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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

Unit 4 Skills Guide: Style, Syntax, and Tone (Skills 7.A, 7.B, 7.C, 8.A, 8.B, 8.C)

This guide teaches how writers use word choice, comparisons, sentence structure, and punctuation to create tone and to make arguments clear and forceful. Learn the toolkit, study the two worked examples, try the practice set, and check yourself against the Answer Key.

How to use this guide

Style is the most visible part of rhetoric and the part students most often analyze badly. The usual failure is **labeling**: “the author uses imagery and parallelism to make the speech powerful.” The Chief Reader Reports ask for something else: name the specific choice in plain language, quote the few words that show it, and explain **what it does for this audience and this purpose**. This guide trains that habit on both sides, reading and writing.

Style skills make up about a quarter of Section I (categories 7 and 8, each 11-14 percent). They appear in Reading sets as questions about tone, word choice, syntax, and punctuation, and in Writing sets as revision questions about clarity, tone, and conventions.

The skills in this unit, in plain English

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
7.A (Reading)	Explain how word choice, comparisons, and syntax contribute to the specific tone or style of a text.	Pinpoint the words, comparisons, and sentence patterns that make a text sound the way it does, and say what that does for the argument.
7.B (Reading)	Explain how writers create, combine, and place independent and dependent clauses to show relationships between and among ideas.	Read sentence structure as meaning: which idea is main, which is supporting, how ideas are contrasted or linked.

SKILL	WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
7.C (Reading)	Explain how grammar and mechanics contribute to the clarity and effectiveness of an argument.	Notice what punctuation, modifier placement, and mechanics do to the reader's understanding and the writer's emphasis.
8.A (Writing)	Strategically use words, comparisons, and syntax to convey a specific tone or style in an argument.	Choose your own words, comparisons, and sentence shapes to produce the tone your audience and purpose call for.
8.B (Writing)	Write sentences that clearly convey ideas and arguments.	Build sentences whose structure shows exactly how your ideas relate.
8.C (Writing)	Use established conventions of grammar and mechanics to communicate clearly and effectively.	Follow standard conventions (agreement, punctuation, pronoun reference) so errors never block your meaning.

Skills 7.A and 8.A also appear in Unit 2 and 7.B/8.B in Unit 3; this unit takes them deeper and adds 7.C/8.C.

Key concepts and definitions

Tone, style, and voice

- **Tone** is the writer's attitude toward the subject and audience.
- **Style** is the whole pattern of choices (diction, syntax, imagery, punctuation, rhythm) that give a text its character.
- **Voice** is the sense of a distinctive speaker that readers hear.
- **Mood** is the feeling the text creates in the reader; it is related to, but not the same as, tone.

Describe tone with **precision and evidence**. Use a pair or a qualifier rather than one blunt word: "respectful but firm," "wry rather than bitter," "elegiac with flashes of defiance." Then attach evidence and effect.

A working tone bank (use words you can defend with a quotation): admiring, affectionate, ambivalent, apologetic, bitter, candid, caustic, celebratory, conciliatory, condescending, contemplative, critical, defiant, derisive, detached, didactic, earnest, elegiac, exhortatory, flippant, indignant, ironic, irreverent, laudatory, mocking, nostalgic, objective, ominous, patronizing, pensive, reverent, sardonic, scornful, sentimental, skeptical, solemn, somber, urgent, whimsical, wistful, wry.

Diction (word choice)

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
Denotation	Literal meaning.	Baseline.
Connotation	Associations and feelings.	The main engine of tone. "Thrifty" vs. "stingy" vs. "frugal."

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT MATTERS
Formal vs. informal / colloquial	Register.	Sets distance and the writer's relationship to the audience.
Abstract vs. concrete	General idea vs. tangible detail.	Abstract raises principle; concrete creates vividness and proof.
Latinate vs. Anglo-Saxon	Longer, learned words vs. short, plain ones.	Latinate often sounds formal or evasive; Anglo-Saxon sounds direct.
Jargon	Specialized vocabulary.	Signals expertise or excludes outsiders.
Euphemism	Soft word for a harsh thing.	Softens, evades, or comforts.
Loaded language	Words chosen to push a judgment.	Frames the subject before argument begins.

