

## SYNTAX, SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Syntax, also referred to as *sentence structure* on the AP exams, requires an ability to look at the whole passage to determine how sentences are used. You have been working with *words* and *phrases*, but now you will go a step farther to analyze the way an author uses sentences to deliver his message. Let's compare analysis to your social calendar. (Sounds like a metaphor!) Detail, diction, figurative language, and imagery -- these are like events on your social schedule: separate, individual events. One Friday night or one Saturday night of one weekend -- that is like diction, or detail, or figurative language, or imagery.

Perhaps your parents would like for you to spend more time studying and less time going out. So they ask you to curb your social life some (!!) and plan some time to study. You decide to prove to them that you are not a social butterfly by pulling out your calendar for last month and showing them how seldom you went out. But when you look at your calendar for the last month, you see that you have been out every Friday and Saturday night and have spent many weeknights involved in extra-curricular activities. The whole month shows that you have been extremely busy having fun! And that is the way that you must look at syntax -- the whole passage.

When analyzing syntax, you cannot just look at a word here and a phrase there. You must look at the entire passage, just as you must look at the whole month on your calendar to see what it will tell you. You must look at every sentence in the passage to see how they work together to deliver the author's message to you. Some authors -- not all -- use syntax in creative ways to express themselves, and your job will be to analyze how they do this. So the first and possibly most important point is to STEP BACK AND LOOK AT THE WHOLE PASSAGE in order to have the right perspective.

Something that students may have a problem with is using quotes in an analysis paragraph about syntax. You have learned the importance of quotes to support your analysis of detail, diction, figurative language, and imagery. However, quotes are not necessary with syntax. It's fine if you can work a quote into your analysis, but often that is cumbersome. When analyzing syntax, you need to say what the sentences do rather than quoting from them.

In this unit you will find a *SYNTAX QUICK CHECK* which you will use to identify and to analyze syntax. You will need to use this for a while until you feel confident without it. P.S. Play it smart and don't show your calendar of events to your parents. It might prove their point!

## CRITERIA FOR SYNTAX ANALYSIS

- I. The first step in analyzing syntax is to look at the *whole passage*, not just individual words or even individual sentences. Syntax analysis is based on what the sentences do and how they work together with other sentences in the passage. Read and highlight all of the passage first, and then reread, looking for any syntax indicators.
- II. **SYNTAX INDICATORS** These indicators are what you will use to analyze syntax.

A. **SENTENCE FUNCTION** You remember these; they can certainly play a large role in syntax, either alone or in combination. For example, sometimes you may find a *series of questions and answers (interrogative / declarative.)*

1. **declarative**: makes a statement: *You ate lunch.*
2. **interrogative**: asks a question: *Did you eat lunch?*
3. **imperative**: gives a command: *Eat your lunch now.*
4. **exclamatory**: expresses strong feeling: *Please eat your lunch!*

B. **GRAMMATICAL CLASSIFICATION** These sentences do not necessarily play a large role in analyzing syntax. However, a combination of the kinds may be significant.

1. **simple sentence**: one independent clause and no dependent clauses; may contain compound subject, compound verb, and one or more phrases (*John and Mary waved at Sue.*)
2. **compound sentence**: contains two or more independent clauses and no dependent clauses; independent clauses may be joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, for, nor, so, yet) (*John and Mary waved, but they did not speak.*)
3. **complex sentence**: contains an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses (*Although John and Mary waved at Sue, they did not speak.*)
4. **compound-complex sentence**: contains two independent clauses and at least one dependent clauses (*Although John and Mary waved at Sue, they did not speak, and they did not stop.*)

C. **SENTENCE LENGTH:**

short, long, combination of lengths; lengthy sentence followed by a very short one will effectively stress a point

#### **D. KINDS OF SENTENCES (RHETORICAL SENTENCES):**

- 1. PERIODIC SENTENCE** -- a sentence in which the main idea (subject and verb) comes at the end of the sentence; the sentence is not grammatically complete until the end.

