

VERBS

These verbs will be especially effective **WHEN THE SUBJECT IS A CHARACTER**. They are excellent **REPLACEMENTS FOR “BE” VERBS** and instrumental in the formulation of **THESIS** and **THEME** statements. Careful use of these verbs can result in precise identification of **CHARACTERIZATION**. Follow your teacher’s directions to categorize the verbs as **POSITIVE**, **NEGATIVE**, or **NEUTRAL**.

VERBS FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS

accentuates	accepts	achieves	adopts	advocates
affects	alleviates	allows	alludes	alters
analyzes	approaches	argues	ascertains	assesses
assumes	attacks	attempts	attributes	avoids
bases	believes	challenges	changes	characterizes
chooses	chronicles	claims	comments	compares
compels	completes	concerns	concludes	condescends
conducts	conforms	confronts	considers	contends
contests	contrasts	contributes	conveys	convinces
defines	defies	demonstrates	depicts	disappoints
discovers	discusses	downplays	disputes	disrupts
distinguishes	distorts	downplays	dramatizes	elevates
elicits	emphasizes	encounters	enhances	enriches
enumerates	envisions	evokes	excludes	expands
experiences	explains	expresses	extends	extrapolates
fantasizes	focuses	forces	foreshadows	functions
generalizes	guides	heightens	highlights	hints
holds	honors	identifies	illustrates	illuminates
imagines	impels	implies	includes	indicates
infers	inspires	intends	interprets	interrupts
inundates	justifies	juxtaposes	lambasts	laments
lampoons	lists	maintains	makes	manages
manipulates	minimizes	moralizes	muses	notes
observes	opposes	organizes	overstates	outlines
patronizes	performs	permits	personifies	persuades
ponders	portrays	postulates	prepares	presents
presumes	produces	projects	promotes	proposes
provides	qualifies	questions	rationalizes	reasons
recalls	recites	recollects	records	recounts
reflects	refers	regards	regrets	rejects
represents	results	reveals	ridicules	satirizes
seems	sees	selects	specifies	speculates
states	strives	suggests	summarizes	supplies
supports	suppresses	symbolizes	sympathizes	traces
understands	vacillates	values	verifies	

VERBS TO USE INSTEAD OF “EXEMPLIFIES” OR “SHOWS”

appears	asserts	attests to	certifies	confirms
connotes	corroborates	defines	demonstrates	denotes
depicts	discloses	elucidates	endorses	establishes
evinces	exhibits	expounds	exposes	intimates
manifests	points to	proves	ratifies	relates
substantiates	suggests	typifies	upholds	validates
illustrates	explains	represents	indicates	displays
explains	delineates	reveals	verifies	

Above verb lists adapted from Liz Davis’ “Yellow Pages”

VERBS TO USE INSTEAD OF "SAYS"

In an ACCUSING or ARGUMENTATIVE way:

abjures	admonishes	alleges	argues	assumes
baits	belittles	condescends	criticizes	challenges
charges	chides	counters	disagrees	examines
jeers	justifies	objects	scorns	taunts

In an AGREEABLE way

acquiesces	acknowledges	advocates	affirms	agrees
appeases	approves	assents	bargains	campaigns
compliments	concur	consents	praises	promotes

In an ANGRY way

accuses	crabs	curses	blurts	explodes
fumes	hisses	jeers	miffs	rages
retorts	roars	scolds	seethes	snaps
sneers	storms	thunders		

In an ANIMATED way

blurts	chokes	coughs	croaks	disrupts
drawls	dribbles	echoes	exaggerates	gags

In a BEGGING way

appeals	cajoles	coaxes	craves	begs
beseches	besieges	bemoans	entreats	expiates
implores	nags	pleads	repents	urges

In a BOSSY way

argues	bosses	barks	commands	demands
dictates	directs	insists	instructs	lectures
nags	preaches	professes	orders	

In a CAUTIOUS way

admonishes	cautions	exhorts	foretells	warns
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In a CLUMSY way

blusters	babbles	jabbers	sputters	stammers
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In a DEFEATED way

admits	concedes	confesses		
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In a DIRECT way

advises	articulates	asserts	assures	attests
avouches	avows	blurts	bargains	communicates
confirms	contests	contributes	counsels	discloses
divulges	elaborates	emphasizes	enumerates	enunciates
exposes	expresses	notifies	pronounces	

In a DISAGREEING way

argues	complains	contests	contradicts	counters
chides	debates	defends	denies	denounces

In an EXCITED way

cries	gloats	enthuses	exclaims	squeals
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In a FRIGHTENED way

cautions	cowers	falters	quakes	quivers
shivers	stammers	shudders	trembles	

In a HAPPY way

cackles	coos	cheers	chirps	chortles
chuckles	giggles	grins	jokes	laughs
lilts	rejoices	sings	squeals	twitters