Comparisons and figurative language

DEVICE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE	TYPICAL EFFECT
Simile	Comparison using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	"The debate sprawled like an unmown lawn."	Vivid, explicit.
Metaphor	Direct identification of unlike things.	"A boarding house is a machine for turning strangers into neighbors."	Reframes the subject.
Analogy	Extended comparison to explain or argue.	A government budget as a household budget.	Makes complex ideas familiar; persuades by parallel.
Personification	Human traits given to non-human things.	"The market punishes the careless."	Dramatizes.
Hyperbole	Deliberate exaggeration.	"I've told you a million times."	Emphasis, humor, indignation.
Understatement	Deliberate minimizing.	"It was a bit chilly," said of a blizzard.	Irony, restraint.
Irony	A gap between what is said and what is meant, or expected and actual.	Verbal, situational, dramatic.	Critique, humor.
Allusion	Reference to a known person, text, or event.	"a Pandora's box of lawsuits."	Borrows authority and associations.

On the exam, the device name is the beginning of the answer, not the end. The effect on this audience is the answer.

Syntax (sentence structure)

Syntax is how words and clauses are arranged. Beyond the four sentence types (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, reviewed in Unit 3), consider these moves.

MOVE	WHAT IT IS	TYPICAL EFFECT
Short sentence after long ones	A sudden brevity.	Emphasis, finality, or shock.
Long, accumulating sentence	Many clauses and phrases.	Builds momentum; suggests overwhelming detail or complexity.
Periodic sentence	Main idea withheld until the end.	Suspense, emphasis.
Loose (cumulative) sentence	Main idea first, then added detail.	Natural, conversational, explanatory.
Parallelism	Repeating a grammatical form.	Rhythm, balance, clarity, emphasis.
Antithesis	Contrasting ideas in balanced structure.	Sharp contrast. "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."
Anaphora	Repeating the first words of successive clauses.	Builds intensity.
Epistrophe	Repeating the last words of successive clauses.	Drives a conclusion.
Asyndeton	Omitting conjunctions in a series.	Speed, urgency.
Polysyndeton	Using many conjunctions.	Slowness, accumulation, weight.
Inversion	Unusual word order.	Emphasis, formality.
Rhetorical question	Question asked for effect.	Provokes thought, implies the answer.
Fragment (intentional)	Incomplete sentence used for effect.	Emphasis or rhythm.
Voice (active / passive)	Who acts vs. who receives.	Passive can hide responsibility or focus on the result.

Prove syntax claims with the text. Writing "She uses asyndeton" without a quotation hurts credibility; writing "The list 'We came, we saw, we left' drops its conjunctions, so the events seem to race past" earns credit.

Grammar and mechanics as rhetoric (7.C and 8.C)

The CED treats grammar as a tool for clarity and emphasis. Key points:

CONVENTION	RHETORICAL EFFECT
Comma + coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)	Joins equal ideas.
Semicolon	Joins closely related independent clauses; signals balance or contrast without a conjunction.

CONVENTION	RHETORICAL EFFECT
Colon	Introduces an explanation, list, or example; creates anticipation.
Dash	Interrupts, adds emphasis, or shows an abrupt turn.
Parentheses	Adds a quieter aside.
Appositive	A noun phrase renaming a noun, usually set off by commas: "Lincoln, the commander in chief, spoke briefly."
Parenthetical element	Adds nonessential information; commas, dashes, or parentheses all work, with different weights.
Ellipsis	Trailing off or omission.
Italics	Emphasis.
Modifier placement	Misplaced or dangling modifiers create confusion.
Pronoun reference	Each pronoun must clearly refer to one noun.
Subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, verb tense	Core conventions.

