



SCHOLAR COACH, INC.

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

Unit 1 Skills Guide: Rhetorical Situation and Claims (Skills 1.A, 1.B, 2.A, 2.B, 3.A, 4.A)

This guide teaches the six AP English Language skills that anchor Unit 1: reading a text for its rhetorical situation and its claims and evidence, then writing introductions, conclusions, and paragraphs that do the same work on purpose. Read the concept sections once, work the examples with a pencil, try the practice set, and check yourself against the Answer Key at the end.

How to use this guide

Unit 1 is the foundation for the entire course. Every later skill (line of reasoning, tone, qualification, synthesis) assumes you can already answer two questions about any nonfiction text: *Who is talking to whom, about what, and why now?* and *What is this writer claiming, and what are they offering to back it up?* The College Board's Course and Exam Description (CED) calls the first question the **rhetorical situation** and the second **claims and evidence**.

Work through the sections in order the first time. After that, use the guide as a reference: the MCQ section when you are drilling multiple choice, the FRQ section before a timed essay, and the misconceptions list when you get something wrong and want to know why.

The skills in this unit, in plain English

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
1.A (Reading)	Identify and describe components of the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, writer, purpose, context, message.	Before you analyze anything, name the six parts of the situation. Who wrote this, for whom, prompted by what, in what circumstances, wanting what to happen, and saying what?

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
1.B (Reading)	Explain how an argument demonstrates understanding of an audience's beliefs, values, or needs.	Find the places where the writer is clearly thinking about the reader: shared values invoked, fears addressed, objections anticipated. Explain how those moves fit the audience.
2.A (Writing)	Write introductions and conclusions appropriate to the purpose and context of the rhetorical situation.	Your opening should orient the reader to the situation and state your claim; your closing should leave the reader with the significance of what you argued, not a repeat of it.
2.B (Writing)	Demonstrate an understanding of an audience's beliefs, values, or needs.	When you write, pick words, examples, and appeals your actual reader will accept. Do not argue to a skeptic as if they already agree.
3.A (Reading)	Identify and explain claims and evidence within an argument.	Sort the sentences of a text into claims (what the writer wants you to accept) and evidence (what the writer offers as reason to accept it). Then explain how each piece of evidence connects to its claim.
4.A (Writing)	Develop a paragraph that includes a claim and evidence supporting the claim.	Write a paragraph whose first sentence makes a debatable point and whose body supplies specific support for it.

Notice the pairing. Skills 1.A/1.B are the *reading* side of the Rhetorical Situation big idea; 2.A/2.B are the *writing* side of the same idea. Skills 3.A and 4.A pair the same way for Claims and Evidence. On the exam, reading skills appear in the Reading question sets (published nonfiction passages) and in the rhetorical analysis essay; writing skills appear in the Writing question sets (student-draft passages) and in all three essays.

Key concepts and definitions

The rhetorical situation (1.A)

Rhetoric is the strategic use of language to achieve a purpose with a particular audience. A **rhetorical situation** is the set of circumstances that surround a text and shape the writer's choices. The CED names six components.

COMPONENT	DEFINITION	QUESTION TO ASK
Exigence	The problem, event, or need that prompts the writer to write <i>now</i> . The "why this, why now."	What happened, or what is wrong, that made this text necessary?

COMPONENT	DEFINITION	QUESTION TO ASK
Writer (or speaker)	The person or group producing the text, including the persona, credentials, and reputation they bring.	Who is speaking, and what do they want the audience to believe about them?
Audience	The people the writer intends to reach (primary audience) and others who may encounter the text (secondary audience).	Who is this for? What do they already believe, value, fear, or need?
Purpose	What the writer wants the audience to think, feel, or do as a result of the text.	After reading, what is the audience supposed to do or believe differently?
Context	The broader circumstances: time, place, culture, history, genre conventions, and the ongoing conversation the text enters.	What else was happening? What does this genre normally do?
Message	The central idea or argument the text conveys.	If you had to state the point in one sentence, what would it be?

Two distinctions trip students up:

- **Exigence vs. context.** Context is the whole background. Exigence is the specific spark. The context of a 1963 civil rights speech is a century of segregation; the exigence might be a particular arrest, march, or published statement that the speaker is answering.
- **Purpose vs. message.** Message is *what* the text says; purpose is *what the writer wants to happen* because of it. A eulogy's message might be "this person lived generously"; its purpose might be to console mourners and move them to imitate that generosity.

