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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

# Units 7-9 Skills Guide: Complexity, Counterargument, Concession, Irony, and **Synthesis**

This guide covers the final stretch of the AP Language course: qualifying claims and engaging other views (3.C, 4.C), writing sentences and punctuation that carry complex ideas clearly (7.B, 8.B, 7.C, 8.C), reading and using audience-sensitive style including irony (1.B, 2.B, 7.A, 8.A), and joining the conversation through concession, rebuttal, and refutation. It closes with a review plan. Read the concepts, study the two worked examples, do the practice set, and check the Answer Key.

## How to use this guide

By Unit 7 you can name a rhetorical situation, find a thesis, trace a line of reasoning, and analyze tone. The question now is how to handle **disagreement and complexity**: your own claims need limits, other people's arguments need fair treatment, and some writers say the opposite of what they mean. The College Board's Course and Exam Description (CED) devotes Unit 7 to qualifying claims and to the clause structure and punctuation that make qualification readable, Unit 8 to audience and style (including irony), and Unit 9 to "joining the conversation" with concession, rebuttal, and refutation, plus review driven by your Progress Check data.

Two cautions from the 2024 and 2025 Chief Reader Reports frame this guide. First, **formulaic counterargument paragraphs and token objections do not earn sophistication**. Second, **complexity must be explored, not announced**. The sections below show what exploring looks like.

## The skills in these units, in plain English

| SKILL         | WHAT THE CED SAYS (PARAPHRASED)                                                                      | WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU                                                                               | MAIN UNIT |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 3.C (Reading) | Explain ways claims are qualified through modifiers, counterarguments, and alternative perspectives. | See how the writer limits a claim or engages another view, and say what that does for the argument. | 7, 9      |

| SKILL         | WHAT THE CED SAYS<br>(PARAPHRASED)                                                                 | WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU                                                                      | MAIN UNIT |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 4.C (Writing) | Qualify a claim using modifiers, counterarguments, or alternative perspectives.                    | Do it yourself: limit your claim and engage opposing views without losing your position.   | 7, 9      |
| 7.B / 8.B     | Explain / write clause structures that show relationships among ideas.                             | Use subordination, coordination, and modifiers to show how ideas relate.                   | 7, 8      |
| 7.C / 8.C     | Explain / use grammar and mechanics for clarity and effect.                                        | Use punctuation and conventions so complex sentences stay clear.                           | 7         |
| 1.A / 2.A     | Identify components of the rhetorical situation; write introductions and conclusions suited to it. | Keep the situation in view as arguments get more complex.                                  | 7         |
| 1.B / 2.B     | Explain / demonstrate understanding of audience beliefs, values, and needs.                        | Choose comparisons and diction your audience can accept; notice diction that reveals bias. | 8         |
| 7.A / 8.A     | Explain / use word choice, comparisons, and syntax for tone.                                       | Includes irony, parenthetical elements, and bias-revealing diction.                        | 8         |

## Key concepts and definitions

### Complexity, defined usefully

A claim becomes **complex** when it recognizes that the truth has more than one side without collapsing into “it depends.” Useful forms of complexity (from the sophistication row of the rubric and teacher frameworks):

| FORM          | PATTERN                                                | EXAMPLE                                                                                             |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Layered       | This <i>and</i> that                                   | “The speech honors the dead and assigns work to the living.”                                        |
| Contradictory | This, <i>but also</i> that                             | “The editorial calls for unity while describing a divided town.”                                    |
| Paradoxical   | This, <i>in spite of</i> that / <i>because of</i> that | “Her restraint is what makes her anger audible.”                                                    |
| Conditional   | True when, false when                                  | “Competition improves performance where goals are clear, and degrades it where creativity matters.” |

| FORM           | PATTERN                   | EXAMPLE                                            |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Scope-limiting | True of X, uncertain of Y | "The finding holds for cities with dense transit." |

Complexity is not hedging. "Maybe it is good, maybe it is bad" says nothing. A complex claim commits to a specific, supportable position that includes its own limits.

### Qualification: modifiers, counterarguments, alternative perspectives (3.C and 4.C)

You met the three methods in Unit 3. Here is how to use them with more control.

**Modifiers** range along a scale of certainty and scope:

| CERTAINTY                | WORDS                                                      |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Low                      | might, may, could, perhaps, possibly, appears to, seems to |
| Moderate                 | often, usually, tends to, generally, largely, likely       |
| High                     | clearly, demonstrably, consistently                        |
| Absolute (use sparingly) | always, never, all, none, proves, only, must               |

Frequency or scope words (some, many, most, in many cases, under certain conditions, for most people) tell the reader *how far* the claim reaches. A rule of thumb for AP essays: **make the claim as strong as the evidence will bear, and no stronger.**

**Counterarguments** are the claims of those who disagree. **Alternative perspectives** are the viewpoints of different stakeholders who may judge the same facts differently.

