

You've heard of the 3Bs—Bach, Beethoven & Brahms...
Introducing the 3Ds: Diction—Detail—Description

Compelling & convincing argument writing incorporates carefully chosen, succinct, and concrete words—otherwise known as diction. *Diction*, in its simplest terms, means your choice of words—using *good diction* means the writer has strategically chosen those words to focus argument's claims, set the tone, and succinctly explain evidence. Good diction helps to establish a writer's Stance & Motive in an introduction, by effectively addressing & speaking to an intended audience.

In most writing, it is more effective to use specific, concrete diction than abstract or general diction:

Vague	General	SPECIFIC	DETAILED & SPECIFIC
food	bland food	plain oatmeal	plain Quaker Instant Oatmeal
student	college junior	art history major	History of Renaissance Painting major
author	author of the reading	Albert Camus	Existentialist novelist Albert Camus
fruit	pear	green pear	unripe Anjou pear

Avoid vague words that do not have a specific connotation (i.e. good, bad, nice, really, and very are the worst offenders), Instead, use a concrete word or phrase to provide precision and clarity:

<i>Bad</i>	bad child— <i>unruly, undisciplined child</i>	bad meat— <i>tainted pork</i>
<i>Conservative</i>	conservative driver— <i>cautious driver</i>	conservative investment— <i>low-risk government bonds</i>
<i>Nice</i>	nice flowers— <i>colorful Gerber daisies</i>	Nice job— <i>well-paying job</i>

Diction also helps to convey *tone*, as in the following examples:

<i>Bright light</i>	<i>Ominous glow</i>	<i>Blinding glare</i>
All three phrases pertain to light, but create a different feeling due to the choice of words		

“Good diction” is language that, as illustrated above, includes not only concrete content words like nouns and modifiers like adjectives and adverbs, but also vivid action verbs. However, you should keep in mind that there is no “correct” diction; instead, we choose language targeted for different audiences, different Stances, difference Motives, different contexts, and different levels of formality.

To a friend	"a screw-up"
To a child	"a mistake"
To the police	"an accident"
To an employer	"an oversight"

All of the above expressions express the same general meaning in that they have the same *denotation*; however, you would likely choose a *particular phrase* to suit a particular audience: i.e. a police officer or employer would take "screw-up" as an insult, while your friends at the bar after an OU football game might interpret "oversight" as an affectation. Moreover, keep in mind that different genres will use specific details differently, i.e. a novel, an instruction manual, or fairy tale. Ultimately, using appropriate diction will help to develop a particular Style for a piece of writing—or your own signature voice & Style!

Diction, Description, & Detail: Especially when writing from personal observation or experience as an example of Evidence you have Cited (or as evidence itself), you not only need to use clear, succinct, and concrete diction that explicitly describe your experiences or observations, you must also distinguish between *essential* and *inessential* details—and include only the *essential*. Lastly complex argument writing should not reduce an experience, observation, claim, or explanation or analysis to a cliché or platitude, which makes an argument reductive, superficial, or trite, rather than complex and interesting. So avoid clichés unless you've done so strategically and for a specific argumentative purpose (as hook, to address an audience's assumption that you will later, in the argument, dispel).