Common errors the exam tests in Writing sets:

ERROR	EXAMPLE	FIX
Comma splice	"The vote ended, the room emptied."	Period, semicolon, or comma + conjunction.
Fragment	"Because the vote ended."	Attach to an independent clause.
Run-on (fused sentence)	"The vote ended the room emptied."	As above.
Faulty parallelism	"She likes swimming, to run, and biking."	"swimming, running, and biking."
Dangling modifier	"Running late, the bus left."	"Running late, I missed the bus."
Ambiguous pronoun	"Tom told Sam that he was wrong."	Name the person.
Faulty comparison	"Unlike other nations, American schools..."	"Unlike schools in other nations, American schools..."
Subject-verb disagreement	"The list of reasons are long."	"The list ... is long."

The CED notes that errors typical of unrevised timed writing do not lower an essay's score unless they are so frequent that they interfere with communication, in which case they can block the fourth point in Row B. Mechanics matter most as clarity tools.

Worked example, reading side: Elizabeth I at Tilbury, 1588

The passage is the best-known part of the speech attributed to Queen Elizabeth I, delivered to her troops at Tilbury as the Spanish Armada threatened England in 1588. The text is in the public domain; the wording below follows the widely reproduced version, and it should be understood as the traditional text of a speech preserved in a later letter rather than a verbatim transcript. The excerpt is trimmed.

My loving people, we have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit ourselves to armed multitudes for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear. I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm.

Step 1: Situation (brief)

Writer: Elizabeth I, queen of England, a woman ruling in a world that doubted women’s capacity for war.
Audience: soldiers assembled to defend against invasion. Exigence: the threat of the Spanish Armada. Purpose: to inspire loyalty and courage, and to show she shares their risk. Context: 1588; Protestant England facing Catholic Spain.

Step 2: Diction and tone (7.A)

CHOICE	EVIDENCE	EFFECT ON THIS AUDIENCE
Affectionate address	“My loving people”	Opens with warmth rather than command; positions her as a ruler bound to her subjects by affection, which she will contrast with the “tyrants” who rule by fear.
Loaded contrast	“Let tyrants fear.”	A four-word sentence that labels rulers who distrust their people as tyrants. It implicitly defines her as the opposite. The brevity makes it a flat, defiant declaration.

CHOICE	EVIDENCE	EFFECT ON THIS AUDIENCE
Gender concession turned into strength	"the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king"	She states the audience's likely prejudice in the harshest terms ("weak and feeble"), then reverses it with "but." Body vs. heart and stomach splits her into the physical self (conventionally weak) and the seat of courage (a king's). Confronting the doubt directly is more persuasive than ignoring it.
Scorn	"think foul scorn that Parma or Spain... should dare"	"Foul scorn" and "dare" cast the invaders as presumptuous rather than formidable, shifting the soldiers' feeling from fear to indignation.

Net tone: warm and trusting at the start, then defiant and resolute; elevated and formal, appropriate for a monarch, but intimate where she names her own risk.

Step 3: Syntax (7.A and 7.B)

- **Long sentence of qualification, then short one.** The speech opens with a long sentence that moves through advisers' warnings and her reply; then comes "Let tyrants fear." The jolt of brevity after a long, carefully balanced sentence gives the declaration force.
- **Semicolons and the antithesis in the second sentence.** "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king..." The semicolon joins two balanced independent clauses; the repeated "I have the" parallels body and heart. The structure of the sentence enacts the reversal it describes.
- **Parallel series with escalation.** "to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honour and my blood" repeats "for my" three times (a mild polysyndeton and anaphora) and moves from the highest authority (God) to the nation to the soldiers in front of her. The last item ("my people") brings the abstract duty to the audience present. The final pair, "honour and blood," moves from reputation to life.
- **Subordination:** "under God" in the second sentence is a parenthetical clause placed in the middle of her claim ("I have placed my chiefest strength... in the loyal hearts"), which ties her authority to divine sanction while making the claim about the soldiers' hearts the main idea.

Step 4: Mechanics as rhetoric (7.C)

The semicolon in "to live or die amongst you all; to lay down for my God..." extends a single resolution into a list of what she will give up, maintaining continuous momentum. The "but" after the semicolon in the gender sentence is a deliberate repetition, since "but" appears twice in one sentence ("the body *but* of a weak and feeble woman; *but* I have the heart"): the first is "only," the second is "however." That play on the word *but* makes the contrast more striking.

Step 5: Write the commentary

Here is a sample paragraph at the level the exam rewards.