**EXAMPLE:**

Sitting in her lounge chair, sunglasses shielding her eyes, head tilting to the side, her book lying open on her lap, Susan patiently waited.

The main idea in this passage is that Susan (subject) waited (verb).

- 2. CUMULATIVE SENTENCE** -- a sentence which begins with the main idea (an independent clause) which is followed by phrases and clauses which elaborate upon the main idea

**EXAMPLE:**

Susan patiently waited, sitting in her lounge chair, sunglasses shielding her eyes, head tilting to the side, her book lying open on her lap.

- 3. RHETORICAL QUESTION** -- a question which does not require an answer because the answer is obvious

**EXAMPLE:**

*The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare

"I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

**III. PUNCTUATION** Look for the use of any punctuation other than a period or a comma. In addition to words, an author may use punctuation to indicate something more than words alone express. For example, he/she may want to show mounting excitement, distress, fear, anger or some other emotion through the use of dashes and exclamation points. A question may prove to be a spring-board for the author to make a particular point or a tonal shift. The lack of punctuation may also

be important. Be aware of the use of punctuation -- it sometimes indicates more than one meaning.

**EXAMPLE** The display of emotion in this passage is made evident by the use of dashes, exclamation marks, and questions. The tempo of the passage also seems to quicken, especially as a result of the dashes.

*Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte

"'May she wake in torment!' he cried, with frightful vehemence, stamping his foot, and groaning in a sudden paroxysm of ungovernable passion. 'Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not there -- not in heaven -- not perished -- where? Oh! You said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer -- I repeat it till my tongue stiffens -- Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you -- haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe -- I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always -- take any form-- drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!'"

- IV. **REPETITION** use of the same words, phrases, or clauses more than one time for emphasis; in poetry, this device is called *anaphora*.

**EXAMPLE**

(13) "Thou shalt not kill.

(14) Thou shalt not commit adultery.

(15) Thou shalt not steal.

(16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

*From Exodus 20: 13 - 16, King James Bible*

- V. **PARALLEL STRUCTURE** Repetition of the same grammatical structure in phrases and clauses; match a noun with a noun, a verb with a verb, etc.

**EXAMPLE** *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, I 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...."

Another type of Parallelism is **ANTITHESIS**, which is used to show contrast.

## EXAMPLE: ANTITHESIS

*An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope

"Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

**VI. RHYTHM, BEAT, OR MOVEMENT** Sometimes authors create a kind of tempo through a pattern of sounds throughout the work. This pattern may be a result of parallel structure and / or repetition.

## EXAMPLE (PROSE)

*Speech to the Virginia Convention* by Patrick Henry

"If we wish to be free -- if we meant to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending -- if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be attained, we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!"

*In this passage, Henry is using parallel structure and repetition, creating a rhythm which builds up to the point he wants to make: "We must fight!" The reader can almost hear him getting louder and speaking faster.*

## EXAMPLE (POETRY)

*The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"The tide rises, the tide falls,  
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;  
Along the sea-sands damp and brown  
The traveler hastens toward the town,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls."

*In this poem one can almost hear and even feel the tide coming in and going out, creating a cadence as the waves rise and fall.*

**VII. INVERSION** This occurs, usually in poetry, when sentence elements are placed out of their normal order.

#### EXAMPLE

"To him who in the love of nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks  
A various language...."

*Thanatopsis* by William Cullen Bryant

*Normal order would read: She speaks a various language  
To him who in the love of nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms.*

**VIII. PURPOSE** Purpose is important in the analysis of all stylistic devices (detail, diction, figurative language, etc.), but it is especially important in syntax. Your job is to determine why the author used a particular sentence structure to deliver his/her message. For example, look at the parallel structure example which is re-written below. Dickens used syntax here to reveal a paradox -- contrasting situations that seem the opposite but are actually true. He repeated the structure using different examples, all of which appear to be contradictory but are accurate. Why did he do this? This passage comes from the very first page of the novel, the passage that sets the tone for much of the book. It draws the reader into the story because it piques the interest of the reader; it makes the reader curious.

