

Course Companion

AP English Language and Composition

Every topic handout in one volume

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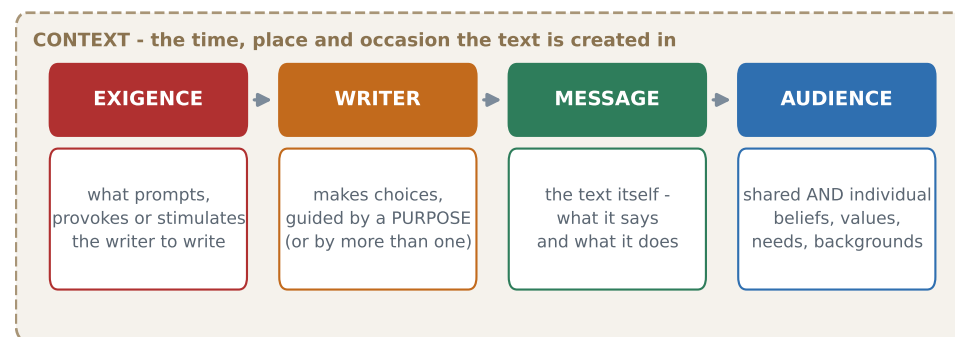
Claims, Evidence, and the Rhetorical Situation

AP English Language and Composition

The Rhetorical Situation

AP English Language is not a literature course. It is a course in **how texts do work on readers**, and Unit 1 installs the two ideas everything else is built on: the **rhetorical situation** and the **claim-plus-evidence** paragraph.

The rhetorical situation - and the order runs left to right



*The sentence every rhetorical-analysis answer needs:
this writer, prompted by this exigence, made this choice to move this audience toward this purpose.*

Exigence prompts the writer; context surrounds everything - and every question about “choices” is answered from here

The CED defines the **rhetorical situation** as the **exigence, purpose, audience, writer, context, and message** taken together. Each has a precise meaning, and using them precisely is what separates a strong answer from a vague one:

- The **exigence** is the part of the situation that **inspires, stimulates, provokes, or prompts a writer to create a text**. It is the reason this text exists *now*.
- The **purpose** is what the writer hopes to accomplish. A text may have **more than one purpose**.
- The **audience** has **shared as well as individual** beliefs, values, needs, and backgrounds - so “the audience” is never a single uniform thing.

- The **context** includes the **time, place, and occasion** in which the text was created.
- The **message** is what the text actually says and does.

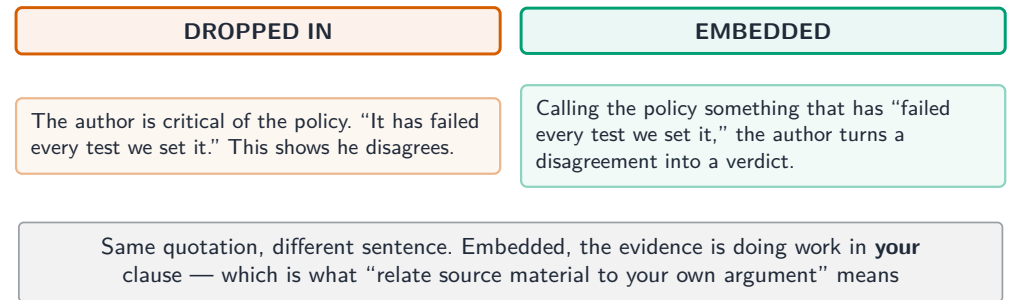
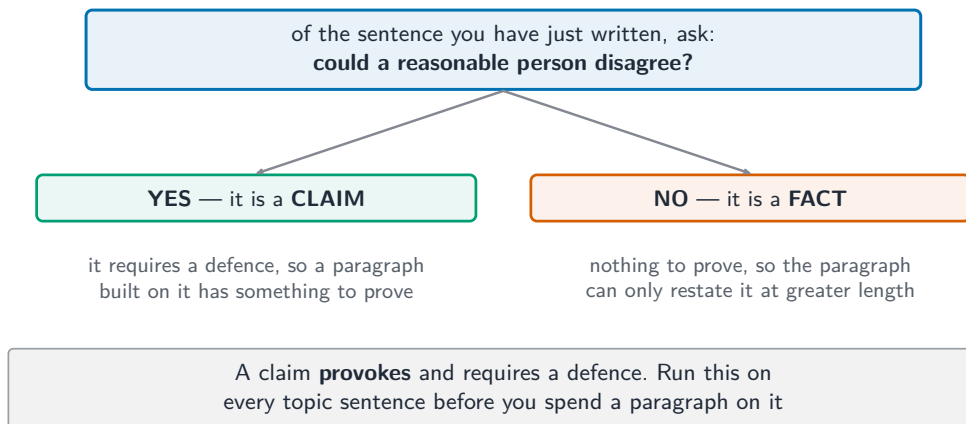
The most common weak answer in this course names a device and stops. The rhetorical situation is what turns a device into an argument: *this writer, prompted by this exigence, made this choice to move this audience toward this purpose.*

Identifying Claims and Evidence

- Writers convey their positions through one or more **claims** that require a defence.
- Writers defend their claims with **evidence and/or reasoning**.
- Types of evidence include **facts, anecdotes, analogies, statistics, examples, details, illustrations, expert opinions**, and personal experience - a deliberately wide list, because recognising an anecdote or an analogy *as* evidence is itself a skill.
- **Effective claims provoke interest and require a defence**, rather than stating an obvious, known fact that requires no proof.

That fourth point is the most useful test you have. Ask of any sentence: *could a reasonable person disagree?* If not, it is not a claim - it is a fact, and building a paragraph on it produces writing with nothing to prove.

Finally, writers **relate source material to their own argument by syntactically embedding** quoted, paraphrased, or summarised material into their own sentences. The evidence is not dropped in beside your sentence; it is built into it.



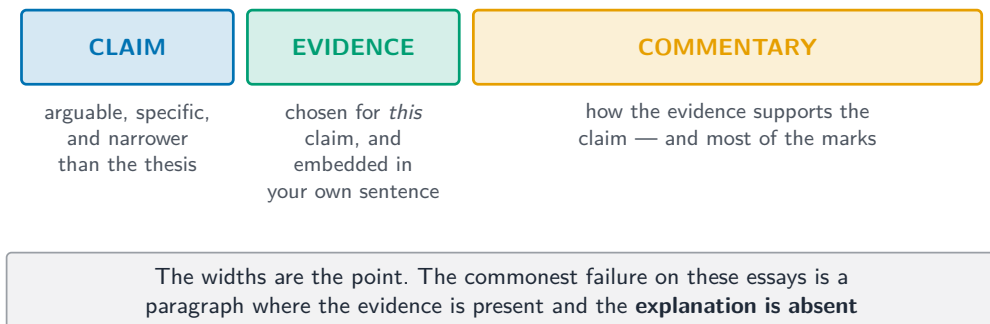
Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

Unit 1's writing objective is deliberately small: **write one paragraph containing a claim and evidence that supports it.** Everything later in the course is an elaboration of this.

A working shape:

1. A **claim** that requires defence - arguable, specific, and narrower than the whole thesis.
2. **Evidence** chosen because it supports *this* claim, embedded syntactically rather than dropped in.
3. **Commentary** explaining how the evidence supports the claim - the step students skip, and the one that carries most of the marks on the exam.

The single most common failure on the AP Language essays is a paragraph in which the evidence is present and the explanation is absent. The reader can see the quotation; what they cannot see is why you think it proves your point.



What the Exam Actually Asks

The free-response section has three questions, and they use the same skills in different arrangements:

- **Question 1, Synthesis** : you are given several sources and must build **your own argument**, using the sources as evidence rather than summarising them.
- **Question 2, Rhetorical Analysis** : you are given one text and must explain **the choices the writer makes** and how those choices contribute to purpose - which is the rhetorical situation applied.
- **Question 3, Argument** : you are given a claim or a scenario and must argue a position, using evidence from your own knowledge and experience.

All three are marked on a **six-point rubric** with the same three rows: **thesis (1 point)**, **evidence and commentary (4 points)**, and **sophistication (1 point)**. Knowing that shape from Unit 1 tells you where the marks are: four of the six come from evidence *and the commentary on it*, so a plan that produces evidence without explanation caps you at low marks no matter how good the writing sounds.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Rhetorical Analysis prompt asks you to “*explain the writer’s rhetorical choices*” in a given passage. A row-scoring answer does not say “*the writer uses a rhetorical question.*” It says: “*Faced with an audience that already agrees on the problem but not on its urgency, the writer opens with a question rather than a statement, forcing readers to supply the answer themselves and so to feel the conclusion as their own rather than as one imposed on them.*” Notice what earns the points: the **audience**, the **choice**, and the **effect on purpose** - the rhetorical situation, used.