Teachers often package these components in acronyms such as **SOAPSTone** (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone) or **SPACECAT** (Speaker, Purpose, Audience, Context, Exigence, Choices, Appeals, Tone). Both map onto the CED's six components; use whichever your class prefers, but on the exam you will see the CED's words.

Audience beliefs, values, and needs (1.B and 2.B)

A skilled writer builds an argument *for a specific audience*. You can see this in the text when the writer:

- **invokes shared values** ("as people who care about this town's children")
- **addresses a belief the audience holds** ("I know many of you think this plan is too expensive")
- **anticipates an objection** and answers it before it is raised
- **chooses examples the audience will recognize** (a farming example for farmers, a scripture reference for a congregation)
- **adjusts register**: formal for officials, warm for mourners, plain for a general public
- **appeals to a need**: safety, belonging, fairness, pride, economic security

The three classical **appeals** are useful labels for *what an appeal targets*, not for the choice itself: **ethos** (the writer's credibility and character), **pathos** (the audience's emotions), **logos** (reason and evidence). On the exam you will earn more credit for describing the concrete choice and its effect ("she opens by listing her twenty

years as a nurse, which gives her standing to question the hospital's policy") than for writing "she uses ethos." The Chief Reader Reports repeat this warning every year.

Claims and evidence (3.A and 4.A)

A **claim** is a statement the writer wants the audience to accept that could, in principle, be disputed. "The bridge was built in 1932" is a fact; "The bridge should be replaced" is a claim. Claims come in three broad kinds:

KIND OF CLAIM	WHAT IT ASSERTS	EXAMPLE
Claim of fact	Something is or is not the case, or will or will not happen.	"Screen time is reducing teenagers' attention spans."
Claim of value	Something is good or bad, better or worse, right or wrong.	"Public libraries are the most democratic institution in American life."
Claim of policy	Something should or should not be done.	"The city should eliminate parking minimums for new housing."

The **thesis** (sometimes called the overarching or central claim) is the main claim the whole text exists to support. **Supporting claims** are the smaller assertions that build toward it, often stated as topic sentences.

Evidence is whatever the writer offers to make a claim believable. Common types:

TYPE OF EVIDENCE	DESCRIPTION	STRENGTH AND LIMITS
Facts and statistics	Verifiable data, numbers, dates.	Persuasive to skeptical audiences; depends on source credibility and relevance.
Examples	Specific instances of a general point.	Make abstractions concrete; one example rarely proves a general claim.
Anecdotes	Short narratives, often personal.	Powerful emotionally; limited as proof.
Expert testimony	Quotation or paraphrase of an authority.	Borrowed credibility; the expert must be relevant and the audience must respect them.
Analogies	Comparison to a parallel case.	Clarify and persuade; break down where the cases differ.
Hypotheticals	Imagined scenarios.	Useful for exploring consequences; prove nothing by themselves.
Observations and experience	What the writer has seen or lived.	Vivid and credible if the writer has standing.

Commentary is the writer's explanation of how the evidence supports the claim. In Unit 1 you only need to identify claims and evidence and write paragraphs that contain both; later units add commentary and line of reasoning. But the habit starts now: notice whether the writer *tells you* why the evidence matters, or leaves you to infer it.

Introductions and conclusions (2.A)

An **introduction** in analytical or argumentative writing does three jobs: it orients the reader to the situation (what is being discussed and why it matters), it establishes the writer's stance, and it states the thesis. For a timed essay, two to four sentences is enough. An introduction that works for one rhetorical situation fails in another: a hook built on a funny anecdote suits an op-ed but not a eulogy.

A **conclusion** does not restate the introduction. It answers "so what?": it explains the significance of the argument, its implications, a call to action, or a return to the opening image with new meaning. Readers score conclusions as part of the whole; a thin conclusion costs less than a thin body, but a conclusion that adds meaning can help earn the sophistication point.

Worked example, reading side: Susan B. Anthony, 1873

The passage below is from a speech Susan B. Anthony delivered many times in 1873 after being arrested for voting in the 1872 presidential election. The text is in the public domain; the excerpt is the opening of the speech as it is commonly reproduced.

Friends and fellow citizens: I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny.

The preamble of the Federal Constitution says:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people, women as well as men.

