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Unit 2 Skills Guide: Evidence, Reasoning, and Organization (Skills 3.B, 4.B, 5.A, 6.A, 7.A, 8.A)

This guide teaches how to find and write a thesis, trace and build a line of reasoning, write commentary that connects evidence to claims, and use word choice to set tone. Work through the concepts, study the two worked examples, try the practice set, and check yourself against the Answer Key at the end.

How to use this guide

Unit 1 taught you to name the rhetorical situation and to separate claims from evidence. Unit 2 asks the harder question: **how does the writer get from the thesis to the end, and does each step actually hold weight?** On the exam, this is the difference between a Row B score of 2 and a score of 4. The Chief Reader Reports for 2023, 2024, and 2025 name *line of reasoning* and *commentary* as the two most common discriminators between middle and high scores.

This unit also introduces the first style skills (7.A and 8.A): how word choice and comparisons create tone. Tone is not decoration; it is part of how an argument persuades.

The skills in this unit, in plain English

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
3.B (Reading)	Identify and describe the overarching thesis of an argument, and any indication it provides of the argument's structure.	Find the one sentence (or two) that states what the whole text is arguing. Notice whether it also tells you how the argument will be organized.
4.B (Writing)	Write a thesis statement that requires proof or defense and that may preview the structure of the argument.	Write a thesis someone could reasonably disagree with. If it helps, let it hint at the order of your reasons.
5.A (Reading)	Describe the line of reasoning and explain whether it supports an argument's overarching thesis.	Trace how the claims connect step by step, then judge: does this chain of steps really lead to the thesis?

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
6.A (Writing)	Develop a line of reasoning and commentary that explains it throughout an argument.	Arrange your claims so each builds on the last, and explain, in your own words, how each piece of evidence supports its claim.
7.A (Reading)	Explain how word choice, comparisons, and syntax contribute to the specific tone or style of a text.	Say what particular words and comparisons make the text sound the way it does, and what that sound does for the argument.
8.A (Writing)	Strategically use words, comparisons, and syntax to convey a specific tone or style in an argument.	Choose your own words and comparisons on purpose so your tone fits your audience and goal.

Unit 2 pairs skills the same way as Unit 1: odd numbers are reading, even numbers are writing, and each pair works on the same idea from opposite sides. A good writer reads like an analyst; a good analyst understands how a writer decides.

Key concepts and definitions

Thesis (3.B and 4.B)

A **thesis** is the central claim of an argument, the sentence the rest of the text exists to defend. Three properties matter.

1. **It is a claim, not a fact or a topic.** "The Gettysburg Address is a famous speech" is a fact. "Lincoln's speech redefines the war as a test of equality rather than of union" is a claim: someone could challenge it.
2. **It requires proof or defense.** If the next sentence could not begin with "because" or "for example," the thesis is not doing its job.
3. **It may preview structure.** A thesis can signal how the argument will unfold: "Although X, Y, because first A and then B." This is optional but helps the reader and shows a line of reasoning from the start.

On the exam, a thesis can be one sentence or several sentences close together, and it can appear anywhere in the response (though it usually belongs at the end of the introduction). The rubric's Row A gives one point for a defensible position; restating the prompt, listing pros and cons, or stating an obvious fact earns zero.

THESIS QUALITY	EXAMPLE (TOPIC: SCHOOL UNIFORMS)	VERDICT
Topic only	"This essay is about school uniforms."	No claim.
Fact	"Many schools require uniforms."	Not arguable.
Vague opinion	"School uniforms are good and bad."	Does not take a position.

THESIS QUALITY	EXAMPLE (TOPIC: SCHOOL UNIFORMS)	VERDICT
Defensible claim	"Uniforms reduce visible income differences among students but do little to improve behavior, so schools should adopt them for equity, not discipline."	Takes a position, requires proof, previews reasons.