Exam tips

- Learn the **six components** by name and use the names. Precision here is directly rewarded.
- **Exigence is not the same as purpose.** Exigence is what prompted the text; purpose is what the writer wants to achieve.
- Test every claim with *could a reasonable person disagree?* If not, it is a fact, not a claim.
- **Embed** evidence in your own sentence. Dropped quotations read as unprocessed.
- **Four of six points are evidence and commentary.** Write the commentary; it is where most lost marks live.
- Never name a device without saying **what it does to the audience**. A device with no effect earns nothing.

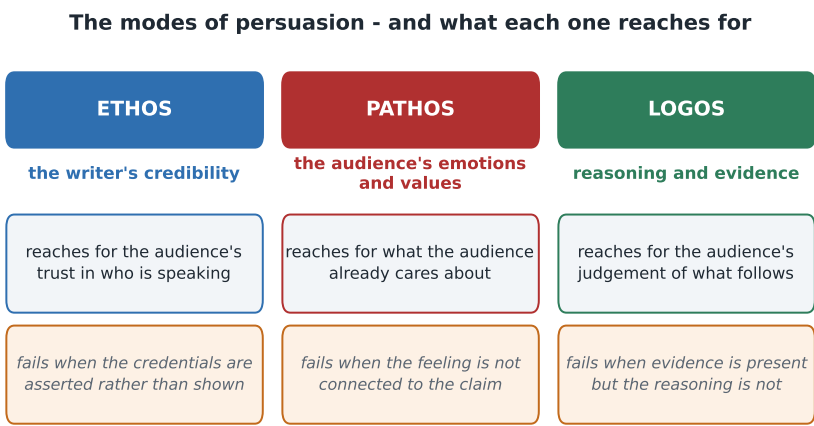
Audience, Thesis, and Supporting Evidence

AP English Language and Composition

Understanding an Audience’s Beliefs and Needs

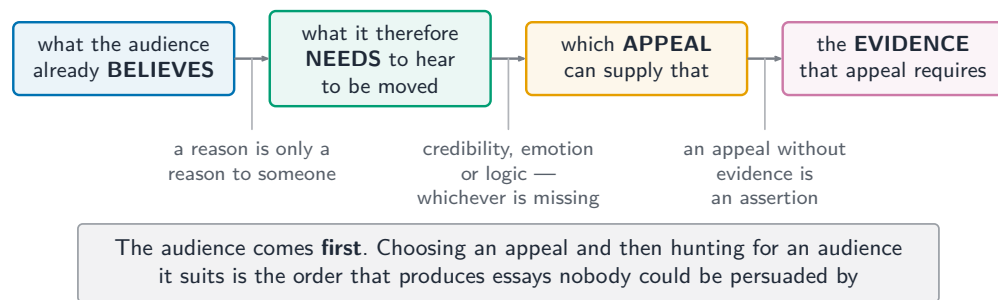
Unit 1 established that a text has an audience. Unit 2 makes that audience the engine of every choice a writer makes.

- **Writers’ perceptions of an audience’s values, beliefs, needs, and background guide the choices they make.** Note the word *perceptions*: what steers the writing is the writer’s picture of the audience, which may be accurate or not.
- To achieve a purpose, writers make choices in an attempt to **relate to an intended audience’s emotions and values** .
- Arguments seek to persuade or motivate action through **appeals** - the **modes of persuasion** .



An answer that names the appeal has labelled it. An answer that names what it reaches for has analysed it.

Naming the appeal is worth nothing on its own; naming what it reaches for is the analysis



Writing for an Audience’s Beliefs and Needs

The same three statements now become a writing instruction. Before drafting, decide:

- What does this audience already **believe** about the subject?
- What do they **need** - information, reassurance, a reason to act?
- What do they **value**, and which of those values can honestly be connected to my position?

An argument that ignores these produces writing addressed to nobody. And the CED’s framing gives you a useful test for your own drafts: *if this paragraph would read identically to a completely different audience, it has not been shaped by one.*

Identifying Claims and Evidence

Unit 2 deepens Unit 1’s treatment of evidence with three claims about **how** evidence works:

- Writers use evidence **strategically and purposefully** to **illustrate, clarify, set a mood, exemplify, associate, or amplify** Evidence does a *job*, and naming that job is analysis.
- **Strategically selected evidence strengthens the validity and reasoning of the argument**, relates to an audience’s **emotions and values**, and helps establish the writer’s **credibility**
- An effective argument contains **sufficient evidence** - sufficient when its **quantity and quality** provide apt support for the line of reasoning.

That third point is often misread as “more is better”. Sufficiency is quantity **and** quality together: three well-chosen pieces of evidence that bear directly on the claim beat six that only touch it.

TYPE	WHAT IT CAN ESTABLISH	WHAT IT CANNOT
facts and statistics	scale, and that a pattern is real	that the pattern matters to a reader
anecdotes and examples	that the thing happens, and how it feels	that it is typical
analogies	a structure the reader already accepts	anything, if the two cases differ where it counts
expert opinion	that informed people hold the view	that they are right

The third column is why writers combine them. A statistic and an anecdote are not **interchangeable** — each covers the other’s gap

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

Applying the above to your own writing, choose each piece of evidence for a stated reason. In practice this means being able to finish the sentence: *I am using this piece because it ...*

- ... illustrates a claim that would otherwise stay abstract;
- ... establishes my credibility on a subject where readers may doubt it;
- ... connects my position to a value the audience already holds.

Evidence chosen this way produces commentary almost automatically, because you already know what the evidence is doing. Evidence chosen because it was available produces the blank space where commentary should be.

Identifying the Overarching Thesis

- A **thesis** . . . is the **main, overarching claim** a writer seeks to defend or prove by using reasoning supported by evidence.
- A writer’s thesis is **not necessarily a single sentence or an explicit statement**, and may require a thorough reading to identify.

That second point matters for the reading side of the exam. On a rhetorical-analysis passage, the thesis may be distributed across the text or implied by its structure. Do not assume the first sentence of the second paragraph is the thesis because that is where you would put yours.

Writing a Thesis Statement

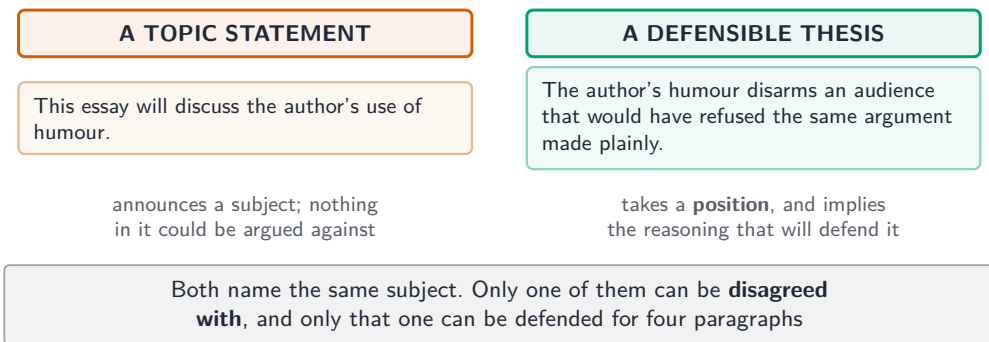
The writing objective is precise: **write a thesis statement that requires proof or defence and that may preview the structure of the argument.**

Two independent requirements sit in that sentence:

- It must **require defence**. Apply the Unit 1 test again: could a reasonable person disagree? A thesis that states a fact cannot be defended, only repeated.
- It **may preview the structure** - optional, but useful, because a thesis that names the lines of reasoning it will pursue gives the essay its shape.

On the exam, the **thesis point is one of six** and it is the cheapest point on the rubric: a defensible thesis in response to the prompt earns it. A restatement of the prompt does not.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). For a Question 3 argument prompt asking you to take a position on the value of a proposed practice, compare two openings. *“There are many arguments both for and against this practice.”* - that earns nothing, because nobody could disagree with it. *“Because the practice rewards visible effort rather than actual improvement, it produces the appearance of progress while removing the incentive to seek it.”* - that earns the point: it is arguable, specific, and it previews the reasoning the essay will develop.



Exam tips

- The audience drives everything. If a paragraph would read the same to any audience, it has not been shaped for one.
- Name **what evidence does** - illustrate, clarify, associate, amplify. That is analysis; listing evidence is not.

- **Sufficiency is quantity and quality**, not volume. Three apt pieces beat six loose ones.
- A thesis in a passage may be **implied or distributed**. Read the whole text before deciding.
- Your own thesis must be **arguable**. Restating the prompt earns zero of the six points.
- Previewing your line of reasoning in the thesis is optional but makes the rest of the essay easier to organise.