### Concession, rebuttal, refutation (Unit 9)

| MOVE          | DEFINITION                                                                        | TYPICAL LANGUAGE                                      |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Concession    | Granting that an opposing point has validity.                                     | Admittedly, granted, to be sure, it is true that      |
| Rebuttal      | Responding to an opposing point to show why it does not defeat your claim.        | Yet, but, still, even so, however                     |
| Refutation    | Showing that the opposing point is false or faulty (a stronger form of rebuttal). | In fact, this overlooks, the evidence shows otherwise |
| Accommodation | Revising your own claim to absorb the valid part of the objection.                | "A better rule would be..."                           |

Four patterns for engaging a counterargument, from weakest to strongest in terms of earning sophistication:

1. **Token mention** ("Some people disagree, but they are wrong.") Earns nothing.
2. **Concede and return** (grant a point, restate your thesis). Shows fairness; modest value.

3. **Concede and rebut** (grant the point, then show with evidence why your claim still holds). Solid.
4. **Concede and accommodate** (the objection changes your position, making it narrower or more precise). Strongest, because it demonstrates real engagement.

**Where to put it.** The 2025 Chief Reader Report discourages bolting a counterargument paragraph onto the essay. Often the most effective placement is **inside** a body paragraph, at the point where a skeptical reader would object, or woven into the thesis itself ("Although X, Y"). Place the engagement where the objection arises, not at a fixed slot.

#### Frameworks that help.

- **Toulmin model:** Claim, Grounds (evidence), Warrant (the link), Backing (support for the warrant), Qualifier (words like "usually"), Rebuttal (conditions under which the claim does not hold). It builds qualification into each argument.
- **Rogierian argument:** state the opposing view fairly, identify the circumstances in which it is valid, state your position, show where it is valid, and look for common ground. Useful when the audience is hostile.
- **They Say / I Say moves** (Graff and Birkenstein): "Though I concede that , ***I still insist that .***" "X is right that , ***but .***"

#### Transitions that introduce counterarguments and concessions

| FUNCTION                   | PHRASES                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduce an opposing view | Critics argue that; some will object that; it may be objected that; skeptics point out that |
| Concede                    | Admittedly; it is true that; to be sure; granted                                            |
| Pivot to rebuttal          | Yet; but; still; even so; nevertheless; however                                             |
| Refute                     | This objection overlooks; this reasoning assumes; the evidence points the other way         |
| Accommodate                | A better formulation is; the objection suggests refining the claim to                       |
| Return to thesis           | Taken together; for this reason; so                                                         |

#### Clause structure and punctuation for complex ideas (7.B, 8.B, 7.C, 8.C)

Complex ideas need sentences that rank them. Review: independent clauses carry the main claim; dependent clauses carry concessions, conditions, reasons.

| IDEA              | TYPICAL STRUCTURE                                                     | EXAMPLE                                                                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Concession</b> | <i>Although / While / Though + dependent clause, then independent</i> | "Although the plan is costly, it will save lives."                                  |
| <b>Condition</b>  | <i>If / Unless / Provided that</i>                                    | "Unless the town funds off-day care, the schedule will burden low-income families." |

| IDEA               | TYPICAL STRUCTURE                                      | EXAMPLE                                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reason             | <i>Because / Since</i>                                 | "The rule works because it asks for little."                 |
| Contrast of equals | Two independent clauses with a semicolon or <i>but</i> | "The plan is costly; the alternative is costlier."           |
| Relative detail    | <i>who / which / that</i>                              | "The council, which met for six weeks, rejected the budget." |

Mechanics that matter in complex sentences:

- **Commas set off nonessential (nonrestrictive) clauses** and phrases: "My brother, who lives in Ohio, is visiting." (I have one brother.) Without commas, the clause is essential: "My brother who lives in Ohio is visiting." (I have more than one.)
- **Dashes** mark an emphatic interruption or turn; **parentheses** mark a quieter aside; **commas** are the least emphatic way to add a parenthetical.
- **Colon** after an independent clause introduces an explanation or example.
- **Semicolon** joins two closely related independent clauses, or separates items in a list containing commas.
- **Modifier placement:** keep modifiers next to what they modify. "Only" and "nearly" are common culprits.
- **Parallel structure** in series and comparisons.
- **Pronoun clarity** in long sentences.

## Audience and style: comparisons and diction that reveal bias (1.B, 2.B, 7.A, 8.A)

**Comparisons an audience can understand.** A comparison persuades only if the audience grasps and accepts the thing compared. Explaining a budget deficit to farmers with a crop-loan analogy works; the same analogy to urban commuters may not. In your own writing, test each comparison: *Will my actual reader recognize this? Does it carry the connotation I want?*

**Diction that reveals bias.** Word choice can show a writer's stance before any argument begins.

| NEUTRAL            | LOADED (FAVORABLE) | LOADED (UNFAVORABLE) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| protester          | activist           | agitator             |
| tax                | contribution       | burden               |
| government program | public investment  | handout              |
| change             | reform             | upheaval             |

When you read, ask what the loaded word asks the audience to assume. When you write, decide whether a loaded word helps (with a sympathetic audience) or hurts (with a skeptical one).