Elizabeth confronts the soldiers' likeliest doubt, that a woman cannot lead them in war, and turns it into proof of her resolve. She names the prejudice in its harshest form ("the body but of a weak and feeble woman") and then answers it with a single balanced sentence in which "but" pivots from body to "the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too." By conceding the one point her audience might use against her, she appears honest rather than defensive, and by placing courage in the heart and stomach rather than the arm, she redefines what a commander needs to provide. The effect is to make her presence in the field, among them, rather than behind the lines, the proof of her claim that she trusts them and they can trust her.

Worked example, writing side: revising for tone, syntax, and conventions

Original student paragraph, written for an op-ed to a local newspaper about a proposed library closure. Numbered by sentence.

Draft 1

1. The library is really important to our town and the city council wants to close it, they say its too expensive. (2) That is a bad idea. (3) A lot of people use the library, kids do homework there, old people go there. (4) If the library closes it would be a huge disaster. (5) The council should think about this, then they will see they are wrong.

Diagnosis

PROBLEM	SKILL	WHERE
Comma splice; missing apostrophe in <i>it's</i> (contraction)	8.C	1
Vague, informal diction ("really important," "a lot of people," "huge disaster")	8.A	1, 3, 4
Condescending tone toward council (sentence 5) in an op-ed that wants to persuade them	8.A	5
Choppy sentences with no ranking of ideas; "kids do homework there, old people go there" is a comma-spliced list	8.B, 8.C	3
Hyperbole without proof ("huge disaster")	8.A	4
Pronoun <i>it</i> and <i>they</i> ambiguous	8.C	4, 5

Revision

The council's proposal to close the library to save \$200,000 is a false economy. Every afternoon, children without home internet finish their homework at its tables, and every morning, retirees read the newspapers they can no longer afford to buy; neither group has anywhere else to go. When a library closes, the savings appear on a budget line, but the costs scatter: to schools, to senior services, to a town that quietly loses the one room where everyone is welcome. The council should weigh those costs before it votes, and I ask its members to visit the library on a Tuesday afternoon before they do.

What changed

SKILL	REVISION
Diction and tone (8.A)	"False economy" is precise and shrewd (it is an economic term that turns the council's own argument against it); "scatter" and "quietly loses" are vivid and restrained. The tone is respectful but pointed. The last sentence invites rather than scolds.
Syntax (8.A, 8.B)	A parallel construction ("Every afternoon..., and every morning...") with matching grammatical forms makes two audiences visible. A contrast ("savings appear... but the costs scatter") uses a balanced structure to make the point. A periodic structure holds "a town that quietly loses the one room where everyone is welcome" for the end of the sentence.
Mechanics (8.C)	Comma splices removed; semicolon joins closely related independent clauses ("...afford to buy; neither group has anywhere else to go"); clear pronoun references ("its tables," "their").
Specificity	Concrete detail (children without home internet, retirees, Tuesday afternoon) replaces "a lot of people."

How this shows up on the multiple-choice section

Typical stems:

- "In context, the word '___' in the second sentence most nearly means/connotes..." (7.A)
- "The comparison of ___ to ___ in paragraph 3 primarily emphasizes..." (7.A)
- "The series of short sentences at the end of the paragraph creates an effect of..." (7.A/7.B)
- "The writer's tone in the final paragraph is best described as..." (7.A)
- "The parenthetical / dash in the sentence '...' functions to..." (7.C)
- "The dependent clause that opens the sentence primarily serves to..." (7.B)
- "The writer's repetition of '___' in the fourth paragraph serves to..." (7.A)
- "The question in the final paragraph functions primarily to..." (7.A)

- "The writer wants to maintain a formal, objective tone. Which version of the underlined portion best accomplishes this?" (8.A)
- "The writer wants to combine sentences 6 and 7 to clarify the relationship between the ideas. Which is best?" (8.B)
- "The writer wants to replace the word '___' in sentence 2 with a more precise word. Which choice is best?" (8.A)
- "Which of the following changes to the punctuation of sentence 3 would most clearly convey the writer's meaning?" (8.C)

Sample MCQ set

Passage for Questions 1-2. *Original passage in the style of a twentieth-century essay about walking.*

1. I walk to work not because I am virtuous but because I am slow. (2) The bus is faster; the train is faster still; my own two feet are the last resort of a man who forgot his wallet. (3) Yet I arrive better. (4) The bus delivers me, like a parcel, already crumpled. (5) The walk delivers me instead as a person, with a morning's weather in my face and the half-formed beginnings of an idea.