#### EXAMPLE

*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, I 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...."

Look below at the example from repetition, the first few commandments of the Ten Commandments. Why are the beginnings of all of them the same: "Thou shalt not...." The repetition adds emphasis or strength to them. It "commands" the reader's attention.

#### EXAMPLE

- (13) "Thou shalt not kill.
- (14) Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- (15) Thou shalt not steal.
- (16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

*From Exodus 20: 13 - 16, King James Bible*

## **SYNTAX / SENTENCE STRUCTURE QUICK CHECK**

### **I. PURPOSE OF USING SYNTAX**

**BUILD EXCITEMENT / INTENSITY  
BUILD TO MAKE A POINT  
EXPLAIN A POINT  
PULL THE READER INTO THE PASSAGE  
ADD COMPLEXITY  
CREATE RHYTHM  
BUILD AN EMOTION**

### **II. HOW THE AUTHOR CONVEYS HIS PURPOSE**

#### **A. SENTENCE LENGTH**

**LONG  
SHORT  
VARIETY OF LENGTHS**

#### **B. RHETORICAL SENTENCES**

**PERIODIC (MAIN IDEA AT END)  
CUMULATIVE (MAIN IDEA FIRST, THEN WORDS /  
PHRASES, CLAUSES ADDED)  
RHETORICAL QUESTION**

#### **C. GRAMMATICAL CLASSIFICATION OF SENTENCES**

**SIMPLE  
COMPOUND  
COMPLEX  
COMPOUND-COMPLEX**

#### **D. FUNCTION OF SENTENCES**

**DECLARATIVE (STATEMENT)  
INTERROGATIVE (QUESTION)  
IMPERATIVE (COMMAND)  
EXCLAMATORY (EXPRESSES STRONG FEELING)**

### **III. PUNCTUATION**

### **IV. REPETITION**

### **V. PARALLEL STRUCTURE**

### **VI. RHYTHM, BEAT, OR MOVEMENT**

### **VII. INVERSION**

## ASSIGNMENT 1: MATCHING SYNTAX GROUP PRACTICE

### PROMPT

Read the following passages and then match the underlined portion in each passage to the kind of syntax /sentence structure used. You will also be asked for TONES and PURPOSE on some of these. An example is done for you.

### EXAMPLE

This passage is from a speech to the 1992 Democratic National Convention.

#### *KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE 1992 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION* by Congresswoman Barbara Jordan

"At this time; at this place; at this event sixteen years ago -- I presented a keynote address. I thank you for the return engagement and with modesty would remind you that we won the presidency in November, 1976. Why not 1992?"

"It is possible to win. It is possible but you must believe that we can and will do it....

"There appears to be a general apprehension about the future which undermines our confidence in ourselves and each other.

"...Some things need to change.

"We can change the direction of America's economic engine and become proud and competitive again. The American Dream is not dead. True, it is gasping for breath but it is not dead. However, there is no time to waste because the American Dream is slipping away from too many. It is slipping away from too many black and brown mothers and their children; from the homeless of every color and sex; from the immigrants living in communities without water and sewer systems. The American Dream is slipping away....

"We, the Democratic Party, can seize this moment. We know what needs to be done and how to do it....The Democratic Party is alive and well."

**KINDS OF SYNTAX:** rhetorical question parallel structure inversion  
*And the correct answer is "parallel structure."*

**TONES:** *inspirational, cautioning*

**PURPOSE:** *to motivate the Democratic Party*



## ASSIGNMENT 1: GROUP MATCHING SYNTAX

### MATCHING: KINDS OF SYNTAX / SENTENCE STRUCTURE TO PASSAGES

Choose from the following:

cumulative sentence    parallel structure    rhetorical question    inversion

1. *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkein

"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit."

\_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

2. *at the signing of the Declaration of Independence* by Benjamin Franklin

"We must all hang together, else we shall all hang separately."

