a literary work. The voice existing in a literary work is not always identifiable with the actual views of the author (cf. narrator and persona).

10. **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.

11. **Style**—The consideration of style has two purposes:
   a. An evaluation 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. 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, laconic, etc.
   b. Classification of authors to a group and comparison of an author to similar authors. By means of such classification and comparison, we can see how an author’s style reflects and helps to define a historical period, such as the Renaissance or the Victorian period, or a literary movement, such as the romantic, transcendental, or realist movement.

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

**Terms for Figures of Speech**

13. **Conceit**—a witty or ingenious thought; a diverting or highly fanciful idea, often stated in figurative language. A fanciful expression, usually in the form of an extended metaphor or surprising analogy between seemingly dissimilar objects. A conceit displays intellectual cleverness as a result of the unusual comparison being made.

14. **Trope**—a generic name for a figure of speech such as image, symbol, simile, and metaphor.

15. **Metaphor**—a figure of speech that compares unlike objects. An implied comparison achieved through a figurative use of words; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it.
"Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (Shakespeare).

"[. . .] while he learned the language (that meager and fragile thread [. . .] by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness [. . .])" (Faulkner).

16. **Extended metaphor**—A series of comparisons between two unlike objects.

17. **Analogy**—A similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them. An analogy can explain 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.

18. **Catachresis**—a harsh metaphor involving the use of a word beyond its strict sphere.

"I listen vainly, but with thirsty ear" (MacArthur).

19. **Symbol/symbolism**—Generally, anything that represents itself and 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. However, a work's symbols may be more complicated, as is 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.

20. **Personification**—A figure of speech in which objects and animals are given human characteristics.

21. **Ellipsis**—Omission of a word

"Blow the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah."

22. **Occupatio**—the rhetorical strategy of claiming the intent of silence on a subject and then naming the subject, often at length.

"I'm not going to tell you what will happen if you miss curfew tonight. I'm not going to talk about taking the keys to your car. I'm not going to talk about taking away your cell phone. I'm not even going to talk about turning off the television for a month."

23. **Paradox**—an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, but that may yet have some truth in it.
"What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young" (George Bernard Shaw).

24. **Metonymy**—(Greek “changed label” or “substitute name”) A figure of speech that uses substitution. The vehicle and the tenor already have a relationship outside the text. It is the substitution of one word for another which it suggests. The substituted term generally carries a more potent emotional impact. The substitution might be done in several ways:

   a. substituting the instrument for the agent,

      The pen (metonymic for writing) is mightier than the sword (metonymic for war)

b. the container for the thing contained and *vice versa*,

   "The U.S. (metonymic for the U.S. Olympic athletes) won three gold medals"

c. the author for the work,

   Did you bring your Hawthorne today?

d. the sign (symbol) for the thing signified,

   “doublet and hose (metonymic for male) ought to show itself courageous to petticoat (metonymic for female)”

"He is a man of the cloth." (substituting the clothing of the priest for name “priest”)

“The White House (metonymic for president) declared” rather than “the President declared”

"By the sweat of thy brow (metonymic for physical labor) thou shalt eat thy bread." (metonymic for earning one’s sustenance)

e. the cause for the effect and *vice versa*.

25. **Synecdoche**—(A form of metonymy). A figure of speech using substitution in which

   a. a part signifies the whole (*fifty masts for fifty ships*) or

   b. the whole signifies the part (*days for life*, as in "He lived his days under African skies"), or

   c. the name of a material stands for the thing itself, as in *pigskin for football*.

To refer to a boat as a “sail”; to refer to a car as “wheels”; to refer to the violins, violas, etc. in an orchestra as “the strings.”
Different from metonymy, in which one thing is represented by another thing that is commonly physically associated with it (but is not necessarily a part of it).

26. Litotes—li’tutez—a form of understatement in which the negative of the contrary is used to achieve emphasis or intensity, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed. Litote is the opposite of hyperbole.

"A few unannounced quizzes are not inconceivable."
"War is not healthy for children and other living things."
"He is not a bad dancer."

27. Tautology—repetition of an idea in a different word, phrase, or sentence.

"With malice toward none, with charity for all" (Lincoln). (notice both clauses mean essentially the same thing)

It is what it is.

28. synesthesia—when one kind of sensory stimulus evokes the subjective experience of another. Ex: The sight of red ants makes you itchy. In literature, synesthesia refers to the practice of associating two or more different senses in the same image. Red Hot Chili Peppers’ song title, “Taste the Pain,” is an example.