Line of Reasoning and Methods of Development

AP English Language and Composition

Identifying Claims and Evidence

Unit 3 is where the course stops being about parts and starts being about **structure**. Its subject is the **line of reasoning** - the path an argument takes from where it starts to what it proves.

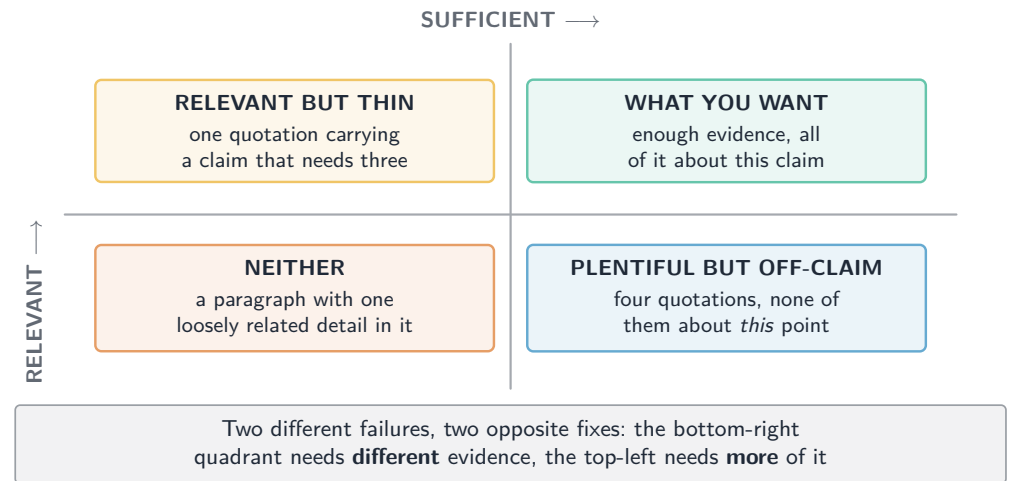
First, four claims about how evidence gets into an argument properly:

- Effective use of evidence uses **commentary** to establish a **logical relationship between the evidence and the claim**.
- Writers **introduce source material** using commentary to integrate it into their line of reasoning - so commentary comes before as well as after.
- **Synthesis** requires **consideration, explanation, and integration of others' arguments into one's own**. That is the exact skill Question 1 tests, and the word *integration* rules out a paragraph that simply summarises each source in turn.
- Writers must **acknowledge** the words, ideas, images, and texts of others through **attribution and citation**.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

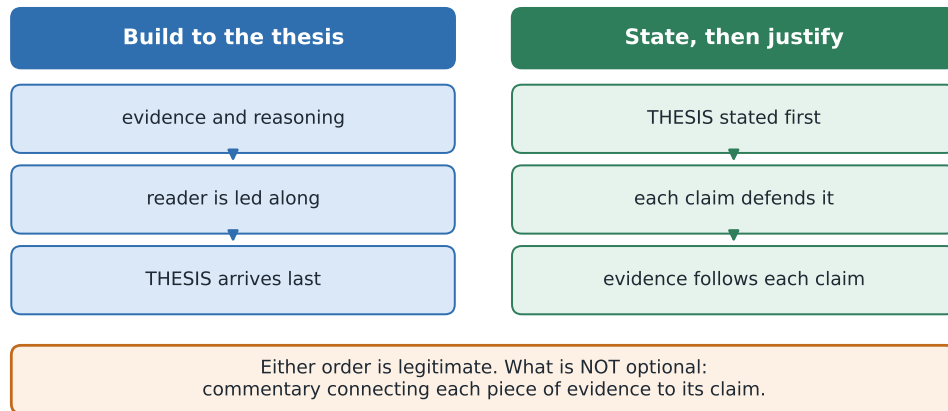
Applied to your own writing, the change from Unit 2 is that commentary now has **two jobs, not one**: it introduces the evidence into the reasoning, and it explains the relationship afterwards.

A paragraph that does both reads: *claim - a sentence positioning the evidence - the evidence, embedded - commentary establishing the logical relationship - the link onward*. The sentence before the quotation is doing as much work as the one after it, and most students write neither.



Describing the Line of Reasoning

Two ways to arrange an argument



The order is a choice; the connective tissue is not

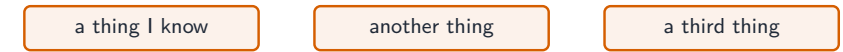
The CED allows two arrangements, and both are valid:

- Writers may **lead readers through a line of reasoning and then arrive at a thesis** - the argument builds to its claim.
- Writers may **express a claim and then develop a line of reasoning to justify it** - the argument declares and then defends.

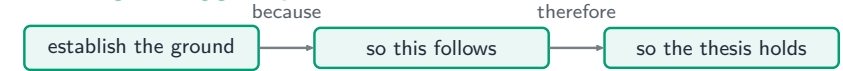
Whichever order is used, the same requirements hold:

- Writers explain their reasoning through **commentary that connects chosen evidence to a claim**.
- Commentary explains the **significance and relevance** of evidence in relation to the line of reasoning.
- The sequence of paragraphs in a text reveals the argument's line of reasoning** - which is the practical tool for reading. To find a writer's reasoning, write one sentence per paragraph and read the list.
- Flaws in a line of reasoning may render an argument specious or illogical**

A LIST



A LINE OF REASONING

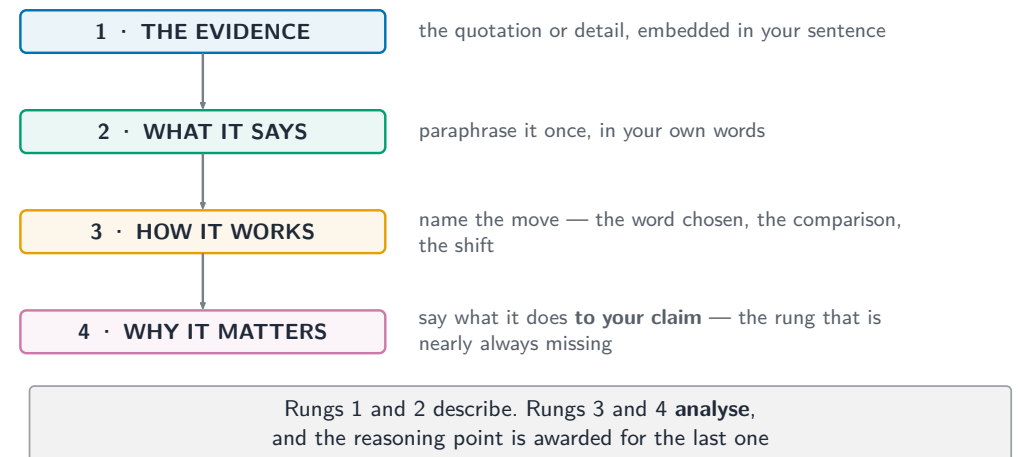


Shuffle the top row and nothing is lost — that is the test. Ask of every paragraph: **why does this come after the one before it?**

Developing a Line of Reasoning and Commentary

For your own essays, the useful discipline is to decide the **order of your claims before writing any of them**. An essay whose paragraphs could be shuffled without loss has no line of reasoning - it has a list.

Test a draft by asking of each paragraph: *why does this come after the one before it?* If the only answer is “it is another thing I know about the topic”, the structure is a list and the reasoning point is at risk.



Recognizing Methods of Development

Methods of development are common approaches writers use to develop and organise the reasoning of an argument. The CED's list: **narration, cause-effect, comparison-contrast, definition, and description**. This unit treats the first two.

- Developing through **narration** : writers offer details about **real-life experiences** and **reflections** on them. The reflection is what makes narration an argument rather than a story - an anecdote with no reflection has supplied no reasoning.
- Developing through **cause-effect** : writers **present a cause, then assert the effects or consequences** of that cause - or begin from an effect and trace it back.

Using Methods of Development

Choosing a method is a rhetorical decision, not a stylistic one. Narration works when the audience needs to *feel* the situation before they will accept a claim about it. Cause-effect works when the audience already accepts the facts but not the connection between them.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). On a Question 1 synthesis prompt, compare two paragraphs using the same two sources. The weak version: *“Source A says X. Source C says Y. Both discuss the issue.”* That is summary in sequence - no claim, no integration, no reasoning. The strong version: *“The strongest objection to the proposal is not that it fails but that it succeeds too narrowly: Source A’s data show the intended outcome improving, while Source C’s account of the same programme records the second-order costs that the measurement in Source A was never designed to capture.”* Here the sources are **integrated into the writer’s own claim**, and the commentary establishes the logical relationship - which is what the four evidence-and-commentary points are awarded for.