1. The comparison of the writer to a "parcel" in sentence 4 primarily serves to
 - A. suggest that the writer is careless about his belongings
 - B. criticize public transportation for being unreliable
 - C. emphasize the impersonal, passive quality of being carried by the bus
 - D. show that the writer prefers speed to comfort
2. The tone of the passage is best described as
 - A. bitter and resentful
 - B. wry and quietly appreciative
 - C. clinical and detached
 - D. nostalgic and mournful

Draft for Question 3. *Original student draft.*

1. The museum's new exhibit about local history opened in June, _____ it drew record crowds all summer.

3. Which choice most clearly conveys the relationship between the ideas and follows standard conventions?
 - A. June, and
 - B. June it
 - C. June; and
 - D. June, it

Answers are in the Answer Key.

How to attack Unit 4 MCQ items

1. **For word-in-context items**, reread the sentence with each choice substituted. The correct choice preserves the sentence's logic and tone; the modern-sense trap (for example, "wanting" meaning "desiring" rather than "lacking") fails.
2. **For tone items**, find two or three words that carry attitude, then choose the descriptor that fits all of them. A double-adjective answer is wrong if either half is wrong.
3. **For comparison items**, state what the two things share in this context (not in general). The correct answer emphasizes that shared quality.
4. **For syntax items**, identify the structure (long vs. short, parallel, periodic) and ask what it does to pace and emphasis. Avoid answers that overstate ("creates panic").
5. **For revision items**, find the goal in the stem (formal tone, precise word, clarity, combination). The correct answer achieves that goal; distractors are good prose that miss it.
6. **For punctuation items**, check whether the punctuation matches the relationship: semicolon between closely related independent clauses, colon before an explanation, comma plus conjunction for equal ideas.

How this shows up on the free-response questions

Rhetorical analysis (FRQ 2)

Style is where most students over-label and under-explain. A strong style paragraph in FRQ 2 contains: a claim about a rhetorical choice and its purpose; short quoted evidence; commentary that explains the effect on this audience; and a link to the writer's purpose. The Chief Reader Reports repeat three warnings:

- Identifying a device without explaining its function keeps Row B at 1 or 2.
- Naming a device the text does not contain (or a syntactic term unsupported by a quotation) damages credibility.
- Devices are not choices. "Pathos" is the effect; the anecdote about a dying relative is the choice.

Argument (FRQ 3) and Synthesis (FRQ 1)

Row C awards a point for "a consistently vivid and persuasive style," but not for ornate language that does not enhance the argument. In practice that means: precise verbs, concrete nouns, varied sentence length with a reason, and tone matched to the audience. Use mechanics as a tool: a colon to announce your key point, a semicolon to bind a contrast, a dash for a sharp aside. Mechanical errors that interfere with communication can block the fourth Row B point.

Quick style moves for your own essays

GOAL	MOVE
Sound authoritative	Strong verbs; third person; no "I think"
Sound reasonable	Concession with <i>although</i> ; qualified modifiers
Create emphasis	Short sentence after long; periodic structure
Show contrast	Antithesis or a semicolon with parallel clauses

GOAL	MOVE
Clarify an abstraction	Concrete image or brief analogy
Avoid padding	Delete "very," "really," "in my opinion," "it is important to note"

Practice exercises

Complete on paper. Answers are in the Answer Key.

Exercise 1: Connotation (7.A)

For each pair, explain the difference in attitude and say which would suit a critical editorial about a politician.

- a. *determined* / *stubborn* (b) *spoke* / *ranted* (c) *strategy* / *scheme* (d) *inexpensive* / *cheap*

Exercise 2: Tone analysis (7.A)

Original passage.

