

Analyzing Fitzgerald's Diction

F. Scott Fitzgerald's diction is anything but accidental. Therefore, pay attention to the words he chooses and his desired effect. As you read each chapter, write two paragraphs analyzing examples where you find the word choice particularly noteworthy. Incorporate the specific word(s) smoothly within your paragraph. Make sure you explain the significance and Fitzgerald's intended effect and do not merely summarize plot.

Remember to use the word *diction* when you are writing about similar clusters of words and phrases, not just a word choice.

Here are examples that might help you as you think about writing an analysis of an author's diction and word choice.

Sample #1

Nick's condescending diction in describing his response to others' secrets shows his true character. Nick says, "frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon" (5-6). Especially by indicating that he acts with "hostile levity" he expresses how arrogant yet cowardly he can be. With "hostile" behavior, he manages to express his true nature to the reader while hiding it from his peers behind his "levity," a jokingly mean demeanor. He's cruel, but he's careful not to let them know, which means he doesn't offend people whom he doesn't seem to like anyway. His criticism of his peers is obvious when he says "an intimate revelation was quivering" instead of "near" or "coming." With the word "quivering" Nick indicates sarcastically that these secrets he found so annoying seemed crucial to the person exposing them.

Sample #2

When Nick explains his father's advice to reserve judgments, his haughty nature comes forth. Nick expresses the idea that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth" (6). His choice to use "fundamental" in describing "decencies" makes Nick appear contradictory. He makes a point of describing these decencies as essential, but he says people aren't equally moral. This phrase makes Nick appear overly critical of others who don't have decency even as he discusses his attempt to not be judgmental.

