

Every essay is scored on three rows – thesis, evidence and commentary, sophistication – and most lost points are a device named without its effect. Everything below is a rule the readers apply.

The three rows of the rubric

✗ Opening with a thesis that restates the prompt.

✓ **Take a defensible position that the passage gives you evidence for.**

The guidelines list restating the prompt, and a position that is vague or must be inferred, among the responses that earn no thesis point.

SG 3 years

✗ Hiding the thesis in the middle of a paragraph.

✓ **Put it where a reader will find it – the thesis may be anywhere, but it must be identifiable.**

The guidelines allow it anywhere in the response, provided the intended thesis is not merely implied.

SG 3 years

✗ Summarising the passage as your evidence.

✓ **Quote or refer to specific moments, then explain what each shows.**

Evidence with no commentary earns the lower band of Row B, however much of it there is.

SG 3 years

✗ Explaining the same idea about each piece of evidence.

✓ **Let the commentary develop – each paragraph should add to the line of reasoning.**

Row B distinguishes evidence with commentary from evidence supporting a consistent line of reasoning.

SG 3 years

✗ Adding a final sentence about the wider world as your sophistication.

✓ **Build it in: qualify the argument, weigh a tension, or explain the significance as you go.**

The guidelines award the point only if the sophistication is part of the argument, not merely a phrase.

SG 3 years

✗ Writing quickly and leaving sentences unfinished.

✓ **Leave two minutes to reread. Errors that interfere with communication cost a point.**

The guidelines state that writing which suffers from grammatical or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in Row B.

SG 3 years

■ The three rows are scored independently: a response can earn evidence points without the thesis point. Never abandon the essay because the opening went badly.

SG 3 years

1 · Claims, Evidence, and the Rhetorical Situation

✗ Naming a rhetorical device and moving on – ‘the writer uses anaphora’.

✓ **Say what the choice DOES: the repetition builds urgency, so the audience feels the delay is unacceptable.**

The guidelines reject responses that fail to address the rhetorical choices’ effect.

SG 3 years

✗ Describing the audience as ‘the readers’.

✓ **Name who they are and what they already believe, because that is what the choices respond to.**

The rhetorical situation is the unit’s content, and the audience is half of it.

CED 1.1

2 · Audience, Thesis, and Supporting Evidence

✗ Writing a thesis that lists three devices.

✓ **State what the writer is doing and to what end; the devices belong in the body.**

A list of devices is not a defensible position about the argument.

CED 2.2

3 · Line of Reasoning and Methods of Development

✗ Organising the essay device by device.

✓ **Organise it by the stages of the argument, and bring in devices where they do work.**

Row B rewards a consistent line of reasoning, which a catalogue cannot show.

CED 3.2

6 · Evidence, Thesis, and Stylistic Choices

✗ Using all the provided sources equally and shallowly.

✓ **Use the minimum the prompt requires, well, and let one or two carry real weight.**

The synthesis rubric scores how the sources support YOUR argument, not how many appear.

CED 6.2

✗ Dropping a source citation in and letting it speak.

✓ **Introduce it, quote it, then explain what it contributes.**

An uncommented citation is evidence without commentary, which caps Row B.

CED 6.3

7 · Qualifying Arguments, Syntax, and Conventions

✗ Arguing one side and ignoring the obvious objection.

✓ **Name the strongest counter-argument and answer it.**

Qualifying an argument is one of the named routes to the sophistication point.

CED 7.1

9 · Refining Qualified Arguments

✗ Writing ‘in conclusion’ and restating the introduction.

✓ **End where the argument arrived, not where it started.**

A repeating conclusion adds nothing the readers can credit.

CED 4.2

✗ Treating the argument essay as a personal opinion piece.

✓ **Support the position with specific evidence – history, reading, observation.**

Row B requires specific evidence whatever the prompt’s subject.

CED 9.1

4 · Introductions, Conclusions, and Development

✗ Spending a paragraph on an introduction before the argument starts.

✓ **Two or three sentences: the situation, then the thesis.**

The introduction earns no row of its own, and the time belongs to the evidence.

CED 4.1

✗ Writing a body paragraph with no topic sentence.

✓ **Open each paragraph with the claim it will support.**

Row B rewards a line of reasoning the reader can follow, and the topic sentences are the line.

CED 4.3

✗ Leaving the essay unfinished because time ran out.

✓ **Plan for three body paragraphs, and write a one-sentence conclusion if the clock beats you.**

An abandoned argument cannot show a line of reasoning, which is where the second Row B point sits.

CED 4.2

5 · Organization, Coherence, and Style

✗ Writing every sentence at the same length and rhythm.

✓ **Vary the syntax – the readers score style as part of the sophistication row.**

Sentence craft is explicit course content and contributes to the fourth Row B point.

CED 5.4

✗ Using informal wording in an analytical essay.

✓ **Keep the register consistent and the vocabulary precise.**

The rubric's fourth point rewards a style that does not distract from the argument.

CED 5.5

✗ Switching between present and past tense when discussing a text.

✓ **Use the present tense for what a writer does, consistently.**

Inconsistent tense is exactly the mechanical fault the guidelines say can cost the fourth point.

CED 5.3

8 · Audience, Tone, and Sentence Craft

✗ Describing tone with one word and no evidence.

✓ **Name the tone and quote the words that create it.**

The evidence row requires the textual anchor for every claim about the writing.

CED 8.1

✗ Assuming a writer's tone stays the same throughout.

✓ **Track where it shifts – the shift is usually where the argument turns.**

Noticing the shift is a standard route to a sophisticated reading.

CED 8.2

2 · Audience, Thesis, and Supporting Evidence

✗ Quoting a long passage and letting it stand.

✓ **Quote the shortest phrase that makes the point, then comment on it.**

Long quotations displace commentary, which is the half that is scored.

CED 2.4

✗ Writing 'this quote shows' before every piece of evidence.

✓ **Vary the framing and go straight to what it demonstrates.**

The formula consumes words the commentary needs.

CED 5.4

✗ Choosing evidence because it is memorable rather than relevant.

✓ **Choose what the claim needs, and drop what it does not.**

Irrelevant evidence cannot support the line of reasoning it interrupts.

CED 2.3

3 · Line of Reasoning and Methods of Development

✗ Arranging paragraphs in the order the passage happens to be written.

✓ **Arrange them by the argument you are making.**

A chronological walk through the text is a summary structure, not an analytical one.

CED 3.3

■ Read the prompt twice and underline the task. The commonest whole-essay failure is a well-written response to a slightly different question.

SG 3 years

✗ Treating the multiple-choice passages as a reading-speed test.

✓ **Read the question stem first, then find the lines it points to.**

The questions are about specific moments, and locating them is faster than reading for gist.

CED 1.4