In an INDIRECT way

allows	alludes	announces	averts	equivocates
estimates	foretells	hints	implies	indicates
insinuates	lies			

In a LIGHTHEARTED way

banters	cracks	chants	gags	chats
chortles	quacks	snickers	teases	warbles

In a LOUD way

booms	bellows	blasts	crowds	exclaims
explodes	resounds	reverberates	roars	rumbles
screams	shouts	shrieks	thunders	yells

In a PAINED way

barks	bawls	bellows	cries	cringes
gasps	grieves	grimaces	groans	grunts
howls	moans	roars	shrieks	wails
whimpers	winces	yelps		

In a QUIET way

breathes	confides	gasps	intimates	mumbles
murmurs	mutters	whispers		

In a SAD way

agonizes	bawls	blubbers	cries	groans
laments	moans	mourns	sobs	snivels
wails	weeps			

In an UNDERSTANDING way

accepts	agrees	assuages	comforts	consoles
empathizes	encourages	soothes	sympathizes	

As an ANSWER

answers	acknowledges	addresses	explains	recalls
rejoins	reminisces	replies	responds	retorts

As a QUESTION

asks	appeals	challenges	cross-examines	demands
enjoins	examines	grills	inquires	interrogates
proposes	propositions	queries	questions	quizzes
requests	requisitions	scrutinizes		

NOT SURE? Here's a few more basic replacements for "SAYS"

adds	announces	articulates	asserts	attests
avows	calls	certifies	cites	claims
clarifies	certifies	comments	continues	concludes
declares	describes	discloses	discusses	elucidates
enumerates	enunciates	explains	expounds	expresses
insists	informs	maintains	mentions	narrates
notifies	observes	presents	proclaims	recites
recounts	relates	remarks	repeats	reports
restates	reveals	states	stresses	suggests
testifies	utters	vouches	vows	

NOTE:

Don't stop here. There are many more ways to spice up your writing.
For example, use adverbs to further describe HOW a character SAYS his or her dialog.

BORING: Joey says, "Well, I thought it sounded good."
BETTER: Joey mumbles, "Well, I thought it sounded good."
EXCITING: Joey sheepishly mumbles, "Well, I thought it sounded good."

ADJECTIVES

FOR USE IN LITERARY DISCUSSION

DESCRIBING STYLE/CONTENT

lucid	graphic	intelligible	explicit	precise
exact	concise	succinct	condensed	pithy
piquant	aphoristic	syllogistic	allusive	metaphorical
poetic	prosaic	plain	simple	homespun
pure	vigorous	forceful	eloquent	sonorous
fluent	glib	natural	restrained	smooth
polished	classical	artistic	bombastic	extravagant
rhetorical	turgid	pompous	grandiose	obscure
vague	diffuse	verbose	pedantic	ponderous
ungraceful	harsh	abrupt	labored	awkward
unpolished	crude	vulgar	formal	artificial
utilitarian	humanistic	pragmatic	naturalistic	impressionistic
subjective	melodramatic	fanciful	authentic	plausible
credible	recondite	controversial	mystical	improbable
absurd	trivial	commonplace	heretical	

DESCRIBING DICTION

high or formal	low or informal	neutral	precise	exact
concrete	abstract	plain	simple	homespun
esoteric	learned	cultured	literal	figurative
connotative	symbolic	picturesque	sensuous	literary
provincial	colloquial	cliché	idiomatic	neologistic
inexact	euphemistic	trite	obscure	pedantic
bombastic	grotesque	vulgar	jargon	emotional
obtuse	moralistic	ordinary	scholarly	insipid
proper	pretentious	old-fashioned		

DESCRIBING SYNTAX

periodic	balances	interrupted	simple	compound
complex	declarative	interrogative	imperative	exclamatory
telegraphic	antithetical	inverted	euphonic	rhythmical
epigrammatic	emphatic	incoherent	rambling	tortuous
jerky	cacophonous	monotonous	spare	austere
unadorned	jumbled	chaotic	obfuscating	journalistic
terse	laconic	mellifluous	musical	lilting
lyrical	elegant	solid		

DESCRIBING ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE/POINT OF VIEW

spatial	chronological	flashback	flash forward	in media res
step-by-step	objective	subjective	nostalgic	reminiscent
contemplative	reflective	clinical	impersonal	dramatic
omniscient	limited			

DESCRIBING IMAGERY

bucolic	pastoral	gustatory	olfactory	tactile
kinetic	kinesthetic	sensual	sacred	sexual
auditory	religious	animalistic	militaristic	chaotic