Exam tips

- Commentary has **two jobs**: introducing evidence into the reasoning, and explaining the relationship afterwards. Write both sentences.
- **Synthesis means integration**, not summary in sequence. A paragraph per source is the classic low-scoring shape.
- To find a writer’s line of reasoning, **summarise each paragraph in one sentence** and read the list.

- Ask of your own paragraphs: *why does this one follow that one?* No answer means no line of reasoning.
- **Narration needs reflection.** An anecdote without it has told a story, not made an argument.
- Choose a method of development for a **rhetorical** reason and be able to say what it is.

Introductions, Conclusions, and Development

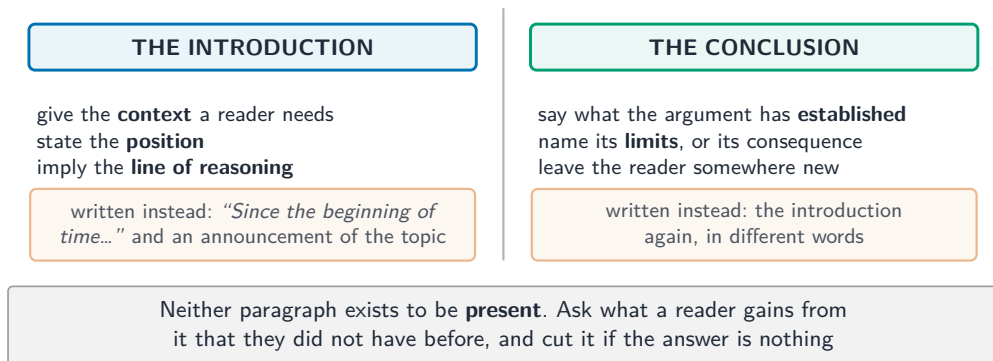
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Introductions and Conclusions in a Text

Unit 4 covers the two positions in a text where a writer's choices are most visible - the beginning and the end - and completes the CED's list of **methods of development**.

- The **introduction** of an argument **introduces the subject and/or the writer** to the audience. It may orient the reader, establish the exigence and context, and gain attention.
- The **conclusion** brings the argument to a unified end. It may present the argument's thesis, explain its significance, or situate the argument in a broader context.

Note the verb in the second: *unified*. A conclusion is not a summary; it is the point at which the parts are shown to have been one argument.



Writing Introductions and Conclusions

On the exam, both are worth writing well but neither is worth writing long. A useful discipline:

- An introduction that **positions the subject and states a defensible thesis** in two or three sentences is complete. Everything else in a timed essay is better spent on evidence and commentary.
- A conclusion that **says what follows from the argument** - its significance, or its wider implication - does more than one that restates the paragraphs.

The weakest conclusion is the one that re-lists what the essay already said. The reader has just read it. Say instead what it means, or what it obliges.

Identifying the Overarching Thesis

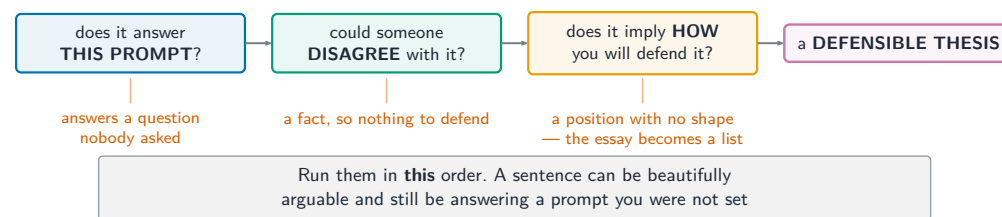
The CED adds a precise refinement here: **a thesis statement may preview the line of reasoning of an argument** - and then, immediately, *this is not to say that a thesis statement must list the reasons*.

That double statement is worth holding, because both errors are common. A thesis that previews nothing leaves the essay shapeless. A thesis mechanically listing three reasons is not required and often produces a rigid essay that cannot develop.

Writing a Thesis Statement

For your own writing, the practical version:

- The thesis must be **defensible**. Non-negotiable, and it is the whole of the thesis point.
- It **may** indicate the shape of the reasoning. Do it when the shape is genuinely load-bearing; do not do it as a formula.
- It should be **specific enough to constrain what follows**. A thesis so broad that any paragraph could belong under it is not directing the essay.



Recognizing Methods of Development

The method	What the writer does	Reach for it when...
Narration	details of real experience, plus reflection on them	the audience must FEEL the situation before judging it
Cause-effect	present a cause, assert its effects - or work backwards	they accept the facts but not the connection
Comparison-contrast	state a CATEGORY of comparison, then the similarities and differences	they judge better against something already familiar
Definition	relate the characteristics that make the thing what it is	they are applying the wrong standard
Description	features and sensory detail	abstraction is the obstacle - they cannot see it

The right-hand column is the decision. The method follows from what the audience needs, not from the topic.

Choose the method the reasoning needs, not the one the topic suggests

Unit 3 covered narration and cause-effect. Unit 4 adds the rest:

- Developing through **comparison-contrast** : writers **present a category of comparison** and then examine similarities and differences within it. The *category* is the part students omit - a comparison without a stated basis is two descriptions side by side.
- Developing through **definition or description** : writers relate the **characteristics, features, or sensory details** of a subject.

Definition is more powerful than it looks. An argument that turns on what a word means - what counts as *success*, as *fairness*, as *progress* - is an argument that has moved to the ground where it can actually be won.

Using Methods of Development

The choice is rhetorical. Ask what the audience needs before they will accept your claim:

- They need to **see** it, and abstraction is the obstacle: **description**.
- They accept the facts but not the connection: **cause-effect**.
- They are applying the wrong standard: **definition**.
- They will judge better against something familiar: **comparison-contrast**.

- They need to feel the situation: **narration**.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Question 3 argument prompt asks you to take a position on whether a common practice is beneficial. A student who reaches for description writes a vivid paragraph nobody disputes. A student who reaches for **definition** writes: “*Whether the practice is beneficial depends on what we count as benefit. If benefit means measurable short-term gain, the practice succeeds; if it means durable capability, the same evidence shows it failing.*” That paragraph has relocated the argument onto ground where the evidence actually decides something - which is the kind of move the **sophistication** point exists to reward.

METHOD	USE IT TO SHOW	IT FAILS WHEN
NARRATION	how something unfolded, and that the order mattered	the order carries no argument
CAUSE AND EFFECT	that one thing produced another	the link is asserted, not shown
COMPARISON	that two cases differ where it counts	they are compared on something irrelevant
DEFINITION	that a disputed word is the crux	nobody was disputing the word
DESCRIPTION	that a detail has to be seen to be believed	it becomes scene-setting

Read the **middle** column first. The method is chosen from what the paragraph has to prove, not from the order things happened in

Exam tips

- Introductions should be **short and load-bearing**: position the subject, state a defensible thesis, move on.
- A conclusion that **restates** earns least. Say what the argument means or obliges.
- A thesis **may** preview the reasoning; it is **not required** to list reasons. Both errors are common.
- Comparison needs a stated category**. Without one you have written two descriptions, not a comparison.
- Definition** is the strongest move available in an argument essay whose terms are contestable.
- Pick a method of development from **what the audience needs**, not from what the topic suggests.

Organization, Coherence, and Style

AP English Language and Composition

Describing the Line of Reasoning

Unit 5 turns from *what* an argument contains to *how it holds together*. It has two subjects: **coherence** and the beginnings of **style**.

The CED's statement of the body paragraph is exact and worth memorising: **the body paragraphs of a written argument make claims, support them with evidence, and provide commentary that explains the relationship of the evidence to the claim.**

Three parts, in that order, in every body paragraph. When an AP essay loses evidence-and-commentary points, it is almost always because the third part is missing from paragraphs that have the first two.

Developing a Line of Reasoning and Commentary

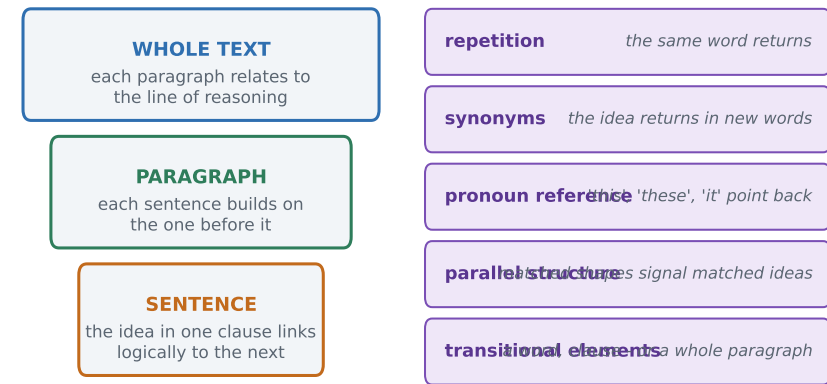
Applied to your own writing: draft the **claims first, as a list**, before writing any paragraph. You then have the line of reasoning in front of you and can check that it moves.