For **rhetorical analysis**, the thesis claims something about the writer's choices and their purpose, for example: "By opening with a personal loss and then widening to a public cost, the speaker moves her audience from sympathy to responsibility." Naming a device without a purpose ("She uses ethos, pathos, and logos") is not a defensible thesis.

Line of reasoning (5.A and 6.A)

A **line of reasoning** is the logical path from your thesis through your supporting claims to your conclusion. It is a chain, not a list. The test: **could the body paragraphs be rearranged without changing the essay?** If so, you have a list. In a real line of reasoning, each claim depends on or develops the one before it.

Common shapes of a line of reasoning:

SHAPE	HOW IT MOVES	TYPICAL USE
Cause to effect	Establish a cause, show its consequences, argue for a response.	Policy arguments.
Problem, cause, solution	Define the problem, diagnose why, propose a fix.	Op-eds, proposals.
Concession to claim	Grant a limited truth in the opposing view, then show why the main claim still holds.	Qualified arguments.
Narrow to broad	Start with one case, generalize to a principle.	Personal essays, speeches.
Chronological shifts	Follow a text from beginning to end, tracking how purpose or tone changes.	Rhetorical analysis.
Order of importance	Move from the weakest reason to the strongest, or reverse.	Argument and synthesis.

When you are **reading**, 5.A asks you to describe the line of reasoning (what steps does the writer take?) and to **evaluate** it (do the steps support the thesis, or does the writer leap, assume, or drift?). Gaps in a line of reasoning often come from an unstated assumption called a **warrant**: the belief that connects evidence to claim. If a writer argues "The town should build a library because the town's children read below grade level," the warrant is that libraries improve reading. Readers who reject the warrant reject the argument.

Commentary (6.A)

Commentary is the writer's explanation of how evidence supports a claim. It answers the skeptical reader's question, "So what? Why does that prove your point?"

The most common error the Chief Reader Reports describe is **quote plus paraphrase**: a quotation followed by a restatement ("This shows that..."). Commentary must say something the evidence did not already say.

NOT COMMENTARY	COMMENTARY
"The author writes, 'We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground.' This shows that the ground cannot be dedicated."	"By stacking three near-synonyms and negating each, Lincoln admits that a speech is a small thing next to what the soldiers did, which turns the audience's attention from the ceremony to the sacrifice."

A reliable three-part commentary check:

1. **Meaning**: what does the evidence mean, in your words?
2. **Impact**: what effect does it have on the audience?
3. **Purpose or link**: how does it advance the thesis or the writer's goal?

For ratio, many teachers recommend commentary roughly twice the length of the evidence. That is a guide, not a rule, but if your evidence is longer than your explanation, you probably have summary.

Word choice and tone (7.A and 8.A)

Tone is the writer's attitude toward the subject and audience. **Diction** is word choice. Two parts of diction matter most:

- **Denotation**: the literal dictionary meaning.
- **Connotation**: the associations and feelings a word carries. "Slender," "skinny," and "gaunt" all denote thin but connote very different attitudes.

Other tools that shape tone:

TOOL	WHAT IT DOES	EXAMPLE
Level of formality	Sets distance or intimacy.	"We regret to inform you" vs. "Heads up."
Concrete vs. abstract diction	Concrete words make things vivid; abstract words raise general ideas.	"the cracked bowl on her sill" vs. "poverty."
Precise verbs	Verbs carry attitude.	"The senator <i>admitted</i> " vs. " <i>confessed</i> " vs. " <i>noted</i> ."
Comparisons (metaphor, simile, analogy)	Frame the subject by what it is likened to.	Calling a tax cut "a gift" vs. "a giveaway."
Loaded language	Words chosen to push the audience toward a judgment.	"Regime" vs. "government."
Euphemism	A softer word replacing a harsh one.	"Downsizing" for firing.

How to describe tone well. A single tone word is often too blunt. Pair it with the evidence and with a qualifier: “respectful but firm,” “playful on the surface, serious underneath.” Then state the effect: what the tone does for the argument. A tone list for reference: admiring, ambivalent, apologetic, candid, conciliatory, contemplative, critical, defiant, earnest, elegiac, indignant, ironic, nostalgic, objective, reverent, sardonic, solemn, urgent, wistful, wry.