Step 1: Name the rhetorical situation (1.A)

COMPONENT	WHAT THE TEXT AND CONTEXT TELL US
Writer	Susan B. Anthony, a well-known suffragist, speaking in her own voice as a defendant. She presents herself as a lawful citizen, not a lawbreaker.
Exigence	Her arrest and indictment for voting. The speech exists because she must answer a criminal charge and wants to shape public opinion before trial.

COMPONENT	WHAT THE TEXT AND CONTEXT TELL US
Audience	"Friends and fellow citizens": the general public in the towns where she spoke, including men who could vote, potential jurors, and people undecided about women's suffrage.
Purpose	To convince listeners that her vote was legal and, more broadly, that women already possess the right to vote under the Constitution.
Context	1873, five years after the Fourteenth Amendment defined citizenship, during a legal strategy by suffragists to claim voting rights through existing constitutional text rather than a new amendment. The genre is a public lecture framed as a legal defense.
Message	The Constitution was made by and for "the whole people," so denying women the vote contradicts its founding words.

Notice how much the exigence shapes the opening. She does not begin with the general case for suffrage. She begins with the indictment, because that is what her audience has heard about and what gives her the right to speak.

Step 2: Find the audience awareness (1.B)

- **"Friends and fellow citizens"** immediately places her inside the community rather than outside it. She claims the same status (citizen) that the charge against her denies.
- **"I stand before you tonight under indictment"** acknowledges what the audience already knows, and may hold against her, before she argues. She shows she understands their likely belief ("she broke the law") and reframes it as "alleged."
- **Quoting the preamble in full** assumes an audience that respects the Constitution as the highest authority. For a nineteenth-century American civic audience, this is the shared value most likely to override prejudice.
- **"It shall be my work this evening to prove to you"** treats the audience as a jury who want evidence, which flatters their reasonableness and sets up a logical structure they can follow.

Step 3: Separate claims from evidence (3.A)

SENTENCE OR PHRASE	CLAIM OR EVIDENCE?	EXPLANATION
"in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights"	Thesis (claim of fact/policy)	The central assertion the whole speech will defend: her vote was a lawful exercise of a right.
"guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any state to deny"	Supporting claim	Narrows the thesis: the right comes from the federal Constitution and overrides state law.

SENTENCE OR PHRASE	CLAIM OR EVIDENCE?	EXPLANATION
The quoted preamble ("We, the people... do ordain and establish this Constitution")	Evidence (textual authority)	The founding document itself, quoted verbatim, is offered as proof of who the Constitution was made for.
"It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people"	Commentary on the evidence	She explains what the quoted words mean for her claim, ruling out narrower readings one by one.
"we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them"	Supporting claim drawn from the evidence	Interprets "secure" to mean the rights already existed and the Constitution protects rather than grants them, which matters for her argument that no state can take them away.

What you should take from this: a short passage can contain a thesis, supporting claims, one carefully chosen piece of evidence, and commentary that squeezes meaning from the evidence word by word. When an MCQ asks "the writer quotes the preamble primarily in order to," the answer is in the commentary that follows the quotation.

Worked example, writing side: revising a student paragraph

Here is an original first draft of a body paragraph from a student argument essay responding to a prompt about whether schools should require community service. The audience is the student's school board.

Draft 1

Community service is good for students. A lot of people do community service and they like it. My friend volunteered at an animal shelter and said it was fun. Also it looks good on college applications. Schools should make everyone do it because it has so many benefits for everyone.

Diagnose it with Unit 1 skills:

- **4.A (claim and evidence).** The claim ("Community service is good for students") is vague and not debatable in a useful way; nobody on the school board thinks it is bad. The evidence is one secondhand anecdote ("my friend... said it was fun") and a general assertion ("looks good on college applications"). Nothing specific supports the actual policy claim at the end (that it should be *required*).
- **2.B (audience).** A school board worries about cost, scheduling, liability, and equity. "Fun" and "looks good on applications" do not speak to those concerns.
- **2.A (introduction/conclusion of the paragraph).** The paragraph ends by restating the opening in bigger words ("so many benefits for everyone") instead of pointing to what the evidence showed.