\_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

3. *Campus Racism 101* by Nikki Giovanni

"Is it difficult to attend a predominantly white college? Compared with what? Being passed over for promotion because you lack credentials? Being turned down for jobs because you are not college educated? Joining the armed forces or going to jail because you cannot find an alternative to the streets? Let's have a little perspective here. Where can you go and what can you do that frees you from interacting with the white American mentality? You're going to interact; the only question is, will you be in some control of yourself and your actions, or will you be controlled by others? I'm going to recommend self-control."

\_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

4. *Walden or Life in the Woods* by Henry David Thoreau

"I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms."

A. \_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

## **ASSIGNMENT 2: WRITING SYNTAX SENTENCES GROUP PRACTICE**

**Refer to the examples and definitions previously given to create your own sentences using the basic independent clause below. Be prepared to share these with the class.**

*Michelle smiled.*

- 1. cumulative sentence**
- 2. parallel structure**
- 3. rhetorical question**
- 4. inversion**

### ASSIGNMENT 3: MATCHING SYNTAX GROUP PRACTICE

Read the following passages; then find and identify the kind of syntax used. You will also be asked for TONES and/or PURPOSE on some of these.

interrogative, declarative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences  
periodic sentence  
punctuation

rhythm  
repetition

1. *Speech Endorsing Women's Enfranchisement* by Adelle Hazlett,  
Women's Rights Pioneer

"Point not exultingly to our frail bodies. The body is but clay, and though you hold that in subjection you gain nothing. The soul -- the fine spirit -- escapes you. The real woman is beyond your power--calm, self-poised, and triumphant. Would you grasp a shadow for a substance? Where is your so-called free republic? Where your boasted equality? How protect your domestic happiness? You say it is founded upon love. Very well, can love exist without respect? Is respect born of injustice? Does justice consist in holding one human being subject to another? Alas! We have neither home, country or freedom, for nothing is our truly which is not our to hold and defend. It is a duty which you owe to yourselves to look this matter fairly in the face, remembering that the better part of valor is discretion."

A. \_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

B. \_\_\_\_\_ TONES

C. PURPOSE:

2. *Nobel Lecture: The Chinese Novel* by Pearl S. Buck

"Out of this folk mind, turned into stories and crowded with thousands of years of life, grew, literally, the Chinese novel."

\_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

3. *Speech After Being Convicted of Voting in the 1872 Presidential Election*  
by Susan B. Anthony

"To them this government has no just powers derived from the consent of the governed. To them this government is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is an odious aristocracy; a hateful oligarchy of sex; the most hateful aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe; an oligarchy of wealth, where the rich govern the poor. An oligarchy of learning, where the educated govern the ignorant, or even an oligarchy of race, where the Saxon rules the African, might be endured; but this oligarchy of sex, which makes father, brothers, husband, sons, the oligarchs over the mother and sisters, the wife and daughters, of every household – which ordains all men sovereigns, all women subjects, carries dissension, discord and rebellion into every home of the nation."

A. \_\_\_\_\_ KIND OF SYNTAX

B. \_\_\_\_\_ TONES

C. PURPOSE:

4. *A Tribute to Eben Ingersoll* by R.G. Ingersoll

"Happiness is the only good, reason the only torch, justice the only worship, humanity the only religion, and love the only priest."

KINDS OF SYNTAX

\_\_\_\_\_

5. *Speech Endorsing Women's Enfranchisement* by Adelle Hazlett,  
Women's Rights Pioneer

"The woman question is the ghost that will not go down in American politics. What part have we in the Constitution? It ranks us with criminals and paupers. What to us in the country's flag? It floats not over one free woman. If fortune had made slaves of us all, you and us, we could have borne it, but that our own husbands and brothers should hold us in subjection to themselves, this, this is too much for our quivering heart-strings! Of what worth is love encrusted with selfishness? Men require unselfish love, purity and truth in woman. Have we not an equal right to demand these attributes in men?"

A. \_\_\_\_\_ Kind of Syntax

B. \_\_\_\_\_ Purpose