Writing side (8.A): you convey tone by choosing words with the right connotation, matching formality to your audience, and using comparisons that your reader will recognize. A tone mismatch (slang in a formal letter, stiff jargon in a friendly appeal) is a rhetorical error, not just a style slip.

Worked example, reading side: Lincoln at Gettysburg, 1863

The passage below is Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (November 19, 1863), in the public domain. It is quoted here in the commonly used Bliss copy wording. **Note:** the text is divided into three parts for analysis.

Part 1. Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Part 2. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Part 3. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Step 1: Find the thesis (3.B)

Lincoln does not announce “My thesis is...” but the argument has a center: the war is a test of whether a nation founded on equality can survive, and the right way to honor the dead is to finish that work. The clearest statements are in Part 2 (“testing whether that nation... can long endure”) and Part 3 (“It is for us the living... to be dedicated here to the unfinished work”). A one-sentence thesis in our words: **The proper memorial to the fallen is not the ceremony but the living’s commitment to finishing the work of securing a nation founded on equality.**

Does the thesis preview structure? Partly. The opening “Four score and seven years ago” signals a movement from past to present to future, which is exactly how the speech is organized.

Step 2: Trace the line of reasoning (5.A)

STEP	CLAIM	HOW IT CONNECTS TO THE NEXT
1. Past	The nation was founded on the proposition that all men are created equal.	Establishes the standard by which everything else is measured.
2. Present	The Civil War is testing whether such a nation can survive; we are here to dedicate a field to those who died for it.	Moves from principle to its present cost, and justifies the ceremony ("fitting and proper").
3. Turn	But a ceremony cannot truly hallow the ground; the soldiers' deeds already did.	Qualifies the previous step: the ritual is secondary to the sacrifice. This turn is what makes the speech an argument rather than a ceremony.
4. Obligation	Therefore the living must continue the unfinished work.	The conclusion follows from the turn: if the dead have done the consecrating, the living owe the task.
5. Purpose	The goal: "a new birth of freedom" and the survival of self-government.	Links the obligation back to the founding principle in Step 1, closing the loop.

Evaluation: The reasoning holds because each step depends on the one before it. Step 3 could not come before Step 2; Step 4 would feel arbitrary without Step 3. The ending returns to the founding "proposition" (equality becomes "a new birth of freedom"), so the argument ends where its first premise began, only larger. The unstated warrant is that the dead's sacrifice creates a debt on the living. An audience that rejects that warrant would reject the call to action, but a 1863 audience of grieving Northerners would not.

Step 3: Analyze word choice and tone (7.A)

The triple negation: "we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow." The three verbs are near-synonyms that rise in religious weight. The effect is a humility that is itself persuasive: the speaker appears to diminish his own speech, which makes his call to action seem selfless rather than political.

"Our poor power to add or detract": the adjective "poor" has a double connotation (modest, and also lamentable). It is self-deprecating rather than boastful; it contrasts with the soldiers' "brave" deeds. Tone: **humble, reverent, solemn.**

"The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here": this is a prediction that history proved wrong, but in context it is a modest dismissal of the speech. The effect is to direct attention away from the speaker.

"Devotion... devotion": the repeated word ("increased devotion," "last full measure of devotion") ties the living's response to the dead's sacrifice through one word, implying a continuity of commitment.

Comparison: "conceived in Liberty" and "a new birth of freedom": the metaphor of birth frames the nation as a living thing begun at the founding, endangered by war, and capable of rebirth. A nation that can be born again can be saved. Notice how the metaphor does argumentative work: it makes survival seem possible and urgent.

Net tone: solemn and humble, but resolute in the final sentence ("we here highly resolve"). The shift from reverence to resolve mirrors the shift from past to future in the line of reasoning.