The mayor's office announced on Friday, with the usual fanfare, that the pothole problem had been "comprehensively addressed." Residents of Maple Street, who have been steering around the same crater since February, were not available for comment, as they were busy steering around it.

- a. Name the tone. (b) Identify two words or phrases that create it and explain how. (c) What is the writer's likely attitude toward the mayor's office?

Exercise 3: Comparison (7.A)

Original sentence: "The senator's speech was a lighthouse in a storm of rumors: bright, fixed, and unable to move."

What does the comparison emphasize, and how does the final phrase ("unable to move") complicate the praise?

Exercise 4: Syntax effect (7.A/7.B)

Original passage.

We waited through the long afternoon, through the slow arrival of the rain, through the news that the road was washed out and the news that the bridge was worse, through every hour of the dark. Then the lights came on.

- a. Describe the syntax of the first sentence. (b) What does the short sentence do after it? (c) What is the combined effect?

Exercise 5: Punctuation as meaning (7.C)

Explain how the meaning or emphasis changes in each pair.

- a. "The committee decided; the principal agreed." / "The committee decided, and the principal agreed."

- b. "He had one goal: to win." / "He had one goal, to win."
- c. "The result, sadly, was predictable." / "The result—sadly—was predictable."

Exercise 6: Fix the errors (8.C)

Correct each sentence.

- a. "The report was long, the council read it anyway."
- b. "Tired of waiting, the bus finally arrived."
- c. "Each of the students were given a laptop."
- d. "The coach praised Maria and Tia after she scored."
- e. "She enjoys hiking, to swim, and reading."

Exercise 7: Revise for tone (8.A)

Rewrite the sentence three times for the stated tone, changing diction and syntax.

Base: "The city did not fix the broken streetlights, and residents are upset." (a) Neutral news report. (b) Indignant op-ed. (c) Wry column.

Exercise 8: Combine for clarity (8.B)

Combine into a single sentence that ranks the ideas as indicated.

- a. "The storm was severe. The game went on. (Main idea: the game went on.)"
- b. "The company posted record profits. It laid off 300 workers. (Main idea: the layoffs.)"

Exercise 9: Write a style paragraph (rhetorical analysis)

Using the Tilbury excerpt in this guide, write a 100-150 word paragraph analyzing one syntactic choice and one diction choice. Include a short quotation for each and explain the effect on the soldiers.

Exercise 10: MCQ writing item (8.A)

Original student draft for a formal letter to a college admissions office.

1. I am applying to your school because it's got a really cool engineering program.

The writer wants to revise sentence 1 to maintain a formal, respectful tone. Which version is best?

- A. I wanna go to your school because of the awesome engineering program.
- B. I am applying to your university because its engineering program offers the research opportunities I hope to pursue.
- C. Your engineering program is, like, the best thing about your school.
- D. My applying to your university is due to the fact that the engineering program is of a high quality.

Common misconceptions

MISCONCEPTION	WHY IT IS WRONG	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
"Naming the device earns credit."	The CED and Chief Reader Reports reward explaining what a choice does.	Choice, quotation, effect, purpose.
"Tone is one word."	One word is often too blunt to be accurate.	Use a pair or a qualifier, with evidence.
"Long sentences are more sophisticated."	Length is not sophistication. Clarity and purpose are.	Say what the structure does.
"Short sentences are simplistic."	A short sentence after long ones can be the strongest.	Look at context.
"Passive voice is always wrong."	It can focus on the result or hide a responsible party.	Ask why the writer chose it.
"A semicolon is a fancy comma."	It joins independent clauses and signals a close relationship.	Use only between related independent clauses (or in complex lists).
"Figurative language is only decoration."	Comparisons frame the subject and persuade.	Ask what the comparison makes the audience believe.
"Grammar errors always lower your score."	The CED says errors typical of timed writing do not, unless they interfere with communication.	Write clearly; do not freeze.
"Big vocabulary shows style."	The rubric warns that ornate language that does not enhance the argument earns nothing.	Choose the precise word, not the grandest.

