

AP English Language and Composition Key Definitions ·

Identifying a device earns nothing; the rubric pays for explaining the effect it produces on a particular audience. Every entry below therefore ends where your commentary should begin.

The rhetorical situation

Rhetorical situation – the exigence, audience, purpose, speaker and context that together shape what a text can do and how

Exigence – the problem or occasion that makes the text necessary now rather than at any other time

Audience – the readers a text is designed for, whose assumptions constrain what the writer can take for granted

Purpose – what the writer intends the text to accomplish – to persuade, to justify, to reframe, to console

Ethos – an appeal grounded in the speaker's credibility, character or shared values with the audience

Pathos – an appeal to the audience's emotions, which succeeds only when the emotion fits the occasion

Logos – an appeal through reasoning and evidence, including the arrangement that makes the reasoning feel inevitable

Argument

Claim – a debatable assertion the writer undertakes to defend

Evidence – the material offered in support of a claim; its relevance must be argued, not assumed

Commentary – the explanation of HOW the evidence supports the claim – the row on which most of the essay's marks depend

Line of reasoning – the sequence of claims through which an argument moves, and the logic connecting each to the next

Concession – acknowledging the force of an opposing view, which strengthens credibility before the rebuttal

Rebuttal – the answer to a counter-argument, which must engage its strongest form rather than a convenient version

Qualifier – a word limiting the scope of a claim – often, usually, in most cases – which makes it defensible

Style

- Diction** – word choice, described by register and connotation rather than labelled ‘strong’ or ‘powerful’
- Syntax** – sentence construction; length, interruption and inversion control pace and place emphasis
- Juxtaposition** – setting two elements side by side so the contrast produces meaning neither carries alone
- Anaphora** – repetition of the same words at the start of successive clauses, which builds momentum and marks parallel ideas
- Antithesis** – balanced contrast in parallel grammatical form, which makes an opposition feel structural rather than asserted
- Tone** – the writer’s attitude toward the subject, inferred from diction and syntax – always demonstrated, never merely named