Worked example, writing side: building commentary and a line of reasoning

Task (original, in the style of FRQ 3): A school-board member wrote, "Homework is the best way to teach students responsibility." Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which the claim is valid.

Draft thesis and reasoning plan

Weak thesis: "Homework has advantages and disadvantages, and there are many sides to this issue." This fails Row A: it takes no position.

Strong thesis: "Homework can teach responsibility only when students have real choices about it; assigned without choice, it teaches compliance instead, so schools should rely on homework less and on student-managed projects more."

This is defensible, narrows the claim ("only when"), and previews a structure: (1) what responsibility requires, (2) why mandatory homework often teaches compliance, (3) what works better.

Plan for the line of reasoning:

PARAGRAPH	CLAIM	WHY IT COMES HERE
1	Responsibility means owning a decision and its consequences, not merely finishing assigned work.	Defines the key term the rest depends on.
2	Mandatory homework usually removes the decision and keeps only the deadline, so students learn to satisfy a checker.	Applies the definition to the claim; shows why homework fails the standard.
3	Projects where students set their own schedule and absorb the consequences teach the thing homework only promises.	Builds on 1 and 2; offers the alternative that the first two paragraphs justify.

Notice each paragraph needs the one before it. The definition makes paragraph 2 possible; paragraph 2's diagnosis makes paragraph 3's alternative necessary.

Drafting paragraph 2: from weak to strong commentary

Version A (summary commentary):

Mandatory homework usually removes the decision and keeps only the deadline. For example, my history teacher gives us a worksheet every night. We have to turn it in the next day. This shows that homework is mandatory and students have to do it.

The evidence is present (a worksheet, a deadline), but the commentary just restates “mandatory.” No reader learns anything new, and the link to *responsibility* is missing.

Version B (real commentary):

Mandatory homework usually removes the decision and keeps only the deadline. In my history class, a worksheet is due every morning, graded for completion, and worth a fixed number of points. Nothing about it asks me to decide what to learn, how long to spend, or what to do if I am stuck; the only choice left is whether to copy a friend’s answers at 7:40 a.m. That is not responsibility but risk management, the same skill a driver uses to judge how fast he can go before a camera catches him. When the only consequence for failing is a lost point, what students learn to manage is the point, not the learning.

What changed:

ELEMENT	VERSION A	VERSION B
Evidence	Vague (“a worksheet every night”)	Specific (graded for completion, due at a time, fixed points)
Commentary	Restates	Explains the missing decision; names what the student actually learns; introduces an analogy (speeding-camera driver)
Link to thesis	Missing	Closes by returning to the claim: what students learn to manage is the point, not the learning
Word choice (8.A)	Neutral, flat	“Risk management,” “the only choice left,” “7:40 a.m.” give the paragraph a wry, slightly sardonic tone appropriate to a student criticizing a system

The tone in Version B is deliberate: dry and controlled rather than angry, which suits a skeptical audience of adults who may not welcome complaint but might respond to precision.

How this shows up on the multiple-choice section

Section I has 45 questions in 60 minutes with four answer choices (A–D). Skill categories 3 and 5 (Claims and Evidence, Reasoning and Organization, reading side) together make up the largest share of reading questions, and categories 4 and 6 contribute substantially to the Writing sets. Style (7 and 8) accounts for about a quarter of the section.

Typical stems:

- “Which of the following best states the overarching thesis of the passage?” (3.B)
- “The thesis in the first paragraph signals that the writer will organize the argument by...” (3.B)
- “The writer wants to revise the thesis (sentence 3) so that it presents a defensible claim and previews the structure of the argument. Which of the following best accomplishes this?” (4.B)