Then, for each claim, write the paragraph in its three parts deliberately. A useful habit under exam conditions is to make the commentary sentence begin with a word that forces a relationship - *because, which means, so, the effect of this is* - because those words cannot be followed by a restatement.

Organization, Unity, and Coherence

Coherence happens at three levels

and it is built by these devices



A "structure" question is asking which of these the writer used, and what it made the reader do next.

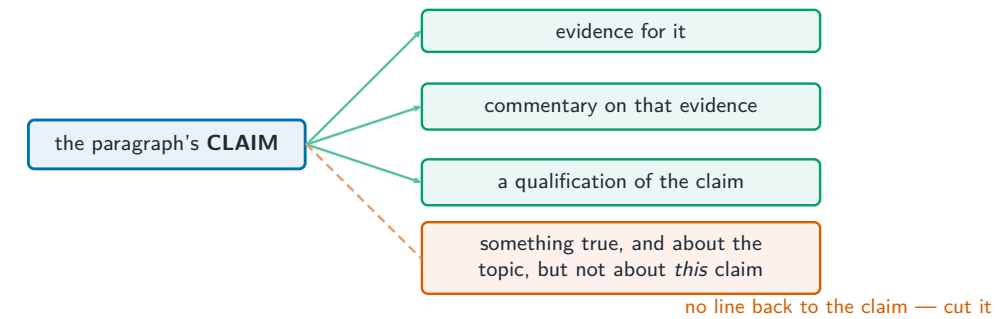
The devices are examinable by name - and they are what a "structure" question is actually asking about

Coherence occurs at different levels in a piece of writing:

- In a **sentence**, the idea in one clause logically links to the idea in another.
- In a **paragraph**, each sentence builds on the one before it.
- Across the **whole text**, each paragraph relates to the line of reasoning.

The CED then names the devices that create those links:

- **Repetition**, **synonyms**, **pronoun references**, and **parallel structure** may indicate or develop a relationship between ideas.
- **Transitional elements** are words or other elements - phrases, clauses, sentences, or whole paragraphs - that **assist in creating coherence**.



Run it on a draft: draw the line from each sentence **back** to the claim. The sentence without one is not a bad sentence — it is in the wrong paragraph

Using Transitional Elements

Transitions have a second job the CED names explicitly: they **introduce evidence** or **indicate its relationship to other ideas or evidence**.

That is the difference between decorative and functional transitions. *Furthermore* adds nothing - it says only “here is another sentence”. *Even in the cases where the effect is smallest* tells the reader what relationship is coming. Choose transitions that carry information about the relationship, not ones that merely mark a boundary.

Note also that a transitional element may be a **whole paragraph**. In a long argument, a short paragraph whose only job is to turn the reasoning is legitimate and often elegant.

THE RELATIONSHIP	THE WORDS	WHAT YOU HAVE PROMISED
ADDING	moreover, furthermore, in addition	another reason of the same kind
CONTRASTING	however, yet, nevertheless, on the other hand	something that cuts against what you just said
CONCEDING	admittedly, granted, of course	you will now answer the point you have granted
CONCLUDING	therefore, thus, consequently	what follows is entailed by what came before
EXEMPLIFYING	for instance, in particular	a case of the general claim, not a new one

A transition is a **promise** about the next sentence.
Breaking it is a reasoning error, not a matter of style

Word Choice, Comparisons, and Syntax

Unit 5 opens the course’s treatment of style with three claims about diction:

- Words have both **connotative and denotative meanings**. Denotation is what a word refers to; connotation is what it carries.
- Descriptive words** - adjectives and adverbs - not only qualify or modify what they describe but **convey a perspective** toward it.
- Precise word choice** reduces confusion and helps the audience perceive the writer’s perspective.

The second is the analytically useful one. When a rhetorical-analysis passage calls a policy *ambitious* rather than *expensive*, no fact has changed and the reader’s disposition has. That is a rhetorical choice, and it is exactly what the question asks you to explain.

Using Words and Syntax for Tone and Style

For your own writing, precision is worth more than range. A concrete rule: prefer the word that is exactly right to the word that is impressive. Examiners reward control, and an inflated word used slightly wrongly reads as loss of control.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). In a rhetorical-analysis passage a writer describes a proposal’s supporters as “*determined*” in one paragraph and “*unyielding*” in the next. A low-scoring answer notes that the writer uses “strong diction”. A scoring answer explains the shift: “*Both words denote persistence, but ‘determined’ carries*

approval and ‘unyielding’ carries obstruction. By moving from one to the other without changing the facts described, the writer withdraws sympathy from the supporters while appearing only to continue describing them - so the audience’s judgement shifts before any counter-argument is made.” That is connotation, tone, and effect on audience in one move.

THE SHAPE	WHAT IT DOES	THE RISK
a short sentence after long ones	lands — the reader has nowhere to look away	used often, nothing lands
a long cumulative sentence	accumulates, so the weight arrives with the last clause	the reader loses the subject
parallel structure	makes items feel equivalent, and rhythm does the arguing	it can equate things that are not alike
a question	makes the reader supply your answer themselves	if they supply a different one

Name the shape, the effect **and** the risk. Analysis that only praises the effect is describing, and description does not earn the commentary marks

Exam tips

- Every body paragraph: **claim, evidence, commentary**. Lost points are nearly always the third.
- Draft your **claims as a list first**. It is the only way to see whether the reasoning moves.
- Begin commentary with *because, which means, so* - words that cannot be followed by a restatement.
- Know the coherence devices **by name**: repetition, synonyms, pronoun reference, parallel structure, transitions.
- A transition should **carry the relationship**, not just mark a boundary. *Furthermore* usually carries nothing.
- **Connotation** is where diction analysis lives. Same denotation, different disposition, is a rhetorical choice worth explaining.

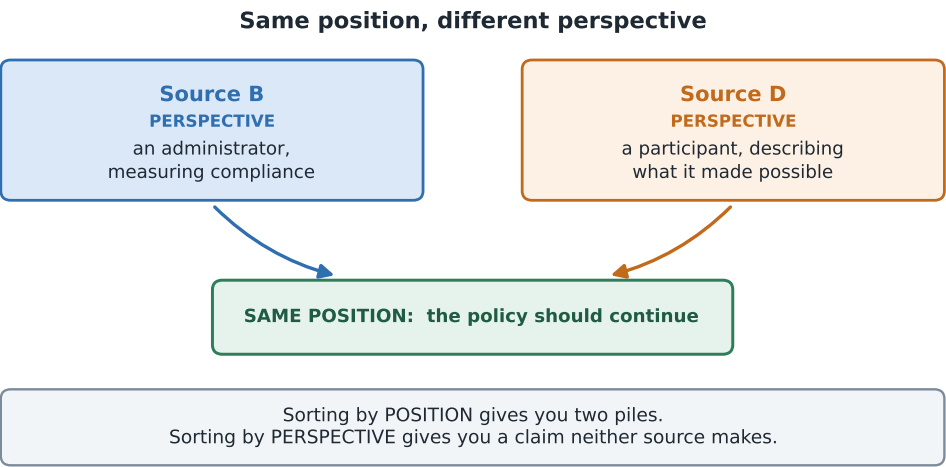
Evidence, Thesis, and Stylistic Choices

AP English Language and Composition

Identifying Claims and Evidence

Unit 6 is the synthesis unit, and it contains the single sharpest distinction in the course.

- When **synthesising**, writers **draw on arguments from multiple sources**, strategically select the most relevant information, and integrate it into their own argument.
- A source **provides information** for an argument, and **some sources are more reliable or credible than others**.
- **A position and a perspective are different**. Sources may hold the **same position** on a subject and yet each come from a **different perspective**.
- The strongest arguments **recognise and acknowledge the other positions** that exist.
- **The degree to which a source considers other positions reflects the degree to which that source is credible** - a test you can apply to any source on the exam.