**use these more precise Imagery words for less precise ones such as "vivid," "colorful," and "powerful"*

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS

Physical Qualities: *great substitutions for “pretty” and “ugly”*

manly	virile	robust	hardy	sturdy
strapping	stalwart	muscular	brawny	lovely
fair	comely	handsome	dainty	delicate
graceful	elegant	shapely	attractive	winsome
ravishing	dapper	immaculate	adroit	dexterous
adept	skillful	agile	nimble	active
lively	spirited	vivacious	weak	feeble
sickly	frail	deceitful	emaciated	cadaverous
effeminate	unwomanly	hideous	homely	coarse
unkempt	slovenly	awkward	clumsy	ungainly
graceless	bizarre	grotesque	incongruous	ghastly
repellent	repugnant	repulsive	odious	invidious
loathsome				

Mental Qualities: *great substitutions for “smart” and “stupid”*

educated	erudite	scholarly	wise	astute
intellectual	precocious	capable	competent	gifted
apt	rational	reasonable	sensible	shrewd
prudent	observant	clever	ingenious	inventive
subtle	cunning	crafty	wily	unintelligent
unschooled	unlettered	ignorant	illiterate	inane
irrational	puerile	foolish	fatuous	vacuous
simple	thick-skulled	idiotic	imbecilic	witless
deranged	demented	articulate	eloquent	

Moral Qualities: *great substitutions for “good” and “bad”*

idealistic	innocent	virtuous	faultless	righteous
guileless	upright	exemplary	chaste	pure
undefiled	temperate	abstentious	austere	ascetic
puritanical	truthful	honorable	trustworthy	straightforward
decent	respectable	wicked	corrupt	degenerate
notorious	vicious	incorrigible	dissembling	infamous
immoral	unprincipled	reprobate	depraved	indecent
ribald	vulgar	intemperate	sensual	dissolute
deceitful	dishonest	unscrupulous	dishonorable	base
vile	foul	recalcitrant	philandering	opportunistic

Spiritual Qualities: *more great substitutions for “good” and “bad”*

religious	reverent	pious	devout	faithful
regenerate	holy	saintly	angelic	skeptical
agnostic	atheistic	irreligious	impious	irreverent
profane	sacrilegious	materialistic	carnal	godless
diabolic	fiendish	blasphemous	unregenerate	altruistic
charitable				

Social Qualities: *great substitutions for “nice” and “mean”*

civil	amicable	contentious	unpolished	sullen
tactful	courteous	cooperative	genial	affable
hospitable	gracious	amiable	cordial	congenial
convivial	joyful	jolly	urbane	suave
anti-social	acrimonious	quarrelsome	antagonistic	misanthropic
discourteous	impudent	impolite	insolent	ill-bred
ill-mannered	unrefined	rustic	provincial	boorish
brusque	churlish	fawning	obsequious	sniveling
grumpy	fractious	crusty	peevish	petulant
waspish	taciturn	reticent	gregarious	garrulous

45 WAYS TO AVOID SAYING "VERY"

Avoid Saying...	Instead Say...	Avoid Saying...	Instead Say...	Avoid Saying...	Instead Say...
very afraid	terrified	very fast	quick	very roomy	spacious
very angry	furious	very fierce	ferocious	very rude	vulgar
very bad	atrocious	very good	superb	very serious	solemn
very beautiful	exquisite	very happy	jubilant	very small	tiny
very big	immense	very hot	scalding	very strong	unyielding
very bright	dazzling	very hungry	ravenous	very stupid	idiotic
very capable	accomplished	very large	colossal	very tasty	delicious
very clean	spotless	very lively	vivacious	very thin	gaunt
very clever	brilliant	very loved	adored	very tired	exhausted
very cold	freezing	very neat	immaculate	very ugly	hideous
very conventional	conservative	very old	ancient	very valuable	precious
very dirty	squalid	very poor	destitute	very weak	feeble
very dry	parched	very pretty	lovely, gorgeous	very wet	soaked
very eager	keen	very quiet	silent	very wise	sagacious
very evil	villainous	very risky	perilous	very worried	anxious

NOUNS FOR USE IN LITERARY DISCUSSION

ANALYZING CHARACTERS

foil	nemesis	adversary	protagonist	antagonist
confidante	doppelganger	narrator (unknown, reliable, unreliable, naïve)		

ANALYZING STRUCTURE/ORGANIZATION/POINT OF VIEW

foreshadowing	epiphany	analogy	extended metaphor	shifts
parallel structure	comparison/contrast	transition	sequence	definition
juxtaposition	anecdote	frame story	arrangement	classification
categorization	placement	perspective (chronological, geographic, emotional, political)		
person (first, second, third)				

IDENTIFYING GENRE/PURPOSE

novel	novella	personal narrative	memoir	abstract
fable	sermon	portrayal	treatise	parody
précis	synopsis	critique	verse	journey
travelogue	essay	allegory	polemic	commentary
farce	conceit	eulogy	elegy	archetype
soliloquy	monologue			

IDENTIFYING SOUND DEVICES

alliteration	assonance	consonance	repetition	rhyme
end rhyme	feminine rhyme	masculine rhyme	meter	slant rhyme
incremental rhyme	eye rhyme	onomatopoeia		