- “Which of the following best describes the line of reasoning the writer develops across paragraphs 2–4?” (5.A)
- “The writer’s discussion of ___ in paragraph 3 is connected to the thesis in paragraph 1 by...” (5.A)
- “Which of the following sentences, if placed after sentence 5, would best provide commentary explaining how the evidence in sentence 5 supports the claim in sentence 4?” (6.A)
- “In context, the word ‘___’ in the second sentence most nearly connotes...” (7.A)
- “The comparison of ___ to ___ in paragraph 3 primarily emphasizes...” (7.A)
- “The writer wants to maintain a formal, objective tone. Which version of the underlined portion best accomplishes this?” (8.A)

Sample MCQ set

Passage for Questions 1–2. *The following is an original passage written for this guide in the style of an 1880s newspaper column on public education.*

1. The proposal before the legislature is that every county maintain a free library. (2) Its opponents say the expense is a burden the farmer cannot bear. (3) I submit that the farmer already pays a larger tax, in ignorance, than any library could cost him. (4) A man who cannot read the label on a bag of seed buys what the merchant chooses to sell; a man who cannot read the contract on his mortgage signs what the banker chooses to write. (5) Each year the county loses more in such bargains than the entire cost of the proposal. (6) A free library is therefore not an expense laid upon the farmer but a defense raised for him.

1. Which of the following best describes the line of reasoning of the passage?
 - A. It presents a problem, offers a series of unrelated examples, and concludes with a call for debate.
 - B. It states a proposal, reframes an objection about cost, supports the reframing with examples of costly ignorance, and concludes that the proposal protects farmers.
 - C. It describes the history of libraries and then argues that tradition favors the proposal.
 - D. It concedes that the expense is a burden and argues that the burden is worth bearing for the sake of culture.
2. The shift in sentence 6 from “expense” to “defense” primarily serves to
 - A. introduce a comparison that the opponents of the proposal will accept as accurate
 - B. reframe the library from a cost to a protection, completing the argument that began with the opponents’ objection
 - C. suggest that the writer has abandoned the argument about cost in favor of an argument about safety
 - D. soften the writer’s tone so the legislature will not feel criticized

Draft for Question 3. *The following is an original student draft excerpt. Sentences are numbered.*

1. Many cities have started installing bike lanes. (2) In one city, collisions involving cyclists fell by almost a third in the year after protected lanes were added on its busiest streets. (3) _____ (4) The cost of the lanes is small compared with the cost of treating the injuries they prevent.

3. The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 2 that provides commentary explaining how the evidence in sentence 2 supports the claim that protected lanes make streets safer. Which of the following would best accomplish this goal?

- A. Cycling has become more popular in recent years, which has led to more discussion of road safety.
- B. A drop of that size, tied to the lanes rather than to a change in the number of riders, suggests that physical separation between bikes and cars, not rider caution, is what prevents collisions.
- C. Many people agree that bike lanes are a good idea for cities.
- D. Another city installed bike lanes at about the same time.

Answers and explanations are in the Answer Key.

How to attack Unit 2 MCQ items

1. **Thesis questions: eliminate answers that are too broad, too narrow, or merely a topic.** The right answer states a claim and covers the whole passage, not just one paragraph.
2. **Line-of-reasoning questions: sketch the passage in five words per paragraph.** The correct answer follows your sketch step for step. Wrong answers invent steps (a "history," a "concession") that the passage does not contain.
3. **Commentary questions (Writing sets): the correct answer explains *how* or *why*.** Wrong answers add new evidence, restate the claim, or change the subject.
4. **Word-choice questions: replace the word with a neutral synonym and notice what changes.** That difference is the connotation.
5. **Tone questions: be wary of a single extreme adjective.** If the passage is mostly measured with one sharp moment, "angry" is probably wrong and "critical but restrained" may be right.
6. **Watch for the "right device, wrong effect" distractor.** The device named is in the text, but what it does for the argument is misstated.

How this shows up on the free-response questions

Row A: Thesis (all three essays)

- The thesis must take a position (FRQ 1 and 3) or make a claim about the writer's choices (FRQ 2).
- It may appear anywhere, but readers scan the end of the introduction first.
- A thesis that previews a line of reasoning is a good habit, not a requirement.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (all three essays)

The ladder, paraphrased from the official rubric:

SCORE	WHAT THE RESPONSE DOES
1	Evidence is general; commentary summarizes.
2	Some specific evidence; commentary explains some of it, but there is no line of reasoning or it is faulty.

