

**Topic: Diction**

**Definition:** Diction is word choice.

**Explanation:** In both writing and speech, words are selected based on the audience--the reader(s) or listener(s). The writer decides on the level of diction that is *appropriate* for that specific audience.

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### Five levels of diction

1. **Non-standard:** Word choice that breaks rules of grammar.
  - He ain't got no money hisself.
2. **Slang:** Word choice used with a particular social group.
  - That's bad!
3. **Jargon:** Word choice used with a particular professional group--attorneys, football players, plumbers, electrical engineers--which is often unfamiliar to a general audience. If you use jargon for a general audience, you must provide definitions.
  - Low wire-speed produces a poor bead.
4. **Colloquial:** word choice used in everyday conversation
  - It seems as if we haven't heard from you in ages.
5. **Formal:** word choice used in writing for a professional or academic audience.

Formal diction has certain types of words to avoid:

- No contractions. Contractions are correct constructions, but they are best used for oral communication.
  - didn't, haven't, it's, she's, who's
- No use of the second person "you," except in formal written directions or correspondence.
  - When you read the Declaration of Independence, you can understand Thomas Jefferson's ideas.
- No qualifiers. These terms imply weakness, indecisiveness, and a lack in confidence.
  - maybe, sort of, kind of, probably, I think, pretty much,
- No clichés. Cliches are self-completing phrases that are unoriginal.
  - *at the end of the day, that said, going like wildfire, raining cats and dogs.*

- No hyperbole or exaggeration. This can sound emotional or childlike.
  - the best, the most fabulous, the worst I have ever seen, the most beautiful, totally.

### **Examples of Formal Style**

- Incorrect [contractions]: Barack Obama isn't the only President who's a Nobel Prize winner.
- Correct: Barack Obama is not the only President who is a Nobel Prize winner.
  
- Incorrect [second person]: If you read the Declaration of Independence, you will see how Thomas Jefferson thought.
- Correct: Reading the Declaration of Independence reveals the thoughts of Thomas Jefferson.
  
- Incorrect [qualifiers] I think that that he is probably one of the greatest Americans.
- Correct: He is a great American.
  
- Incorrect: [cliche]: At the end of the day, everyone agrees that his brilliance is out of this world.
- Correct: Everyone agrees about his brilliance.
  
- Incorrect [hyperbole]: He is absolutely the most important person of the eighteenth century.
- Correct: He is a great person of the eighteenth century.