Two sources can agree and still be doing completely different work in your argument

THE VERB	WHAT IT COMMITS YOU TO	USE IT WHEN
<i>states, reports</i>	nothing — you are relaying	the fact is not in dispute
<i>argues, contends</i>	that this is a position, and defensible	you will engage with it
<i>claims, asserts</i>	quiet doubt — a position without shown support	you are about to qualify it
<i>concedes, admits</i>	that this costs the source something	it is evidence against their own side
<i>demonstrates, shows</i>	that the source has proved it	you are building on it, not testing it

Says wastes the slot. The verb positions the source **before** your commentary begins, and costs no extra words

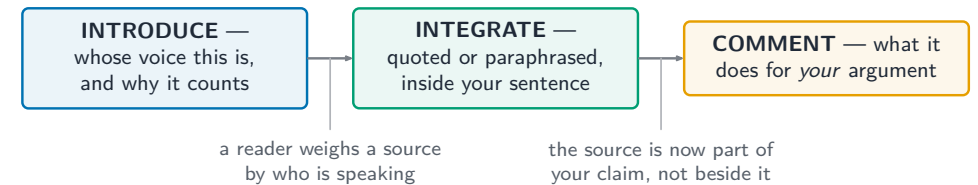
Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

The position-and-perspective distinction is what makes synthesis possible. If you sort the sources only by position, you get two piles - for and against - and a paragraph per pile. If you sort them by **perspective**, you can say things like:

Both the economist and the teacher support the measure, but they support it for reasons that do not survive together: one values the measurable gain, the other the change in what students attempt.

That sentence is synthesis. It uses two sources, is grounded in what each actually says, and produces a claim neither source makes.

Also examinable: use the credibility test. A source that never acknowledges any other position is, by the CED's own standard, less credible - and saying so about a source is legitimate evidence in your essay.



A synthesis essay is not a tour of the sources. Move three is where the **synthesis** happens, and it is the one most often missing

Identifying the Overarching Thesis

A short but load-bearing point: **consideration and use of new evidence may require revision of the thesis statement and/or changes to the line of reasoning**.

Reading a text, this means a writer's thesis may be *responsive* - shaped by the evidence rather than imposed on it. Look for where an argument turns.

Writing a Thesis Statement

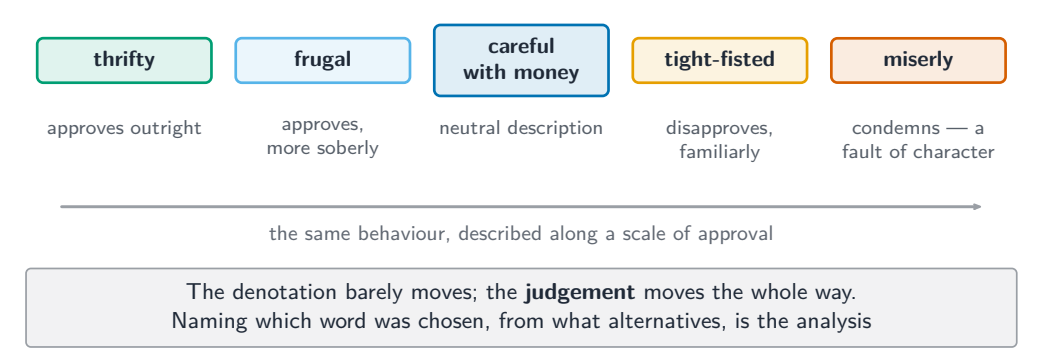
Writing under time pressure, this is permission you should use. If, while drafting, you find the evidence does not support the thesis you began with, **change the thesis**, not the evidence. Examiners reward an argument that fits its evidence; there are no marks for having predicted your own conclusion.

In practice, spend the first minutes reading sources and sketching claims *before* fixing the thesis. A thesis written after the evidence is nearly always better than one written before it.

Word Choice, Comparisons, and Syntax

- A writer’s **tone** is the writer’s **attitude or feeling about a subject**, conveyed through word choice and writing style.
- Readers **infer** tone from word choice - especially from the **positive, negative, or otherwise charged** associations of the words chosen.
- A writer’s **shifts in tone** from one part of a text to another may suggest **qualification, refinement, or a change in perspective**.

The third is the analytical gold. A tone shift is a visible event in a text: something changed at that point, and explaining what the writer wanted the reader to do differently after it is exactly the kind of answer that scores.



Using Words and Syntax for Tone and Style

In your own writing, tone should be **consistent and controlled**, and deliberately shifted only where the argument turns - for example when moving from stating your position to conceding part of an opposing one.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). On a synthesis prompt, compare two uses of the same two sources. Weak: “*Source B agrees with Source D that the policy should continue.*” That is position-sorting, and it produces nothing. Strong: “*Sources B and D both defend the policy, but B defends it as an administrator measuring compliance while D defends it as a participant describing what it made possible - so the agreement is thinner than it appears, and the case rests on whether we are measuring the policy’s operation or its effect.*” Same two sources, but the **perspectives** are doing the work, and the claim belongs to the writer.

Exam tips

- **Position and perspective are different.** This one distinction lifts most synthesis essays out of the middle band.
- Sort sources by **perspective**, not by side. Sorting by side produces a paragraph per pile and no argument.
- Use the CED’s **credibility test**: a source that ignores all other positions is weaker, and you may say so.
- If the evidence does not fit the thesis, **change the thesis**. There are no marks for consistency with your first idea.
- A **tone shift** is a visible event. Say what changed and what the reader was meant to do after it.
- Keep your own tone controlled. Shift it only where the argument genuinely turns.

Qualifying Arguments, Syntax, and Conventions

AP English Language and Composition

Introductions and Conclusions Revisited

Unit 7 returns to introductions and conclusions with more experience behind you, then moves to the two things that most separate competent writing from strong writing: **qualification** and **sentence structure**.

On introductions and conclusions, the CED's statements are unchanged - the introduction introduces subject and writer to the audience; the conclusion brings the argument to a **unified end** and may present the thesis, explain its significance, or situate the argument in a broader context.

Writing Introductions and Conclusions

At this stage the useful upgrade is to make the conclusion do the work the CED permits. A conclusion may:

- **Explain the significance** of the argument - why it matters that this is true;
- **Situate it in a broader context** - what larger question it belongs to;
- **Present the thesis** in its final, now-earned form.

The third is the strongest under exam conditions: restate the thesis in language you could not have used in the introduction, because the argument had not yet been made.

How Claims Are Qualified

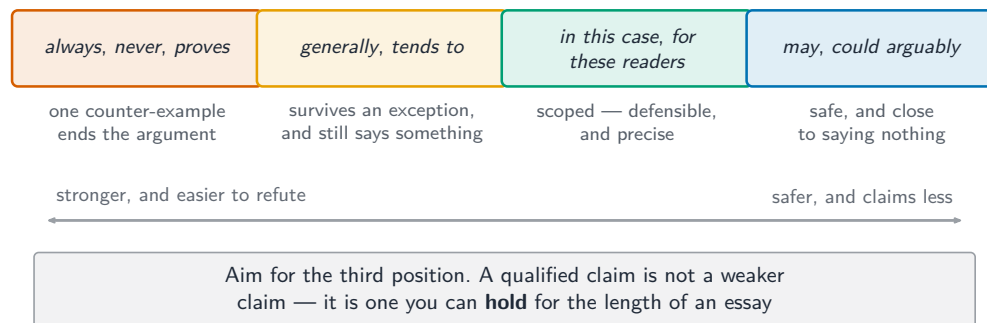
- A **lack of understanding of the complexities** of a subject can lead to **over-simplification or generalisation**.
- Because arguments are usually part of an **ongoing discourse**, effective arguments often **avoid expressing claims in absolute terms**.
- Writers may strategically use **words, phrases, and clauses as modifiers** to **qualify or limit the scope** of an argument.

This is counter-intuitive for many students, who assume that a stronger-sounding claim scores better. The opposite is true: an unqualified claim is easy to defeat with one counter-example, while a qualified claim survives it. *Schools should ban phones* invites a single exception. *Schools should restrict phone use during instructional time, where the cost to attention is measurable* does not.

Qualifying a Claim

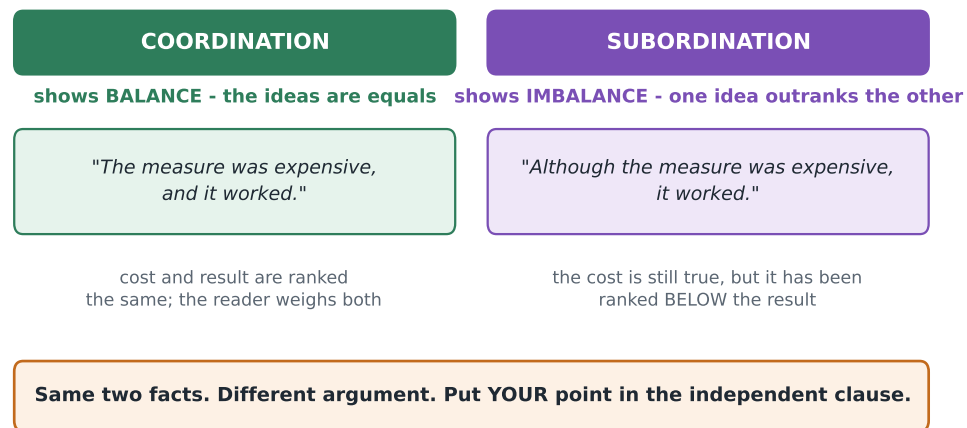
The tools are ordinary words used deliberately: *in most cases, where X holds, for this population, unless, to the extent that*. Each narrows the claim to the ground the evidence actually covers.

