

Claims, Evidence, and the Rhetorical Situation

AP English Language ■ Unit 1

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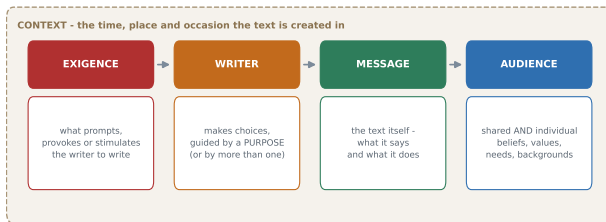


What we will cover

- 1 The Rhetorical Situation
- 2 Identifying Claims and Evidence
- 3 Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence
- 4 What the Exam Actually Asks

The Rhetorical Situation

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.

the distinction this unit turns on

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 **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 Rhetorical Situation, continued

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

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.

- 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.

Identifying Claims and Evidence, continued

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

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence, continued

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.

What the Exam Actually Asks, continued

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.

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.