Quick reference: Unit 4 checklist

QUESTION	YOUR ANSWER
What is the tone, in two words or a qualified phrase?	_____
Which two or three words carry it, and what do they connote?	_____
Which comparison (if any) frames the subject, and what does it make us believe?	_____
Where does sentence length or structure shift, and why?	_____
Which punctuation choice adds emphasis or shows a relationship?	_____
In my writing, is every sentence clear on first read?	_____

Answer Key

Sample MCQ set

1. **(C).** A parcel is carried passively and handled impersonally; the writer contrasts it with arriving “as a person.” (A) misreads the image. (B) The bus is faster, not unreliable. (D) The writer prefers arriving better, not speed.
2. **(B).** The writer jokes about being “slow” and a man who “forgot his wallet” (wry), yet concludes the walk is better (quietly appreciative). (A) and (D) overstate; there is no bitterness or mourning. (C) The vivid images are not clinical.
3. **(A).** “June, and” joins two independent clauses with a comma plus conjunction, clearly signaling addition. (B) is a comma splice or run-on. (C) A semicolon plus “and” is incorrect. (D) is a comma splice, joining two independent clauses with only a comma.

Exercise 1

- a. *Determined* is admiring; *stubborn* is critical; use *stubborn*. (b) *Spoke* is neutral; *ranted* is scornful; *ranted*. (c) *Strategy* is neutral or approving; *scheme* implies underhandedness; *scheme*. (d) *Inexpensive* is positive; *cheap* can mean poor quality; context decides, but *cheap* is more critical.

Exercise 2

- a. Sarcastic or wry, mildly mocking. (b) “with the usual fanfare” implies the announcement is empty ceremony; “comprehensively addressed” in quotation marks signals irony; “were busy steering around it” is a deadpan joke that contradicts the claim. (c) Skeptical and critical of the mayor’s office.

Exercise 3

It emphasizes that the speech was bright, steady guidance amid confusion. “Unable to move” complicates the praise by implying rigidity: the senator is fixed in position, perhaps inflexible, so the compliment carries a gentle criticism.

Exercise 4

- a. A long cumulative sentence with a repeated “through” (anaphora) and accumulating clauses. (b) The short sentence “Then the lights came on” releases the tension and marks the turning point. (c) The long sentence enacts the endless waiting; the short sentence delivers relief by contrast.

Exercise 5

- a. The semicolon makes the two events a balanced pair; the comma plus *and* adds a stronger sense of sequence or consequence. (b) The colon announces and emphasizes the goal; the comma makes it a casual aside. (c) Commas treat “sadly” as a mild aside; dashes add emphasis and a sharper tone of regret or irony.

Exercise 6

- a. “The report was long; the council read it anyway.” (b) “Tired of waiting, we were relieved when the bus finally arrived.” (c) “Each of the students was given a laptop.” (d) “The coach praised Maria and Tia after Tia scored.” (or clarify who scored). (e) “She enjoys hiking, swimming, and reading.”

Exercise 7 (model)

- a. "Residents have reported that the city has not repaired several broken streetlights." (b) "How long must residents walk home in the dark while the city ignores the streetlights it promised to fix?" (c) "The city's streetlights remain broken, giving residents a rare chance to practice moonlight navigation."

Exercise 8 (model)

- a. "Although the storm was severe, the game went on." (b) "Even as the company posted record profits, it laid off 300 workers."

Exercise 9 (model)

Elizabeth's long opening sentence, which moves through her advisers' warnings before her reply, makes the short sentence that follows land hard: "Let tyrants fear." The four-word declaration contrasts her trust in her people with the suspicion she attributes to despots, and the abrupt shift in length makes the contrast feel like a defiant announcement. Her diction does similar work when she calls herself "a weak and feeble woman." By naming the audience's likely prejudice in its harshest terms, she appears candid; the following "but I have the heart and stomach of a king" then turns the admission into proof of courage. The soldiers hear a queen who neither hides behind rank nor asks them to ignore doubts, and that honesty makes her promise to "live or die amongst you all" more credible.

Exercise 10

(B). Formal, precise, and respectful; names the specific reason. (A) and (C) are informal. (D) is wordy ("due to the fact that") and vague, without the improvement in formality that the goal requires.

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