Qualification is also what the **sophistication point** most often rewards. A student who states a position, then shows they know its limits and defends it anyway, has demonstrated exactly the control the rubric is looking for.



Clauses and Relationships Between Ideas

Two ways to join ideas - and they mean different things



The CED is explicit: coordination shows balance, subordination shows imbalance

- Writers express ideas in **sentences**, made up of **clauses**, at least one of which must be **independent** .
- **The arrangement of sentences** in a text can **emphasise particular ideas**.
- **Subordination and coordination** express the intended relationship between ideas in a sentence.
- Writers use **coordination to illustrate balance or equality** between ideas.
- Writers use **subordination to illustrate imbalance or inequality** between ideas.
- The arrangement of clauses, phrases, and words within a sentence can **emphasise ideas**.

Those two middle statements make sentence structure analysable rather than decorative. *The measure was expensive, and it worked* treats cost and effect as equals. *Although the measure was expensive, it worked* subordinates the cost - it is still true, but it has been ranked below the result. Same facts, different argument.

Writing Clear Sentences

For your own writing: decide the relationship first, then choose the structure that expresses it. If two ideas genuinely carry equal weight, coordinate them. If one is a concession and the other your point, subordinate the concession - and put your point in the independent clause, where the emphasis falls.

THE FAULT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE FIX
COMMA SPLICE	<i>The data was clear, the committee ignored it.</i>	full stop, semicolon, or add <i>but</i>
RUN-ON	<i>The data was clear the committee ignored it.</i>	the same three repairs — the comma was never the problem
FRAGMENT	<i>Although the data was clear.</i>	attach it to the sentence it depends on

All three are about **where a sentence ends**. Naming the fault is worth nothing on its own — the mark is for the repair

Grammar, Mechanics, and Clarity

- Grammar and mechanics that follow established conventions **enable clear communication**.
- Writers use **punctuation strategically** to demonstrate relationships among ideas.
- **Punctuation** - commas, colons, semicolons, dashes, hyphens, parentheses, quotation marks, end marks - **advances the argument**.
- **Design features** such as **italics or boldface** create emphasis.

Conventions of Grammar and Mechanics

The examinable framing is that punctuation is **argumentative**, not merely correct. A colon promises that what follows explains what preceded. A semicolon asserts that two independent statements belong together. A dash interrupts, and the interruption is the point.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A rhetorical-analysis passage reads: “*The programme was popular; it was also, by every measure the department itself proposed, ineffective.*” A low answer notes “the writer uses a semicolon”. A scoring answer explains the structure: “*The semicolon presents the two facts as equal and simultaneous rather than as a contrast, so the reader cannot dismiss the failure as an objection to popularity - both are simply true at once. The parenthetical ‘by every measure the department itself proposed’ then removes the department’s escape route before the word ‘ineffective’ arrives.*” That is syntax analysed as argument.

MARK	WHAT IT PROMISES	AN EXAMPLE
semicolon ;	two complete statements, closely related and of equal weight	<i>The policy was cheap; it was also useless.</i>
colon :	what follows <i>delivers</i> what the first half announced	<i>The result was predictable: nobody applied.</i>
dash —	an interruption, or a turn the reader did not expect	<i>The scheme worked — for the six people who heard of it.</i>

Each mark is a **promise** about the second half of the sentence, in the same way a transition is a promise about the next one

Exam tips

- **Qualify your claims.** An absolute claim is defeated by one counter-example; a qualified one is not.
- Qualification is the most reliable route to the **sophistication point**.
- **Coordination = balance. Subordination = imbalance.** The CED says so, and it makes syntax analysable.
- Put your point in the **independent clause**. Concessions belong in the subordinate one.
- Punctuation **advances the argument**. A colon explains, a semicolon joins as equals, a dash interrupts.
- Never write “the writer uses a semicolon” without saying **what relationship it asserts**.

Audience, Tone, and Sentence Craft

AP English Language and Composition

Understanding an Audience’s Beliefs and Needs

Unit 8 is the course’s most advanced treatment of **style** - the point at which word choice, syntax, and audience stop being separate topics.

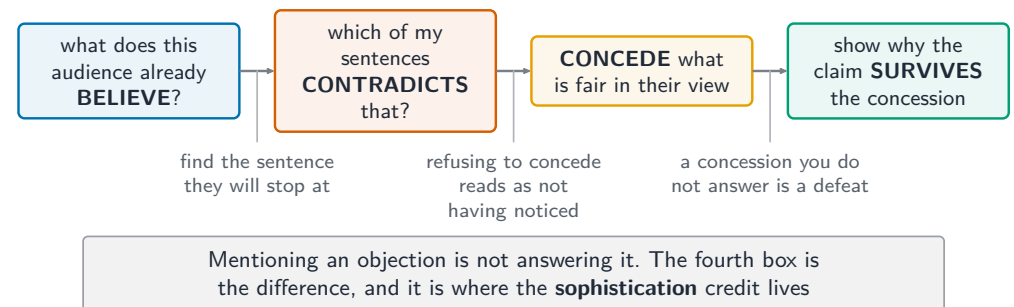
- Writers may make **comparisons** - **similes, metaphors, analogies, or anecdotes** - in an attempt to relate to an audience.
- Writers’ choices regarding **syntax and diction** influence **how the writer is perceived** by an audience.
- **Word choice may reflect a writer’s biases** and may affect their **credibility** with a particular audience.
- Because **audiences are unique and dynamic**, writers must consider the **perspectives, contexts, and needs** of the intended audience.

The third point is worth dwelling on. Diction does not only characterise the subject - it characterises the writer. A reader who notices loaded word choice starts to discount everything that follows, which is why an unqualified vocabulary is a credibility risk, not a strength.

Writing for an Audience’s Beliefs and Needs

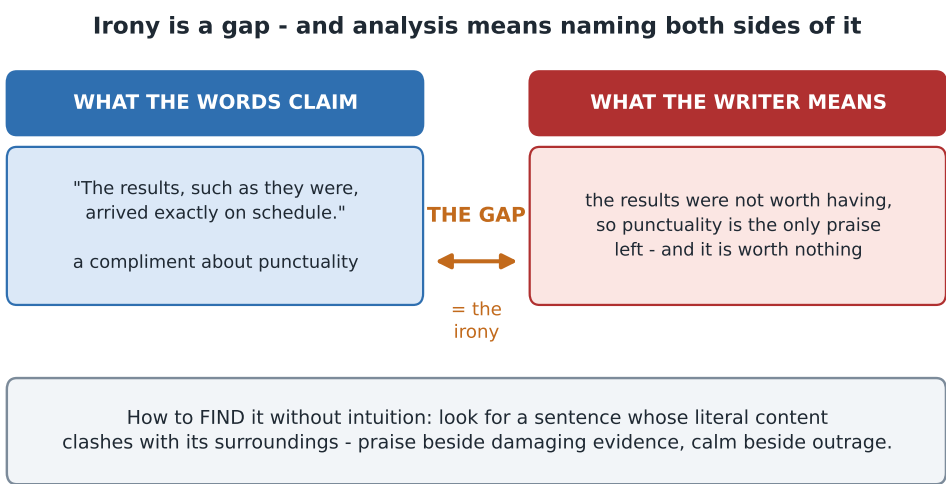
The instruction here is that **audiences are dynamic**: they change as they read. An argument that has just conceded something is being read by a slightly different audience than the one that began the essay.

Practically, this means the ordering of concession and claim matters. Concede before you press, and you address a reader who now believes you are fair. Press first and concede afterwards, and the concession reads as retreat.



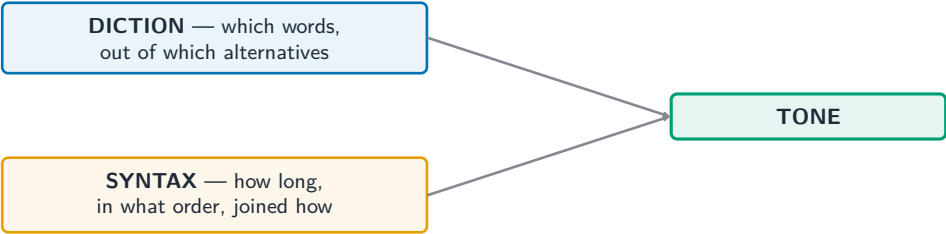
Word Choice, Comparisons, and Syntax

- A writer’s **style** is the **mix of word choice, syntax, and conventions** employed by that writer. Style is a *composite*, which is why “the writer’s style is formal” is not analysis - it names the result without any of the components.
- Writers may signal a **complex or ironic perspective** through stylistic choices. **Irony** may emerge from the difference between what is said and what is meant, or between what is expected and what occurs.