Draft 2

A service requirement would give every student, not only those with family connections, access to the kind of experience that builds real skills. At our school, students who already volunteer tend to be the ones whose parents know a clinic director or a nonprofit board member; the rest never get asked. A graduation

requirement with school-arranged placements would close that gap. The students I interviewed who completed forty hours at the county food bank last year described learning to schedule shifts, train newcomers, and solve problems when deliveries fell through, the same abilities employers list in every job posting. Because the board's own strategic plan names "career readiness for all students" as a priority, a service requirement is one of the few programs that would serve that goal at almost no cost.

What changed:

UNIT 1 SKILL	DRAFT 1	DRAFT 2
Claim (4.A)	"Community service is good."	A debatable, specific claim: a <i>requirement</i> would give <i>every</i> student access to skill-building experience.
Evidence (4.A)	A friend said it was fun.	An observation about who currently volunteers; interviews with specific students about specific skills; the board's own strategic plan.
Audience (2.B)	Speaks to a peer.	Speaks to the board's values (equity, career readiness, cost).
Closing move (2.A)	Repeats the claim.	Connects the evidence to a value the audience has already endorsed.

The second draft is longer, but every sentence does a job. That is the standard for 4.A: a paragraph with a claim that needs defending and evidence that actually defends it.

How this shows up on the multiple-choice section

Section I has 45 questions in 60 minutes with four answer choices (A–D). Reading questions use published nonfiction passages with a short italicized orienting note; Writing questions use student drafts with numbered sentences. Unit 1 skills appear in both. Skill categories 1 and 2 together account for roughly a quarter of the section; category 3 is the largest single reading category.

Typical stems for these skills:

- "The passage is best understood as a response to which of the following situations?" (1.A, exigence)
- "The writer's reference to ___ in the first paragraph primarily serves to appeal to an audience that ___." (1.B)
- "Which of the following best describes the intended audience of the passage?" (1.A)
- "The writer uses the example of ___ primarily as evidence that ___." (3.A)
- "Which of the following pieces of evidence does the writer present to support the claim that ___?" (3.A)
- "The writer wants to add a sentence at the beginning of the first paragraph to introduce the topic and engage the audience. Which of the following would best accomplish this goal?" (2.A)
- "The writer wants to acknowledge the beliefs of readers who ___. Which of the following, inserted after sentence 6, would best accomplish this?" (2.B)
- "The writer wants to add evidence to support the claim in sentence 4. Which of the following would best accomplish this goal?" (4.A)

Sample MCQ set

Passage for Questions 1–2. *The following is an original passage written for this guide in the style of an open letter from a small-town newspaper editor, published in 1911, to the town council.*

Gentlemen of the Council: You have asked why this paper opposes the plan to pave Main Street with brick when the county has offered macadam at half the price. I answer as one who has walked that street every morning for twenty-two years, in mud and in dust, and who has buried two neighbors whose wagons overturned in its ruts. The question before you is not which surface is cheaper this spring. It is which surface our grandchildren will still be driving on. The macadam road laid in Fulton in 1898 has been resurfaced three times at a cost, I am told by their clerk, of eleven thousand dollars. The brick laid in Dayton the same year has needed nothing but sweeping. I do not ask you to spend more. I ask you to spend once.

1. The passage is best understood as a response to which of the following exigences?

- A. A wagon accident that killed two residents the previous week
- B. The council's request that the paper explain its opposition to a paving plan
- C. A county offer of free road materials that the editor considers a bribe
- D. The editor's twenty-two years of walking an unpaved street

2. The writer's references to Fulton and Dayton primarily serve as evidence that

- A. brick paving is more expensive to install than macadam
- B. nearby towns have historically mismanaged their road budgets
- C. the apparently cheaper surface costs more over time
- D. the council has ignored the experience of comparable towns

Draft for Question 3. *The following is an original excerpt from a student's argumentative draft. Sentences are numbered.*

1. Many high schools have begun to start the school day later, around 8:30 a.m. (2) Research on adolescent sleep suggests teenagers' bodies are not ready to wake before about 7:00 a.m. (3) Our district should move its start time to 8:30. (4) Critics say later start times disrupt parents' work schedules and after-school sports.

3. The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 3 that acknowledges the beliefs of readers who are skeptical of the proposal, before responding to them in sentence 4. Which of the following would best accomplish this goal?

- A. Anyone who has watched a first-period class knows that students are barely awake.
- B. It is reasonable for families and coaches to worry about what a later start would do to their routines, and those concerns deserve a direct answer.
- C. Some people will never accept change, no matter how much evidence supports it.
- D. Later start times have been adopted by schools in at least a dozen states since 2015.