Terms for rhetorical strategies

29. rhetoric—the ancient art of finding the best available means of persuasion. Those means of persuasion can be generally divided among logos (the logical appeal, considered the strongest appeal by the Greeks), ethos (the ethical appeal, otherwise known as the credibility of the speaker or the moral claims of the argument), and pathos (the pathetic or emotional appeal, useful for moving the audience to action, but dangerous when used merely to manipulate the audience's actions or thoughts by use of its emotional vulnerabilities).

30. rhetorical modes—This flexible term describes the variety, conventions, and purposes of the major kinds of writing. The four most common rhetorical modes (often referred to as “modes of discourse”) are as follows:
   (a) 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 expository topics.
   (b) 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.
The purpose of **description** is to recreate, 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.

d) 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.

31. **bathos**—the use of insincere or overdone sentimentality. Compare to **pathos**, a higher form of emotional appeal.

32. **Persona**—The role or façade that a character/speaker assumes or depicts to the reader, a viewer, or the world at large. It works hand in hand with **ethos**, the ethical attitude of this speaker.

33. **Dramatic irony**—A circumstance in which the audience or reader knows more about a situation than a character.

34. **Verisimilitude**—Similar to the truth; the quality of realism in a work that persuades readers that they are getting a vision of life as it is.

35. **Wit**—the quickness of intellect and the power and talent for saying brilliant things that surprise and delight by their unexpectedness; the power to comment subtly and pointedly on the foibles of the passing scene. It often uses humor, but it isn’t the same as humor.

36. **Grotesque**—Characterized by distortions or incongruities

37. **Invective**—a direct verbal assault; a denunciation. An emotionally violent, verbal denunciation or attack using strong, abusive language. (For example, in *Henry IV*, Prince Hal calls the large character of Falstaff “this sanguine coward, this bedpresser, this horseback breaker, this huge hill of flesh.”)

38. **Irony**—a mode of expression in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is stated, often implying ridicule or light sarcasm.

39. **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, intended to ridicule). When well done, sarcasm can be witty and insightful; when poorly done, it is simply cruel or banal.

40. **Pathetic fallacy**—Faulty reasoning that inappropriately ascribes human feelings to nature or non-human objects.
41. **Epigram**—A concise but ingenious, witty, and thoughtful statement.

42. **Aphorism**—A short, pithy statement of a generally accepted truth or sentiment.

43. **Apostrophe**—Direct address, usually to someone or something that is not present; also, a sudden turn from the general audience to address a specific group or person or personified abstraction absent or present. A figure of speech that directly addresses an absent or imaginary person or a personified abstraction, such as liberty or love. It is an address to someone or something that cannot answer. The effect may add familiarity or emotional intensity. Many apostrophes imply a personification of the object addressed.

William Wordsworth addresses John Milton as he writes, “Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England hath need of thee.”

In “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” Keats addresses the urn itself: “Thou still unravished bride of quietness.”

“For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel. Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him.” Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*.

44. **Periphrasis**—The use of an unnecessarily long or roundabout form of expression; circumlocution.

In “The Rape of the Lock,” Pope elaborates the statement “Hampton court is on the Thames near Hampton”:

Close by those meads, forever crowned with flowers,
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,
There stands a structure of majestic frame,
Which for the neighb’ring Hampton takes its name (Pope).

45. **Aporia**—expression of doubt (often feigned) by which a speaker appears uncertain as to what he should think, say, or do.

"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do?'' Luke 16

46. **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, literary, religious, topical, or mythical. There are many more possibilities, and a work may simultaneously use multiple layers of allusion.
47. **Ambiguity**—The multiple meanings, either intentional or unintentional, of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage.

48. **Satire**—A work that targets human vices and follies or social institutions and conventions for reform or ridicule. It can be recognized by the many devices used effectively by the satirist: 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. (Do not use interchangeably the words "satire" and "irony." Satire is a genre or a style. Irony is a tone).

**Terms for Analyzing the Rhetoric of Syntax**

49. **Periodic sentence**—A sentence that departs from the usual word order of English sentences by expressing its main thought only at the end. In other words, the particulars in the sentence are presented before the idea they support. The opposite of loose sentence. This independent clause is preceded by a phrase or clause that cannot stand alone. The effect of a periodic sentence is to add emphasis and structural variety. It is also a much stronger sentence than the loose sentence.

After a long, bumpy flight and multiple delays, I arrived at the San Diego airport.

