

Tips for analyzing and writing about syntax:

- * When analyzing syntax, there are many ways to talk about the pacing or rhythm of a piece; here are a few examples: controlled, fragmented, commanding, grammatically correct (or not), choppy, orderly, unstoppable, long and steady, and fluid.
- * When analyzing syntax, look at the sentence openings and try to find a pattern or patterns. Also look for sentences that are particularly verb heavy or verb light. If you find patterns or verb heavy or light sentence constructions, consider what the author wants to emphasize.
- * When analyzing syntax, it is most important to consider how the author's syntactic choices highlight his or her purpose.
- * When writing about syntax, try to break the piece into three parts where there is a notable difference in syntax (for example, where short sentences become longer, repetition becomes evident, etc.). Consider how the author's tone is changing and what he or she wants the reader to understand.

Name:

Date:

Syntax Analysis Practice 1

Directions: After reading Lincoln’s piece, write down any notable syntactic features on the right-hand side of the chart, then answer the following questions.



The Gettysburg Address—Abraham Lincoln, Nov. 19, 1863

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as a final resting place for those who died here that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have hallowed it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is rather for us the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

1. How would you describe Lincoln’s use of syntax in this passage? _____

2. Are there sections in the piece where the syntax changes? In what ways? _____

3. What is Lincoln’s purpose in writing this piece? _____

4. Select three of Lincoln’s syntactic constructions that best reinforce his purpose, then explain how they illustrate or emphasize his purpose. Use the reverse if necessary. _____

Syntax Analysis Practice 2

Directions: Carefully read the Frederick Douglass piece, then complete the chart on the following page. The sentences are numbered for place markers.



1The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom, were perpetually before me. 2It was life and death with me. 3But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. 4How I did so,--what means I adopted,--what direction I travelled, and by what mode of conveyance,--I must leave unexplained, for the reasons before mentioned.

5I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State. 6I have never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself. 7It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. 8I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate. 9In writing to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival at New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. 10This state of mind, however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. 11I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery. 12This in itself was enough to damp the ardor of my enthusiasm. 13But the loneliness overcame me. 14There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren--children of a common Father, and yet I dared not to unfold to any one of them my sad condition. 15I was afraid to speak to any one for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait for the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey. 16The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this--"Trust no man!" 17I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. 18It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. 19Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land--a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders--whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers--where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey!--I say, let him place himself in my situation--without home or friends--without money or credit--wanting shelter, and no one to give it-- wanting bread, and no money to buy it,--and at the same time let him feel that he is pursued by merciless men-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go, or where to stay,--perfectly helpless both as to the means of defense and means of escape,--in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawings of hunger,--in the midst of houses, yet having no home,--among fellow-men, yet feeling as if in the midst of wild beasts, whose greediness to swallow up the trembling and half-famished fugitive is only equalled by that with which the monsters of the deep swallow up the helpless fish upon which they subsist,--I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation,--the situation in which I was placed, --then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.

--Excerpt from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*--Frederick Douglass, 1854

Name: _____

Date: _____

Syntax Analysis Chart

Directions: After reading the Douglass piece, determine his purpose before adding five syntactic features that establish purpose, reflect action or provide emphasis to the chart. After completing the chart, write a healthy paragraph that addresses Douglass's purpose in writing the piece and how his syntax conveys that purpose using three of your five examples as support for your argument (remember to introduce and explain all quotes used).

Douglass's purpose in writing this piece:

Sentence Number	Notable Syntactic Features	How Syntactic Features Establish Purpose, Reflect Action, or Provide Emphasis
1	Parallelism, antithesis	Douglass's parallelism and antithesis both attempt to balance his strongly polar feelings about his captivity and freedom.