Answers and explanations are in the Answer Key at the end of this guide.

How to attack Unit 1 MCQ items

1. **Read the orienting note first.** It gives you the writer, date, genre, and often the audience before you read a word of the passage. Half of 1.A is answered there.
2. **For exigence questions, look for the trigger.** The exigence is usually named in the first paragraph, often with words like "You have asked," "In response to," "After last week's," or "Now that."
3. **For evidence questions, find the claim the evidence sits next to.** Evidence almost always supports the sentence immediately before or after it. Distractors describe claims from elsewhere in the passage.
4. **For audience-awareness Writing items, the right answer names the audience's actual concern and treats it respectfully.** Options that dismiss or insult the audience ("some people will never accept change") are wrong even when they sound confident.
5. **Reject absolutes.** Wrong answers often turn "many" into "all" or "suggests" into "proves."

How this shows up on the free-response questions

Section II has three essays in 2 hours 15 minutes (including a 15-minute reading period), each scored 0–6: Row A Thesis (0–1), Row B Evidence and Commentary (0–4), Row C Sophistication (0–1).

Rhetorical analysis (FRQ 2)

This is where 1.A and 1.B carry the most weight. The prompt gives you an orienting paragraph with the speaker, occasion, audience, and message. The directions require you to "demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation."

- **Use the orienting paragraph as your first evidence.** If the prompt tells you the speech was a commencement address to graduates in 2016, every claim you make about the speaker's choices should connect to graduates, a ceremony, and that year.
- **Build your thesis on choices tied to purpose,** not devices: "Anthony frames her defense as a legal proof, quoting the Constitution's own words to a civic audience that reveres them, in order to recast her 'crime' as citizenship." That names a choice (framing as proof, quoting the preamble), an audience awareness (reverence for the Constitution), and the purpose from the prompt.
- **The Chief Reader's warning:** essays that treat a speech as an essay ("the author writes to readers") lose credibility. Name the speaker and the listeners.
- **Sophistication (Row C)** is often earned by explaining the significance of a choice *given the situation*: why this audience, at this moment, needed this move.

Argument (FRQ 3) and Synthesis (FRQ 1)

Here 2.A, 2.B, and 4.A are your tools.

- **Introduction (2.A):** two to four sentences. Orient (what the question is and why it matters), define the key term if the prompt uses an abstraction, state a defensible thesis. Do not restate the prompt; that earns a 0 in Row A.
- **Body paragraphs (4.A):** each one opens with a claim that advances the thesis and contains specific evidence. "Specific" means a named example with details, not "many people" or "studies show." Row B stalls at 2 when evidence is general.

- **Audience (2.B):** your reader is a trained AP reader who is “skeptical but open-minded.” Write to someone who needs convincing, not to someone who already agrees.
- **Conclusion (2.A):** say what follows from your argument. Implications, limits, or a broader context can contribute to Row C.

A Unit 1 pre-writing routine for any essay

1. Write the six components of the rhetorical situation in the margin (for FRQ 2, from the prompt; for FRQ 3 and FRQ 1, your own: you are the writer, the AP reader is the audience, the prompt is the exigence).
2. Write your thesis as one sentence with a claim that someone could reasonably dispute.
3. List two or three supporting claims, each with one piece of specific evidence beside it.
4. Only then begin the introduction.

Practice exercises

Complete these on paper. Answers are in the Answer Key.

Exercise 1: Identify the rhetorical situation

Read the following original passage, written for this guide as a letter from a hospital’s chief nurse to the hospital’s board of trustees in 1919.

To the Trustees: Last month this hospital turned away forty-one patients because we had no beds and no nurses to tend them. Six of those patients died at home. I have served here since the building opened, and I have never written to you before. I write now because the influenza is returning and because the city council has again declined to fund a training school for nurses. You are the only body with the authority to fund one yourselves. A school of twenty students, housed in the east wing, would cost less than the new boiler you approved in March and would supply this hospital with trained hands by the time the next wave arrives.

For each component, write one phrase from or about the passage: exigence, writer, audience, purpose, context, message.

Exercise 2: Audience awareness

Using the same passage, identify **three** specific places where the writer shows awareness of the trustees’ beliefs, values, or needs. For each, name the value or concern being addressed.

Exercise 3: Claims and evidence

Read this original paragraph from a magazine essay about public parks.

