

English 11

Composition Terms

Voice

The voice of a verb describes the relationship between the action (or state) that the verb expresses and the participants identified by its arguments (subject, object, etc.).

- **Active**

When the subject is the agent or doer of the action, the verb is in the active voice.

Example. In the sentence, “The cat ate the mouse,” the verb "ate" is in the active voice.

- **Passive**

When the subject is the patient, target or under-goer of the action, it is said to be in the passive voice.

Example. In the sentence, “The mouse was eaten by the cat,” the verbal phrase "was eaten" is passive.

Emotional Appeal (Pathos)

Pathos is often associated with emotional appeal. But a better equivalent might be appeal to the audience's sympathies and imagination. An appeal to pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally, but to identify with the writer's point of view - to feel what the writer feels. Perhaps the most common way of conveying a pathetic appeal is through narrative or story, which can turn the abstractions of logic into something palpable and present. The values, beliefs, and understandings of the writer are implicit in the story and conveyed imaginatively to the reader. Pathos thus refers to both the emotional and the imaginative impact of message on an audience, the power with which the writer's message moves the audience to decision or action.

Example. Pathetic appeal can be noted in Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in 1963. An editorial said that African Americans should just wait for things to get better. This is part of his response:
“We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward the goal of political independence, and still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’”

Form

Form is the overall structure or shape of a work, which frequently follows an established design. Forms may refer to a literary type (narrative form, short story form) or to patterns of meter, lines, and rhymes (stanza form, verse form).

Example. The form of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem “The Rime of The Ancient Mariner,” is a lyrical ballad.

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Thesis

The thesis is the central idea of an essay. The thesis is a complete sentence (although sometimes it may require more than one sentence) that establishes the topic of the essay in clear, unambiguous language.

Example. "My thesis is simple: in the next century mankind must harness the nuclear genie if our energy needs are to be met and our security preserved." (John B. Ritch, "Nuclear Green," *Prospect Magazine*, March 1999)

Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a short passage -- usually only a single sentence -- summarizing the fundamental argument of an essay or report. Typically, the thesis statement will appear near the end of the introductory paragraph.

Example. Through reading Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel," and William Faulkner's "Barn Burning," the reader finds many different kinds of love. In the Malamud story, love can have a commercial price; in Faulkner, however, love must give way to ethics.

Personal Essay

While many essays call for objectivity and distance between the writer and the subject matter, the personal essay asks for the opposite: it demands the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and personal input of the writer. When writing a personal essay, a writer will often write in the first person- using "I" for the narration- and include personal anecdotes, thoughts, interpretations, or ideas.

Example. Personal essays are often requested when you return to school (What I Did on My Summer Vacation), or when applying to University (What I will bring as a student to the University of British Columbia).

Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay is an essay that tries to prove a point by supporting it with evidence. The writer's goal is to sway the reader to accept the writer's point of view or argument. Often, an opposing argument/refutation can add strength to one's argumentative essay.

Example. Famous topics include abortion, gun control, euthanasia, and capital punishment.

Persuasive Essay

Persuasive writing, also known as an argument, is used to convince the reader of a writer's argument(s) relating to a debatable issue. Persuasive writing involves convincing the reader to perform an action, or it may simply consist of an argument(s) convincing the

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reader of the writer's point of view, with specific evidence. Persuasive writing, where one states and supports an opinion, is one of the most used writing types in the world.

Example. An example persuasive topic is reality television as a positive or negative cultural phenomenon.

Informal Essay

The informal essay is written mainly for enjoyment. This is not to say that it cannot be informative or persuasive; however, it is less a formal statement than a relaxed expression of opinion, observation, humor or pleasure. A good informal essay has a relaxed style but retains a strong structure, though that structure may be less rigid than in a formal paper.

Example. Personal essays can often be examples of Informal essays.

Formal Essay

A formal essay employs sophisticated vocabulary and is written in the third person without the usage of personal pronouns- I, he/she, etc.. It may have format requirements in some institutions of five paragraphs (introduction, three body paragraphs, conclusion) or may simply be a multi-paragraph composition where the purpose or topic is stated within the first paragraph. This purpose is often referred to as the thesis or thesis statement.

Example. A multi-paragraph composition on an examination often requires the skill of formal essay writing.

Expository Essay

An expository essay involves a specific type of writing, the purpose of which is to inform, explain, describe, or define the author's subject to the reader. Expository text is meant to deposit information and is the most frequently used type of writing by students in colleges and universities. A well-written exposition remains focused on its topic and lists events in chronological order, avoiding personal opinion.

Example. Essays written purely on one topic with the clear purpose to inform, are expository, such as the topic of Recycling.

Descriptive Essay

The purpose of a descriptive essay is to describe a person, place, or thing in such vivid detail that the reader can easily form a precise mental picture of what is being written about. The author may accomplish this by using imaginative language, interesting comparisons, and images that appeal to the senses.

Example. The subject of a descriptive essay is fairly ordinary—a ride on a Ferris wheel. The author can make it interesting, however, by comparing the Ferris wheel to a monstrous creature, employing vivid vocabulary, literary devices, and sensory writing.

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Diction

Diction is a writer's choice of words, phrases, sentence structures, and figurative language, which combine to help create meaning.