SCORE	WHAT THE RESPONSE DOES
3	Specific evidence supports all claims in a line of reasoning; commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning.
4	Same, and commentary consistently explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning.

The jump from 2 to 3 is line of reasoning; the jump from 3 to 4 is the consistency of commentary. For FRQ 2, a 3 also needs commentary that explains how at least one rhetorical choice contributes to the writer's purpose, and a 4 needs multiple choices. Mechanical errors that interfere with communication block the fourth point.

What this looks like in each essay

- **Rhetorical analysis:** a good line of reasoning often follows the text chronologically and tracks how the speaker's purpose and tone shift. Each body paragraph claims something about *what the writer does* in that stretch of the text, quotes briefly, and explains the effect on the audience. Tone words belong in your commentary, attached to specific diction: "the verb *haunt* casts the debt as something the audience cannot escape."
- **Argument:** build the argument so each paragraph develops the previous one. Define key terms first. Use observations, history, literature, or experience, but always explain how the example bears on the abstract claim.
- **Synthesis:** put sources in conversation. Use one source to qualify or extend another ("While Source A emphasizes cost, Source D shows why the cost may be worth it"). Do not simply report what each says.

The Chief Reader's quick checklist

1. Thesis takes a position and fits the whole prompt.
2. Each topic sentence advances the thesis; none merely repeats it.
3. Every quotation or reference is followed by commentary that says something new.
4. Commentary connects back to the thesis or to the purpose.
5. Tone words are tied to specific words in the text.

Practice exercises

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

Exercise 1: Rate the thesis (4.B)

Label each thesis as Defensible (D) or Not defensible (N). For each N, state the problem in a few words.

- a. "Social media is a major part of teenagers' lives."
- b. "Because online platforms reward outrage over accuracy, news consumers should treat shared headlines as advertisements until verified."
- c. "There are many arguments for and against the four-day school week."
- d. "In her commencement speech, Dove talks about wishes for graduates."

- e. "By giving graduates wishes instead of advice, the speaker lets them hear her expectations without feeling lectured, which makes her counsel easier to accept."

Exercise 2: Rewrite the thesis

Rewrite thesis (a) and thesis (c) from Exercise 1 so that each is defensible. Keep each to one or two sentences.

Exercise 3: Find the thesis and its structure signal (3.B)

Original passage.

Nobody disputes that cities need more housing. The dispute is over where to put it. I will argue that the best place is not the edge of town, where new streets must be paved and new pipes laid, but the middle, on lots that already have both. The case rests on three facts: infill housing is cheaper to serve, it keeps workers near jobs, and it spares farmland that cannot be replaced.

- a. Write the thesis in your own words. (b) What does the thesis tell you about the organization of the essay?
(c) Predict the topic of each of the next three paragraphs.

Exercise 4: Trace a line of reasoning (5.A)

Original passage.

1. Every spring, our town debates the same ritual: whether to cancel the evening bus line, which loses money. (2) The debate treats the line as a business. (3) But the line is not a business; it carries night-shift hospital workers, dishwashers, and cleaners to jobs that the daytime economy depends on. (4) If the line stops, those workers do not stop working; they buy cars, and the roads that the town already struggles to maintain take the cost. (5) Therefore, the right comparison is not between the line's fares and its expenses, but between its expenses and the cost of the roads, parking, and lost shifts that would replace it. (6) By that measure, the line is among the cheapest things the town does.

- a. Describe the line of reasoning in 4–5 steps. (b) Identify the unstated warrant in sentence 4. (c) Is the line of reasoning sound? What one piece of evidence would strengthen it?

Exercise 5: Upgrade the commentary (6.A)

For each piece of evidence, write two sentences of commentary that say something new and tie the evidence to the claim.