City parks are not luxuries; they are infrastructure. In the summer of 2021, surface temperatures in the treeless blocks of one Midwestern city ran fourteen degrees hotter than in blocks beside a park, according to the city’s own sensors. Emergency calls for heat illness followed the same map. A park, in other words, does for a neighborhood what a storm drain does: it carries away something that would otherwise harm people. We fund drains without debate. We should fund parks the same way.

- a. State the thesis in your own words. (b) Identify every piece of evidence and label its type (statistic, example, analogy, etc.). (c) Identify one supporting claim that is not the thesis.

Exercise 4: Diagnose a paragraph (4.A)

Here is an original student paragraph. Identify its claim, list its evidence, and explain in two or three sentences why it would not fully satisfy Skill 4.A.

Social media has a lot of effects on teenagers. Some are good and some are bad. Teenagers use social media all the time. It can make them feel connected but also lonely. Everyone knows someone who has been affected by it in some way.

Exercise 5: Rewrite the paragraph

Rewrite the Exercise 4 paragraph so that it has a debatable claim and at least two pieces of specific evidence. You may invent plausible, clearly original examples (a named observation from your own school, a described study, a specific scenario) as long as you do not present them as real statistics. Target length: 100–150 words. Audience: a school principal deciding whether to restrict phone use.

Exercise 6: Match the introduction to the situation

Below are three rhetorical situations and three original opening sentences. Match each opening to the situation it fits, and explain in one sentence why the other two openings would be inappropriate for that situation.

Situations 1. A eulogy delivered by a granddaughter at her grandfather's funeral. 2. An op-ed in a city newspaper arguing for a bike lane on a dangerous street. 3. A rhetorical analysis essay on the AP exam about a 1905 speech on child labor.

Openings (a) "Delivering her speech to a convention of suffragists who could not yet vote, Florence Kelley turns her audience's political powerlessness into the center of her argument about child labor." (b) "Three cyclists have been struck on Harbor Avenue since January, and the city's response has been a sign." (c) "My grandfather never once told me to work hard. He just let me watch him do it."

Exercise 7: Write an introduction and conclusion (2.A)

Prompt (original, in the style of FRQ 3): *A columnist recently wrote, "The most useful thing a school can teach is how to be bored well." Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which the columnist's claim is valid.*

Write (a) a two-to-four-sentence introduction that orients the reader, defines "bored well" as you will use it, and states a defensible thesis; and (b) a two-to-three-sentence conclusion that does not restate the thesis but states its significance or implication.

Exercise 8: MCQ writing item (2.A)

Original student draft; sentences numbered.

1. ____ (2) Between 2010 and 2020, the number of independent bookstores in the United States grew even as online retailers expanded. (3) Owners credit events, curated selections, and the simple fact

that people like being in a room with other readers. (4) Rather than being killed by the internet, the independent bookstore has learned to offer what the internet cannot.

The writer wants to add a sentence at position (1) that introduces the topic and engages an audience of general newspaper readers. Which of the following would best accomplish this goal?

- A. The retail book industry has undergone significant structural changes in the past decade, which this essay will examine.
- B. A decade ago, nearly everyone predicted that the neighborhood bookstore would be the next video store: fondly remembered and gone.
- C. Books are important because reading improves vocabulary and empathy.
- D. Independent bookstores grew between 2010 and 2020.

Common misconceptions

MISCONCEPTION	WHY IT IS WRONG	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
"The audience is 'the reader' or 'everyone.'"	Writers write to particular people with particular beliefs. "Everyone" tells the AP reader you have not thought about the situation.	Name the audience as specifically as the orienting note allows: "graduating seniors at a women's college in 1997," "a town council deciding a budget."
"Exigence is the same as context or occasion."	Context is the whole background; exigence is the specific need or event that makes the text necessary now.	Ask "what happened that made this writer pick up the pen?" The answer is the exigence.
"Purpose is what the text is about."	That is the subject or message. Purpose is what the writer wants the audience to think, feel, or do.	Phrase purpose with an infinitive: "to persuade the board to fund...", "to console...", "to move the audience to..."
"Ethos, pathos, and logos are rhetorical choices."	They are categories of appeal, the <i>effect</i> a choice targets. The choice is the anecdote, the statistic, the credential, the comparison.	Describe the concrete choice first, then the effect: "She lists her twenty-two years on the street, which gives her the standing to overrule the county's price comparison."
"A claim is any sentence the writer believes."	A claim is a disputable assertion. A verifiable fact is evidence, not a claim.	Ask: could a reasonable person disagree with this sentence? If not, it is probably evidence or background.
"More evidence is always better."	Evidence that does not connect to the claim is noise. One well-explained example beats three unexplained ones.	For each piece of evidence, write the sentence that says what it proves. If you cannot, cut it.
"A good introduction needs a hook."	In AP essays, a long or gimmicky hook wastes time and can clash with the situation.	Orient, stance, thesis. Two to four sentences.