50. **Loose sentence**—A sentence that follows the customary word order of English sentences, i.e., subject-verb-object. The main idea of the sentence is presented first and is then followed by one or more subordinate clauses. A type of sentence in which the main idea (independent clause) comes first, followed by dependent 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, or conversational.

I arrived at the San Diego airport after a long, bumpy ride and multiple delays.

51. **Elliptical construction**—A sentence containing a deliberate omission of words. In the sentence

"May was hot and June the same." (The verb was is omitted from the second clause).

52. **Antecedent**—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. A question from the 2001 AP test as an example follows:
“But it is the grandeur of all truth which can occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds; it exists eternally, by way of germ of latent principle, in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never to be planted.”

The antecedent of “it” is . . . ? [answer: “all truth”].

53. **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 dependent, or subordinate clause, cannot stand alone as a sentence and must be accompanied by an independent clause. The point that you want to consider is the question of what or why the author subordinates one element.

54. **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 (or independent clause) to complete its meaning. These easily recognized key words and phrases usually begin these clauses: although, because, unless, if, even though, since, as soon as, while, who, when, where, how and that.

Example: Yellowstone is a national park in the West *that is known for its geysers*. (The italicized phrase is the subordinate clause; the non-italicized part of the sentence is the independent clause).

55. **Anaphora**—the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines.

"We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender" (Churchill).

"As from my tent [. . .] As slow I walk [. . .]" (Whitman).

"He has refused . . . He has forbidden . . . He has called . . . He has dissolved . . ."

56. **Epistrophe**—repetition of the same word or phrase at the end of successive clauses.

Poland—without warning. And now Japan has attacked Malaya and Thailand—and the United States—without warning" (Franklin D. Roosevelt).

57. **Congeries**—A heaping together and piling up of many words that have a similar meaning.

"This morning you have been rude, obnoxious, impolite, oafish."

58. **Parallelism**—The repetition of identical or similar syntactic elements (word, phrase, clause). Also referred to as parallel construction or parallel structure, this term comes from Greek root meaning “beside one 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 a preposition or verbal phrase.

“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 believe, it was the epoch of incredulity [. . .]” (Dickens).

The effects of parallelism are numerous, but frequently they act as an organizing force to attract the reader’s attention, add emphasis and organization, or simply provide a musical rhythm.

"a government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln).

59. **Antithesis**—a form of parallelism. Opposition or contrast of ideas or words in a balanced or parallel construction.

"Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue" (Barry Goldwater). (notice, this is also an intentional comma splice).

"Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more" (Shakespeare).

"The vases of the classical period are but the reflection of classical beauty; the vases of the archaic period are beauty itself" (Sir John Beazley).

60. **Isocolon**—A form of parallelism. The repetition of phrases or clauses of equal length and corresponding grammatical structure.

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

61. **Chiasmus**—a form of parallelism. Two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a); from shape of the Greek letter chi (X).
"Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts and in my prayers always" (MacArthur).
"Renown'd for conquest, and in council skill'd" (Addison).

62. **Asyndeton**—lack of conjunctions between coordinate phrases, clauses, or words.

"We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardships, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty" (Kennedy)

"But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground" (Lincoln). (notice, this sentence also uses anaphora).

63. **Polysyndeton**—the repetition of conjunctions in a series of coordinate words, phrases, or clauses.

"I said, 'Who killed him?' and he said, 'I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right,' and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Bay and she was all right only she was full of water" (Hemingway).

64. **Parataxis**—Clauses or phrases arranged independently (a coordinate, rather than a subordinate, construction).

"We ran, we sang, we told jokes." (notice, this sentence is also an example of anaphora).

65. **Hypotaxis**—An arrangement of clauses or phrases in a dependent or subordinate relationship.

“As we ran, we sang and told jokes."

66. **Inversion**—The usual word order is rearranged, often for the effect of emphasis or to maintain the meter.

"In silent night when rest I took" (Anne Bradstreet).

"Happy I am" (Yoda).

"Nor in the embrace of ocean shall exist thy image" (William C. Bryant).
67. syllogism—From the Greek for “reckoning together,” a syllogism (or syllogistic reasoning or syllogistic logic) is a deductive system of formal logic that presents two premises (the first one called “major” and the second called “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 a 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”).

Logical Fallacies and Argumentative Flaws

68. Ad Hominem—a general category of fallacies in which a claim or argument is rejected on the basis of some irrelevant fact about the author of or the person presenting the claim or argument. Typically, this fallacy involves two steps. First, an attack against the character of person making the claim, her circumstances, or her actions is made (or the character, circumstances, or actions of the person reporting the claim). Second, this attack is taken to be evidence against the claim or argument the person in question is making (or presenting).