- a. *Claim:* Public libraries serve needs beyond books. *Evidence:* Library staff in one city report that about a third of daytime visitors use the computers to apply for jobs.
b. *Claim:* Lincoln's humility strengthens his authority. *Evidence:* "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here."

Exercise 6: Word choice and tone (7.A)

Compare the two sentences and answer the questions.

1. "The mayor *admitted* the budget was short." (2) "The mayor *boasted* that the budget was short."

- a. What attitude does each verb signal? (b) What audience reaction does each aim for? (c) Rewrite the sentence with a third verb that signals a neutral reporting tone.

Exercise 7: Control tone (8.A)

Write the following message three ways: (i) formal and respectful, to a principal; (ii) friendly, to a classmate; (iii) urgent, to a local newspaper. Message: *The school plans to move the club fair to a day when many students cannot attend.* One or two sentences each. Underline the words that carry the tone.

Exercise 8: Plan a line of reasoning (6.A)

Prompt (original): *A town leader claims, "A town is only as strong as its newspapers." Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which the claim is valid.*

Write (a) a defensible thesis; (b) three topic sentences that each build on the previous one; (c) for each, one piece of specific evidence you could use; (d) one sentence explaining why the three paragraphs cannot be rearranged.

Common misconceptions

MISCONCEPTION	WHY IT IS WRONG	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
"A thesis must list three reasons."	That is a formula, not a requirement. A thesis must take a defensible position; previewing is optional.	Make the claim first; add the structure only if it is natural.
"A thesis is the first sentence."	It can appear anywhere; the first sentence is often a context sentence.	Look for the sentence that all the others support.
"A line of reasoning is the same as the order of paragraphs."	Order is not reasoning; reasoning means each step depends on the last.	Test: if you could swap paragraphs without loss, you have a list.
"Commentary means saying 'this shows that...'"	The phrase signals commentary but does not make it. If the words after "shows that" only restate the evidence, it is still summary.	Add the <i>how</i> or <i>why</i> that the evidence did not say.
"More quotations means better evidence."	Quotation without explanation is padding.	Quote briefly (3–8 words) and spend the saved space on commentary.
"A tone word alone is analysis."	Calling a passage "sarcastic" without pointing to words or effects is label, not analysis.	Link the tone to specific diction and say what it does for the purpose.
"Connotation is just emotion."	Connotation also carries social meaning (formal, elite, rustic, clinical) and attitude (approval, contempt).	Ask: what does this word suggest about who is speaking and how they regard the subject?
"Flowery language shows sophistication."	The rubric warns that ornate language that does not enhance the argument earns nothing.	Choose precise words over fancy ones.

MISCONCEPTION	WHY IT IS WRONG	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
"Every body paragraph needs a counterargument."	The 2025 Chief Reader Report discourages formulaic counterargument paragraphs.	Work complexity into the line of reasoning where it naturally belongs.

Quick reference: Unit 2 checklist

QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER
What is the thesis in one sentence?	_____
Does it take a position someone could challenge?	_____
What are the 3–4 steps of the line of reasoning?	_____
What does each step depend on from the step before?	_____
What is the strongest piece of commentary in the text (or in my essay)?	_____
Which two words most set the tone, and what do they connote?	_____
Is there any step where the writer (or I) leaps without a warrant?	_____

Answer Key

Sample MCQ set

1. **(B).** Sentence 1 states the proposal; sentence 2 gives the objection (cost); sentence 3 reframes (the farmer already pays in ignorance); sentences 4–5 support with examples; sentence 6 concludes. (A) calls the examples unrelated and ends with a call for debate; neither is true. (C) invents a history and an appeal to tradition. (D) says the writer concedes the burden, but the writer denies it is a burden.
2. **(B).** "Expense" repeats the opponents' word; "defense" replaces it. The shift completes the reframing begun in sentence 3. (A) is wrong because the opponents would not accept the comparison. (C) misreads the shift; the argument is still about cost. (D) names a tone effect the passage does not aim for.
3. **(B).** It explains how the evidence supports the claim: the size of the drop and its link to the lanes point to physical separation as the cause. (A) is background, not commentary. (C) is a vague appeal to agreement. (D) adds new evidence but does not explain how sentence 2 supports the claim.

