

Every essay is scored on three rows – thesis, evidence and commentary, sophistication – and the commonest lost point is summary written where analysis was needed. 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 · Short Fiction I

✗ Retelling the plot of the passage.

✓ **Make a claim about what the passage does, then use its details as evidence.**

Summary is the most common way a response earns no evidence point despite covering the whole text.

SG 3 years

✗ Naming a literary device without saying what it achieves.

✓ **Explain the effect: the imagery of decay makes the narrator's nostalgia feel self-deceiving.**

The commentary is what Row B scores; the device alone is identification.

CED 1.5

2 · Poetry I

✗ Confusing the narrator with the author.

✓ **Keep them apart – the narrator is a construct, and the gap between them is often the point.**

The distinction is course content and misusing it makes the analysis wrong.

CED 2.2

4 · Short Fiction II

✗ Writing about a poem's meaning with no attention to its form.

✓ **Use the structure – the turn, the stanza break, the metre – as evidence.**

In poetry the structural choices ARE the evidence available.

CED 4.4

✗ Paraphrasing a poem line by line.

✓ **Group the lines into the movements of the argument the poem makes.**

A paraphrase is summary, which caps the evidence row.

CED 4.1

7 · Short Fiction III

✗ Choosing a work for the literary-argument essay that you barely remember.

✓ **Choose one you can quote or describe in specific detail.**

The evidence row requires specifics, and a vaguely recalled novel cannot supply them.

CED 7.1

✗ Answering the literary-argument prompt with a summary of the chosen work.

✓ **Answer the prompt's question about it, using only the parts that bear on that question.**

The prompt sets the argument; the work supplies the evidence.

CED 7.3

8 · Poetry III

✗ Treating a symbol as having one fixed meaning.

✓ **Show what the text makes it mean, here, and how that meaning develops.**

Interpretation from the text is what the sophistication point rewards.

CED 8.4

✗ Writing that a work ‘shows the human condition’.

✓ **Say what specifically it argues about people, and where the text shows it.**

A universal claim with no textual anchor is the kind of phrase the guidelines exclude from the sophistication point.

SG 3 years

3 · Longer Fiction or Drama I

✗ Analysing a character by describing what they do.

✓ **Say what the choices reveal, and how the text shapes our view of them.**

Description is summary; the interpretation is what Row B scores.

CED 3.2

✗ Treating a character’s statement as the text’s own view.

✓ **Ask whether the work endorses it – irony and unreliability are course content.**

The gap between a character and the work is often what a passage is doing.

CED 3.5

5 · Poetry II

✗ Ignoring the setting because it seems like background.

✓ **Use it: setting shapes conflict, constrains characters, and carries meaning.**

Setting is a named element of the course and a reliable source of evidence.

CED 5.1

✗ Describing structure as ‘the order of events’.

✓ **Name the choice – a flashback, a frame, a delayed revelation – and say what it achieves.**

The structural choice is the evidence; the sequence alone is plot.

CED 5.3

6 · Longer Fiction or Drama II

✗ Reading figurative language literally.

✓ **Identify the comparison, then explain what it makes the reader feel or understand.**

The explanation of the effect is the commentary the rubric requires.

CED 6.4

✗ Calling every image a symbol.

✓ **A symbol carries meaning beyond itself, and the text has to establish that meaning.**

Over-reading is as costly as under-reading, because the claim cannot be supported.

CED 6.5

2 · Poetry I

✗ Writing about a poem's speaker as 'the poet'.

✓ **Refer to the speaker, and note where the poem invites you to distrust them.**

The distinction is the same one that separates narrator from author in prose.

CED 4.2

✗ Ignoring who is telling the story.

✓ **Say what the point of view lets us see and what it hides.**

Narrative perspective is a named element and shapes every other reading.

CED 2.3

9 · Longer Fiction or Drama III

✗ Writing three paragraphs that each make the same point about the work.

✓ **Let the argument develop – complicate it, or trace a change across the text.**

Row B distinguishes commentary that supports a line of reasoning from commentary that repeats.

CED 9.3

✗ Ending with a moral about life.

✓ **End with what the work achieves, in its own terms.**

A general moral is the phrase the guidelines exclude from the sophistication point.

SG 3 years

✗ Planning nothing and starting to write.

✓ **Spend three minutes deciding the claim and the two or three moments that support it.**

The essays that lose Row B points are usually the ones that found their argument halfway through.

CED 9.1

✗ Leaving no time for the third essay.

✓ **Divide the time deliberately and start each essay on schedule.**

An unwritten essay scores zero in all three rows, which no strength elsewhere can offset.

CED 9.2

■ Where the prompt supplies a passage, everything you need is in it. Outside knowledge about the author is rarely evidence.

CED 1.1

- ✗ Answering a multiple-choice question from memory of the whole passage.
- ✓ **Return to the lines the question cites and read them again in context.**

The distractors are built from plausible readings of nearby lines.

CED 1.3