69. Begging the Question—a fallacy in which the premises include the claim that the conclusion is true or (directly or indirectly) assume that the conclusion is true. This sort of "reasoning" is fallacious because simply assuming that the conclusion is true (directly or indirectly) in the premises does not constitute evidence for that conclusion. Obviously, simply assuming a claim is true does not serve as evidence for that claim. This is especially clear in particularly blatant cases: "X is true. The evidence for this claim is that X is true." Some cases of question begging are fairly blatant, while others can be extremely subtle.

"If such actions were not illegal, then they would not be prohibited by the law."

"The belief in God is universal. After all, everyone believes in God."

70. Red Herring—This is the most general fallacy of irrelevance. Any argument in which the premises are logically unrelated to the conclusion commits this fallacy. The name of this fallacy comes from the sport of fox hunting in which a dried, smoked herring, which is red in color, is dragged across the trail of the fox to throw the hounds off the scent. Thus, a "red herring" argument is one which distracts the audience from the issue in question through the introduction of some irrelevancy. This frequently occurs during debates when there is an implicit topic, yet it is easy to lose track of it. By extension, it
applies to any argument in which the premises are logically irrelevant to the conclusion.

71. Straw man argument—one of the best-named fallacies, because it is memorable and vividly illustrates the nature of the fallacy. Imagine a fight in which one of the combatants sets up a man of straw, attacks it, then proclaims victory. All the while, the real opponent stands by untouched. The Straw Man is a type of Red Herring because the arguer is attempting to refute his opponent’s position, and in the context is required to do so, but instead attacks a position—the "straw man"—not held by his opponent or one which makes his opponent’s position seem simplistic or blatantly immoral.

72. Appeal to nature—What is logically wrong with appealing to nature? One problem is that the concept of the natural is vague. For instance, is the human use of fire "natural"? Is it "natural" for people to wear clothes? The vagueness of the notion of naturalness does not mean that it is useless, since there are many clear cut cases of the natural and the unnatural. However, an appeal to nature which is based on a borderline case will be unsound because it will be unclear whether its premise is true or false. Another problem is that the word "natural" is loaded with a positive evaluation, much like the word "normal." So, to call something "natural" is not simply to describe it, but to praise it.

73. Loaded language—A word or phrase is "loaded" when it has a secondary, evaluative meaning in addition to its primary, descriptive meaning. When language is "loaded," it is loaded with its evaluative meaning. A loaded word is like a loaded gun, and its evaluative meaning is the bullet. The problem with it is that the logic of the argument isn’t convincing the reader as much as the language is pushing the reader’s buttons.

Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unloaded</th>
<th>Loaded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>Weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>Beast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

74. Loaded question—A question with a false, disputed, or question-begging presupposition. A loaded question is a question with a false or questionable presupposition, and it is "loaded" with that presumption. The question "Have you stopped beating your wife?" presupposes that you have beaten your wife.
Sound elements

75. Assonance—The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

"and land so lightly
And roll back down the mound beside the hole" (Robert Frost).

76. Consonance—The repetition of two or more consonant sounds in a group of words or a line of poetry.

"The little boy lost his show in the field.
Home he hobbled, not caring, with a stick whipping goldenrod" (Robert Penn Warren).

77. Sibilance—the ss sound produced through the pronunciation of the sibilants: s (as in hiss and his), c (as in certain), z (as in buzz) and the blend sh (as in whoosh).

78. Onomatopoeia—The use of words whose sounds suggest their meaning.

Bees buzz, cows moo, birds chirp, thunder rumbles.

79. Aspirates—strong breath or a release of a strong burst of air. “Phew!”

80. Liquids—four of consonants are liquids: l, m, n, and r. They create a fluid sound.

81. Mutes—A mute is a consonant that cannot be sounded at all without a vowel, and which at the end of a syllable suddenly stops that breath, as k, p, t, in ak, ap, at. The mutes are eight: b, d, k, p, q, t, and c and g hard. Three of these—k, g, and c hard—sound exactly alike. B, d, and g hard stop the voice less suddenly than the rest.

—i am accused of tending to the past
as if i made it,
as if i sculpted it
with my own hands. i did not.
—Lucille Clifton

82. Plosives—A stop, plosive, or occlusive is a consonant sound produced by stopping the airflow in the vocal tract. The term plosive is reserved for oral (non-nasal) stops: that is, stops with a release burst [p], [t], [k], [n], [m].