Say what the words claim, say what the writer means, and the gap is the argument

Irony is the hardest thing on this exam for a second-language reader, because it cannot be looked up. The workable method is structural rather than intuitive: find a sentence whose **literal content does not match its surroundings** - excessive praise beside damaging evidence, calm register beside an outrageous fact - and the mismatch is the signal.



the same words in a different sentence shape carry a different attitude — which is why syntax is evidence and not decoration

The test: rewrite the passage keeping the **words** and changing the **shape**. Whatever changes was being carried by the syntax

Using Words and Syntax for Tone and Style

For your own writing, the safest use of irony is none. What the sophistication point actually rewards is **control**: a consistent register, a vocabulary that is precise rather than inflated, and syntax that ranks ideas deliberately.

THE TONE	THE WRITER'S STANCE	POINT AT
measured	confident, and not trying to win by volume	qualifiers, concessions, low-temperature verbs
urgent	the cost of delay is the argument	short sentences, imperatives, time words
wry	amused, and not quite committed	understatement, an unexpected register
indignant	a norm has been broken and someone is loaded nouns, rhetorical questions at fault	
elegiac	something valuable is already lost	past tense, concrete detail, slow rhythm

A tone word is a **claim** like any other. If you cannot point at the third column, you have not established it

Clauses and Relationships Between Ideas

- **Modifiers** - words, phrases, or clauses - **qualify, clarify, or specify** information about the thing they modify.
- **Parenthetical elements** - though not essential to understanding what they describe - **interrupt** the sentence to add information, comment, or emphasis.

Both are stylistically rich and analytically useful. A modifier is where a writer’s judgement hides: *the long-delayed report* has evaluated the report while appearing only to identify it. A parenthetical is an aside the writer chose to make - and the choice to interrupt is itself an emphasis.

Writing Clear Sentences

A concrete discipline: **place modifiers next to what they modify**, and use parentheticals sparingly. One well-placed interruption creates emphasis; three in a paragraph destroy it, because a reader cannot tell which interruption mattered.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A rhetorical-analysis passage says of a policy: “*The results, such as they were, arrived exactly on schedule.*” A low answer says the writer “uses a parenthetical phrase”. A scoring answer explains both parts: “*The parenthetical ‘such as they were’ dismisses the results in four words, without offering an argument against them - and placing it before ‘arrived exactly on schedule’ means the praise for punctuality lands on results the reader has just been told to discount. The sentence appears to compliment the programme and in fact withdraws the only thing it could be complimented for.*” Modifier, parenthetical, irony, and effect on audience, all in one.

Exam tips

- **Style is a composite** - word choice, syntax, conventions. Naming the components is analysis; naming the result is not.
- Loaded diction **damages the writer’s credibility**. Say so; it is examinable.
- Find irony **structurally**: a sentence whose literal content clashes with its surroundings.
- **Concede before you press**. The audience that reads your claim will already have decided whether you are fair.
- A **modifier** is where judgement hides. *The long-delayed report* has already evaluated it.
- Use parentheticals **sparingly** in your own writing. Three in a paragraph cancel each other out.

Refining Qualified Arguments

AP English Language and Composition

How Claims Are Qualified

Unit 9 is short and it is the course’s final move: **how to handle the arguments that oppose yours**. Everything here is directly rewarded on the exam, and the three key verbs are constantly confused.

The framing first:

- **Effectively entering an ongoing conversation** about a subject means **engaging the positions that have already been taken**. An argument that ignores them is not participating in the discussion, only announcing into it.
- Evidence and sources will either **support, complement, or contradict** a writer’s thesis. All three are usable - contradicting evidence is not a problem to be hidden but material to be handled.
- **Writers enhance their credibility when they refute, rebut, or concede** opposing arguments and contradictory evidence.

Three different moves - and the evidence you have decides which one you may make

CONCEDE	REBUT	REFUTE
accept all or part of the competing claim as correct	offer a contrasting perspective, or an alternative interpretation	demonstrate, using evidence, that the claim is incorrect
needs: honesty	needs: another reading of the same facts	needs: evidence of error
and the CED says it RAISES your credibility	almost always available - this is the workhorse move	without that evidence, refuting is bluffing

Then come back to your own position. An unreturned concession reads as agreement.

Concede accepts, rebut counters, refute disproves. Choose the one your evidence can actually support

The three moves, in the CED’s own definitions:

- **Concede** : writers accept all or a portion of a competing position or

claim as correct, and agree that the opposing point has merit.

- **Rebut** : writers **offer a contrasting perspective** on an argument and its evidence, or provide an alternative interpretation.
- **Refute** : writers **demonstrate, using evidence, that all or a portion of a competing position or claim is incorrect**.

The distinction is what your evidence lets you do. **Refuting requires evidence of error**; if you do not have it, refuting is bluffing and a reader will see it. **Rebutting requires only an alternative reading** of the same facts, which is far more often available. **Conceding requires honesty**, and it costs nothing - the CED says explicitly that it *enhances* credibility.

Two further points:

- **Transitions may be used to introduce counterarguments** - and, as in Unit 5, the transition should signal the relationship. *Critics argue* announces one; *the strongest objection to this is* announces one and ranks it.
- **Not all arguments explicitly address a counterargument**. True of texts you read, and worth noting when analysing - an argument that engages no opposition has told you something about its intended audience.

THESIS

1 point

all or nothing, and decided by one sentence — so it is the cheapest point on the paper to secure

EVIDENCE AND COMMENTARY

4 points

evidence gets you to the middle of this scale; the movement from there to the top is almost entirely **commentary**

SOPHISTICATION

1 point

not awarded for length or vocabulary — see the qualifying and counterargument moves in this unit

Three rows, three different arithmetics. A revision that adds another quotation is working on the row where evidence has already **stopped** paying

Qualifying a Claim

For your own writing, the strongest and most reliable shape on Question 3 is:

1. State your position, **qualified** to the ground your evidence covers.
2. **Concede** the part of the opposing position that is genuinely correct.
3. **Rebut or refute** the rest - rebut if you have an alternative reading, refute only if you have evidence of error.
4. Show why your position **survives** the concession.

Step 4 is the one most students omit, and it is where the sophistication point lives. Conceding and then not returning to your own argument reads as having changed your mind.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). On a Question 3 argument prompt, compare two treatments of the same objection. Weak: “*Some people disagree, but they are wrong.*” That names an opposing position without engaging it - it is neither concession, rebuttal, nor refutation. Strong: “*The objection that the policy is too costly is correct as far as it goes: the direct expenditure is higher than any alternative considered. But cost is only decisive if the alternatives achieve the same result, and the same report shows they do not - so the comparison the objection depends on is not available.*” That paragraph **concedes** the cost, **refutes** the comparison with evidence, and returns to the writer’s own position. Three moves, and every one of them is on the rubric.

WHERE YOU PUT IT

WHAT IT SIGNALS

USE IT WHEN

first — before your own case

you know the strongest version of the the reader probably holds it already other side

inside each paragraph

every claim has been tested as it was the objections are specific to each claim made

near the end

a duty discharged — or, done well, then one objection outweighs the rest real turn

Position is a **rhetorical** choice, not a template slot. The default placement is the one that reads most like a box being ticked

DOES NOT EARN IT

longer words for the same idea
a fourth body paragraph
a counterargument mentioned and dropped
a conclusion that widens to all of humanity

EARNs IT

a claim qualified so that it is exactly defensible
an objection answered, not noted
tension between two of your own sources, named
a consequence the prompt did not ask for

Every item on the right is a **move**, and every one of them appears elsewhere in this course. None of them is a matter of vocabulary

Exam tips

- **Concede, rebut, refute** are three different claims. Do not use the words interchangeably.
- **Refute only with evidence of error.** Without it, rebut instead - an alternative interpretation is almost always available.
- **Conceding raises credibility**, by the CED's own statement. It is not a weakness.
- After conceding, **come back**. An unreturned concession reads as agreement with the other side.
- Use a transition that **ranks** the counterargument: *the strongest objection to this is* beats *some people say*.
- When analysing a text, notice when it addresses **no** counterargument. That absence tells you who it was written for.