Exercise 1

- a. N: a fact, not arguable. (b) D. (c) N: lists sides, takes no position. (d) N: describes the speech, makes no claim about choices or purpose. (e) D.

Exercise 2 (model answers)

- a. "Because social media rewards constant comparison, it harms teenagers' well-being more than it helps their friendships, and schools should teach students to limit it." (c) "The four-day school week saves money and improves teacher retention, but districts should adopt it only when they can guarantee that students on the off day have safe, supervised options."

Exercise 3

- a. Thesis: New housing should be built as infill in the city's middle rather than at the edge. (b) It previews three reasons in order: cost to serve, proximity to jobs, farmland protection. (c) Paragraph 2: infill is cheaper because infrastructure exists; paragraph 3: infill keeps workers near jobs (shorter commutes); paragraph 4: infill preserves farmland.

Exercise 4

- a. Steps: (1) The town debates cutting the bus line yearly as a money-loser. (2) Sentences 2–3 reject that framing: the line serves essential night workers. (3) Sentence 4: cutting it shifts the cost to roads rather than eliminating it. (4) Sentence 5: redefine the comparison to include those replacement costs. (5) Sentence 6: by that measure the line is cheap. (b) Warrant: workers who lose the bus will turn to cars rather than quit their jobs or move. (c) Mostly sound, because each step depends on the previous. Strengthening evidence: a figure for the cost of road maintenance or parking per additional car, or survey data on how many riders own cars.

Exercise 5 (model answers)

- a. "That share suggests that for many residents the library is the only place to find a free computer and a printer, which makes it a gateway to employment rather than a reading room. A service that helps one in three visitors compete for jobs is serving the community's economic needs as directly as its literary ones." (b) "By predicting that his words will be forgotten, Lincoln appears to shrink his own role, which makes his later demand on the living seem to come from duty rather than ambition. The apparent modesty works as authority: an audience is more willing to follow someone who does not seem to be asking for credit."

Exercise 6

- a. "Admitted" signals reluctant honesty, a confession of a fault; "boasted" signals pride, implying the mayor is pleased about the shortfall, which is ironic or critical. (b) "Admitted" invites sympathy or respect for candor; "boasted" invites disapproval of the mayor. (c) "The mayor *said* / *reported* the budget was short."

Exercise 7 (model answers)

- i. "I respectfully ask the administration to reconsider the date of the club fair, which conflicts with the schedules of many students who work or care for siblings." (ii) "Hey, did you see they moved the club fair to Thursday? A lot of us won't be able to make it, so let's tell the principal." (iii) "The school has scheduled its club fair for a day when many students cannot attend, shutting out those who most need a place to belong." Tone carriers: "respectfully ask," "reconsider" (i); "Hey," "let's" (ii); "shutting out," "most need" (iii).

Exercise 8 (model)

- a. "A town's newspapers matter less as sources of news than as the place where a community learns to disagree in public, so a town is only as strong as its capacity for shared argument, which newspapers are best placed, though not alone, to supply." (b) P1: A town's strength depends on its residents' ability to discuss shared problems. P2: Newspapers provide a common set of facts and a public forum that make that discussion possible. P3: Where newspapers decline, residents split into separate information streams, and the town loses its ability to govern itself by agreement. (c) P1: a town-hall dispute resolved with reference to a published report. P2: a local paper's coverage of a school-budget vote. P3: research on communities that lost their only paper and later saw lower turnout in local elections (described cautiously and cited as an example). (d) Paragraph 2 depends on the definition in 1; paragraph 3 describes what happens when 2 fails, so it cannot come before it.

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