MISCONCEPTION	WHY IT IS WRONG	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
"A conclusion restates the thesis in different words."	Repetition adds nothing for the reader and earns nothing on the rubric.	Answer "so what?": implications, a broader context, a return to the opening with new meaning.
"Restating the prompt's statement of purpose is a thesis."	Row A requires a defensible claim about the writer's choices (FRQ 2) or your own position (FRQ 1 and 3). Echoing the prompt earns 0.	Add the "how": name the specific choices or the specific position.

Quick reference: Unit 1 checklist

Before you finish any reading task, you should be able to fill in this table from memory.

QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER
Who is the writer, and how do they present themselves?	_____
What prompted the text (exigence)?	_____
Who is the intended audience, and what do they value or fear?	_____
What does the writer want the audience to do or believe (purpose)?	_____
What is the central claim (thesis)?	_____
What are the two or three most important pieces of evidence, and what claim does each support?	_____
Where does the writer most clearly show awareness of the audience?	_____

Before you submit any paragraph you write, check: Does the first sentence make a claim someone could dispute? Does the paragraph contain at least one specific piece of evidence? Does the paragraph speak to the actual reader's values or concerns? Does the last sentence connect the evidence to the claim rather than repeat the claim?

Answer Key

Sample MCQ set

1. (B). The first sentence states the exigence directly: "You have asked why this paper opposes the plan." The council's request prompted the letter. (A) is a detail the editor uses as evidence of the road's danger, not the trigger for writing, and the passage does not say the accidents happened "the previous week." (C) misreads the county's offer as a bribe; the editor never suggests that. (D) is the editor's credential (ethos), not the exigence.

2. (C). The Fulton macadam road needed three resurfacings costing eleven thousand dollars; the Dayton brick “has needed nothing but sweeping.” Together they support the claim that the cheaper surface this spring costs more over decades (“I ask you to spend once”). (A) states the opposite of the editor’s point about long-term cost and is not what the comparison shows. (B) is an unsupported judgment; the editor blames the surface, not the towns. (D) accuses the council of something the passage does not say.

3. (B). The stem asks for a sentence that acknowledges skeptics’ beliefs respectfully *before* sentence 4 names their specific concerns. (B) does exactly that: it validates the worry and promises a response. (A) is evidence for the writer’s own side, not an acknowledgment of skeptics. (C) insults the skeptical audience, which violates 2.B. (D) adds evidence rather than acknowledging beliefs; it is grammatically fine but off-goal.

Exercise 1: Rhetorical situation

COMPONENT	MODEL ANSWER
Exigence	Forty-one patients turned away, six deaths, the return of influenza, and the city council’s refusal to fund a nursing school; the chief nurse writes “now” because the next wave is coming and the council has just said no.
Writer	The hospital’s chief nurse, who has served since the building opened and has never written to the board before (which signals urgency and credibility).
Audience	The hospital’s board of trustees, who control the budget and “are the only body with the authority to fund” a school.
Purpose	To persuade the trustees to fund a nurse training school in the east wing before the next influenza wave.
Context	1919, during the influenza pandemic; a shortage of trained nurses; municipal funding refused; the genre is a formal internal letter from staff to governing board.
Message	The hospital can and should train its own nurses; the cost is modest and the alternative is more preventable deaths.

Exercise 2: Audience awareness (any three)

- “You are the only body with the authority to fund one yourselves”: addresses the trustees’ sense of their own power and responsibility; makes inaction a choice they own.
- “would cost less than the new boiler you approved in March”: speaks to the board’s concern with cost by comparing to a purchase they already judged affordable; also implies consistency (if the boiler was worth it, so is this).
- “Six of those patients died at home”: appeals to the trustees’ responsibility for patient welfare and the hospital’s reputation.
- “I have never written to you before”: anticipates the board’s possible belief that staff complain routinely; establishes that this request is exceptional.
- “would supply this hospital with trained hands by the time the next wave arrives”: addresses the board’s need for a practical, timely solution rather than a vague appeal.