- Formal diction consists of a dignified, impersonal, and elevated use of language; it follows the rules of syntax exactly and is often characterized by complex words and a lofty tone.
- Middle diction maintains correct language usage, but is less elevated than formal diction; it reflects the way most educated people speak.
- Informal diction represents the plain language of everyday use, and often includes idiomatic expressions, slang, contractions, and many simple, common words.
- Poetic diction refers to the way poets sometimes employ an elevated diction that deviates significantly from the common speech and writing of their time, choosing words for their supposedly inherent poetic qualities.

Example. As an excellent choice of words for his audience, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has been known as an excellent example of diction: "...But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate...we can not consecrate...we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced...."

Formal Language

Like formal diction, formal language consists of a dignified, impersonal, and elevated use of language; it follows the rules of syntax exactly and is often characterized by complex words and a lofty tone.

Example. The social worker *examined* the client's history to *establish* which interventions had previously been implemented.

Informal Language

Like informal diction, informal language represents the plain language of everyday use, and often includes idiomatic expressions, slang, contractions, and many simple, common words.

Example. The social worker *checked out* the client's history to *figure out* which interventions had previously been implemented.

Colloquialism

Colloquialisms or colloquial language is considered to be characteristic of or only appropriate for casual, ordinary, familiar, or informal conversation rather than formal speech or writing.

Example. Y'all, gonna, wanna, etc. In the dictionary, colloquial words are often labeled with the identifier *colloq.*

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Purpose

When a person writes something, he or she has purposes for writing. The writer may have motivations of which he or she is unaware. The writer may also have mixed, and even contradictory, motivations for writing.

Writing can be seen as having six general types of purpose, each type of purpose focusing on one of the parts of the communication model:

- **Writer: Expressive Purposes.** One may write simply to express one's feelings, attitudes, ideas, and so on. This type of writing doesn't take the reader into consideration; instead, it focuses on the writer's feelings, experiences, and needs.

Example. Expressive writing may take the form of poetry, journals, letters, and, especially, free writing. Often, a person will do expressive writing and then be disappointed when readers don't respond to it.

- **Reader: Conative Purposes.** Conative writing seeks to affect the reader. Persuasive writing is conative; so is writing intended to entertain the reader. Writing intended to arouse the reader's feelings is conative.

Example. Connotative writing may take any form, so long as its intention to persuade the reader or affect the reader emotionally.

- **Context: Informative Purposes.** Informative writing refers to something external to the writing itself, with the purpose of informing the reader.

Example. This page is informative, as are the components of a Map. In our times, informative writing is usually prose, although in earlier periods poetry was used for informative purposes.

- **Message: Poetic Purposes.** Poetic (or literary or stylistic) purposes focus on the message itself—on its language, on the way the elements of language are used, on structure and pattern both on the level of phrase and of the overall composition. Poetic writing can be in prose as well as in verse. Fiction has poetic purposes.

Example. Anytime one writes with an emphasis on the **way** the language is used, one has a poetic purpose.

(Purpose continued...)

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(Purpose continued...)

- **Contact: Phatic Purposes.** Phatic language (and nonverbal communication) establishes and maintains contacts between speakers or between writer and reader. In speaking, for instance, we may greet someone by saying, "Howya doin?" or "Hozit goin?" These questions are **not** requests for information. They are intended to establish and maintain friendly contact. Phatic purposes are not significant in most writing.

Example. The use of greetings and closings in letters is one example of phatic purpose in writing.

- **Code: Metalinguistic Purposes.** Comments **on** a piece of writing are metalinguistic.

Example. If a student attaches a note to an essay to explain why the essay is late, the note is metalinguistic in relation to the essay. An author's preface to a book is another example of metalinguistic purpose in writing.

Parallelism

In grammar, parallelism means giving two or more parts of the sentence a similar form so as to give the whole a definite pattern.

Example. "Our transportation crisis will be solved by a bigger plane or a wider road, mental illness with a pill, poverty with a law, slums with a bulldozer, urban conflict with a gas, racism with a goodwill gesture." (Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness*)

In contrast, faulty parallelism can be seen in the following sentence:

In our society, the elderly feel alienated, because they are confined in retirement homes, their unattractive representation in the media, and the capitalist economy deems them unproductive.

In fiction, parallelism is a rhetorical technique where ideas are different, yet connected.

Example. An essay on the topic of education may have one paragraph about students, one paragraph about courses, and one paragraph about teachers, which means the essay's ideas are parallel ideas.

The above definitions related to composition are examinable in English 11.

These definitions were gathered from public domain content at wikipedia.org, dictionary.com, for students in the Saint Thomas Aquinas High School English Department.

Composition refers to the skill or art of creating written works or pieces of literature. While this can be in the form of poetry, drama, essays or prose, the terms on this list would apply mostly to students' own writing.

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Compare	Sarcasm
Contrast	Satire
Description	Understatement
Expository	Audience
Genre	Colloquial
Narrative	Denotation
Persuasion; persuasive	Jargon
Aside	Propaganda
Bias	Slang
Cliché	Style
Irony	

The above list constitutes the terms related to composition that are have been covered in high school English and are examinable terms in English 11.