

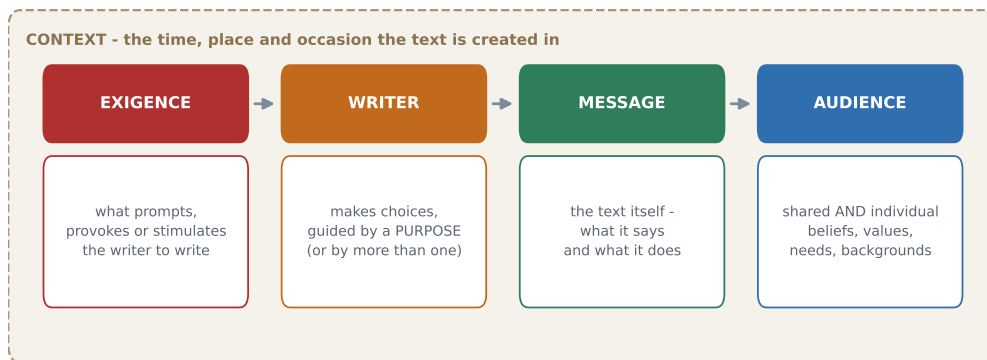
Claims, Evidence, and the Rhetorical Situation

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** 修辞情境 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** 促因 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** 目的 is what the writer hopes to accomplish. A text may have **more than one purpose**.
- The **audience** 受众 has **shared as well as individual** beliefs, values, needs, and backgrounds - so "the audience" is never a single uniform thing.
- The **context** 语境 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** 主张 that require a defence.
- Writers defend their claims with **evidence and/or reasoning** 证据与推理.
- 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** 综合写作: you are given several sources and must build **your own argument**, using the sources as evidence rather than summarising them.
- **Question 2, Rhetorical Analysis** 修辞分析: 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 论证写作:** 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.