

6.6 Using words and syntax for tone and style

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 14 marks

Objective

Build the skills to use style to make your own argument **credible** 可信.

You must be able to:

- choose diction that does not overstate your evidence
- use qualification in the sentence as well as in the thesis
- vary syntax to mark the weight of a claim
- avoid a style that promises more than the argument delivers

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Diction matched to evidence

"Suggests", "indicates", "shows", "proves" are not interchangeable. Using the strongest available verb for weak evidence costs credibility the moment a reader checks.

■ Qualification at sentence level

"In the two districts studied, attendance rose" is more credible than "attendance rose" when only two districts were studied —and it costs one clause.

■ Syntax and weight

Put the claim you most want believed in a short, plain sentence. Complex syntax around a central claim can read as evasion, however well constructed.

2 Practice

2.1 State why "proves" and "suggests" are not interchangeable.

[2]

2.2 Explain what sentence-level qualification adds. [2]

2.3 Sentence: "Everyone knows that this reform has completely failed."

(a) State two weaknesses. [2]

(b) Rewrite it. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Using "proves" for evidence that only suggests costs the writer [1]

- **A** length
- **B** credibility
- **C** coherence
- **D** unity

3.2 A central claim is usually best expressed in [1]

- **A** the longest sentence available
- **B** a short, plain sentence
- **C** a rhetorical question
- **D** a subordinate clause

3.3 Write two sentences making a claim whose diction matches evidence of moderate strength. [4]

4 Go further

- work through the **6.6 Using words and syntax for tone and style** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Evidence, Thesis, and Stylistic Choices** section of the AP English Language handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 they claim different strengths of support; using the stronger for weak evidence is a claim the evidence does not back.

2.2 it states the scope of the finding in the sentence itself, so the reader is not misled about what was measured.

2.3 (a) "everyone knows" asserts consensus instead of evidence; "completely failed" overstates and invites a counter-example. (b) a rewrite that states an argued, scoped claim, e.g. "On the two measures the department itself set, the reform has not met its targets".

3.1 B. an overstated verb is checked and found wanting.

3.2 B. plainness reads as confidence; complexity around a claim reads as evasion.

3.3 claim expressed with a verb matched to the evidence; scope stated in the sentence.