Exercise 3: Claims and evidence

- a. **Thesis:** Cities should fund parks as essential infrastructure, the way they fund storm drains, not as optional amenities.
- b. **Evidence:**
- Fourteen-degree temperature difference between treeless blocks and park-adjacent blocks, from city sensors: *statistic/fact*.
 - Emergency calls for heat illness “followed the same map”: *fact/observation* (correlational).
 - A park “does for a neighborhood what a storm drain does”: *analogy*.
 - “We fund drains without debate”: *observation about current practice*, used as the basis of the comparison.
- c. **Supporting claim (not the thesis):** “A park... carries away something that would otherwise harm people” (parks protect health), or “City parks are not luxuries” (a claim of value that the thesis of policy builds on).

Exercise 4: Diagnosis

Claim: “Social media has a lot of effects on teenagers” (and “some are good and some are bad”). **Evidence:** none that is specific. “Teenagers use social media all the time” and “everyone knows someone who has been affected” are generalizations, not evidence. **Why it fails 4.A:** the claim is not debatable (no one disputes that social media has effects), it does not take a position, and the paragraph offers no particular instance, observation, data, or example that could support any position. It is a topic, not an argument.

Exercise 5: Model rewrite (one of many acceptable versions)

Phone restrictions during class would help students most not by removing distraction but by restoring the small social moments that build a school community. In the two classrooms at our school where teachers already collect phones at the door, students talk to each other during the five minutes before the bell; in the hallway outside, the same students stand in silence, scrolling. A junior I spoke with described her phone-free chemistry class as “the only place I actually know everyone’s name.” A restriction that applies during instruction and passing periods, with phones available at lunch, would extend that effect across the building without cutting students off from parents or after-school plans. For a principal weighing complaints about distraction against complaints about overreach, the social benefit is the stronger case, and it is one students themselves can see.

Check: debatable claim (restrictions help through community, not distraction); specific evidence (two classrooms, hallway observation, a quotation from a named-role student); audience awareness (principal weighing complaints; parents’ access preserved); closing connects evidence to claim.

Exercise 6: Matching

- **Situation 1 (eulogy) → (c).** Personal, warm, concrete memory suits mourners. (a) is academic analysis; (b) is a civic complaint. Neither fits a funeral.
- **Situation 2 (op-ed) → (b).** A specific, urgent fact and a pointed jab at the city suit newspaper readers and a persuasive purpose. (c) is too personal and unrelated; (a) is about a different subject entirely.
- **Situation 3 (AP rhetorical analysis) → (a).** It names the speaker, audience, occasion, and a specific choice tied to the message, which is exactly what Row A and the “rhetorical situation” direction require. (b) and (c)

make no claim about a writer's choices.

Exercise 7: Model introduction and conclusion

Introduction: "Boredom has a bad reputation in schools, where every empty minute is treated as a failure of planning. But there is a difference between being bored badly, which means reaching for the nearest distraction, and being bored well, which means tolerating an unfilled moment long enough for your own thoughts to arrive. The columnist is largely right: a school that teaches students to sit with that discomfort gives them a skill that outlasts any particular lesson, though it is a skill that must be taught alongside substance rather than in place of it."

Conclusion: "If schools took the columnist seriously, the change would show up less in the curriculum than in the clock: fewer bells, longer stretches of unstructured work, and teachers willing to let a silence go unfilled. The payoff would not appear on any test. It would appear years later, in adults who can wait in a line, sit through a difficult conversation, or finish a hard book without checking whether something more interesting has arrived."

Both pass the tests: the introduction orients, defines the key term, and states a qualified but defensible position; the conclusion states implications rather than repeating the thesis.

Exercise 8: MCQ writing item

(B). It introduces the topic (bookstores' predicted death) with a concrete, recognizable comparison that newspaper readers will find engaging, and it sets up the reversal in sentences 2–4. (A) announces the essay's intention in a flat, academic register that does not engage general readers ("this essay will examine" is also out of place in an op-ed-style draft). (C) is off-topic: the passage is about bookstores as businesses, not the benefits of reading. (D) merely repeats sentence 2's fact without introducing or engaging.

Want a plan built around **your** student?

BOOK NOW →