## Irony (Unit 8)

**Irony** is a gap between what is said and what is meant, or between what is expected and what happens.

| KIND                              | DEFINITION                                                    | EXAMPLE                                         |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Verbal irony</b>               | A speaker says one thing and means another.                   | "What a lovely morning," said in a storm.       |
| <b>Situational irony</b>          | The outcome contradicts what was expected.                    | A fire station burns down.                      |
| <b>Dramatic irony</b>             | The audience knows something a character does not.            | A narrator reveals what a character cannot see. |
| <b>Sarcasm</b>                    | Verbal irony intended to wound.                               | "Thanks a lot, genius."                         |
| <b>Understatement / hyperbole</b> | Saying less or more than the case warrants.                   | Calling a disaster "a minor inconvenience."     |
| <b>Satire</b>                     | Using irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize a target. | Swift's "A Modest Proposal."                    |

Satire can be **Horatian** (gentle, amused) or **Juvenalian** (bitter, indignant). To analyze satire, use the sequence: **target, purpose, technique, and what the satirist wants the audience to know or do.**

How to recognize irony: the stated claim conflicts with the context, the writer's known values, or common sense; the tone is too calm for the content; or the proposed solution is monstrous or absurd. In MCQ items, a tone answer like "mock solemnity" or "deadpan" often signals irony.

## Worked example, reading side: irony in Swift's

## A Modest Proposal (1729)

Jonathan Swift's essay, in the public domain, proposes that the poor of Ireland sell their children as food for the rich. The following sentence appears in the section where the "projector" describes his plan. (Wording follows the standard text.)

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust.

### Step 1: Situation

Writer: Swift, writing as a persona, a calm, statistics-minded "projector" (a schemer of public improvements), not in his own voice. Audience: educated English and Anglo-Irish readers who read pamphlets about Irish poverty. Exigence: widespread poverty in Ireland and the failure of English policy and Irish landlords to address it; earlier pamphlets proposing remedies had gone ignored. Purpose: to shame the audience's indifference by showing that treating the poor as an economic resource already amounts to consuming them.

## Step 2: Identify the irony and its mechanics

| FEATURE                              | EVIDENCE                                                                                              | WHAT IT DOES                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Persona</b>                       | A calm, helpful "I"                                                                                   | The speaker treats the unthinkable as a technical problem, which exposes the way policy discussions treat the poor as statistics.                                       |
| <b>Euphemism and cookery diction</b> | "delicious nourishing and wholesome food," "stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled," "fricasie," "ragoust" | Culinary vocabulary applied to a child creates horror through contrast between the genteel register and the content. The reader cannot miss that the register is wrong. |
| <b>Borrowed authority</b>            | "a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London"                                                | Parodies the way pamphleteers cite supposed experts, mocking the practice of lending credibility to monstrous proposals.                                                |
| <b>Parallel series</b>               | "stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled"                                                                   | A catalogue of methods that gives bureaucratic thoroughness to cannibalism.                                                                                             |
| <b>Understatement of morality</b>    | "I make no doubt that it will equally serve"                                                          | The speaker's confidence and absence of moral hesitation expose the moral numbness of the cold economic argument he parodies.                                           |

## Step 3: Target, purpose, technique, and what the satirist wants

- **Target:** Not cannibalism but the indifference of the powerful, who already "devour" the poor through rents, trade restrictions, and neglect, and the habit of discussing human beings as economic quantities.
- **Technique:** Juvenalian satire through a deadpan persona and sustained verbal irony.
- **Effect on the audience:** Recoil, followed by recognition. The recoil is part of the argument: readers who are horrified by the proposal must ask why they were not equally horrified by the conditions that make it conceivable.
- **What Swift wants:** That readers abandon complacency and take real action on the Irish economy.

## Step 4: Audience awareness (1.B)

Swift's irony requires an audience that shares his values but not his persona. The satire works only if readers *know* that eating children is wrong; the horror demonstrates their shared moral ground and then turns it against their inaction. A less civilized audience would simply find the proposal offensive; the educated audience of pamphlets recognized the genre being mocked.

## Step 5: Sentence structure and mechanics (7.B, 7.C)

The sentence is a long **loose (cumulative) sentence**: the main claim ("I have been assured... that a young healthy child... is... a most delicious... food") comes first, followed by an accumulating list of methods and a second independent clause ("and I make no doubt"). The comma-separated list without a conjunction before

"or" ("stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled") builds a pace of businesslike enumeration. The unemotional syntax is part of the irony: the sentence's calm structure refuses to register horror.

## Worked example, writing side: engaging a counterargument

**Task (original, FRQ 3 style):** *A columnist recently wrote, "Competition does more harm than good to young people." Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which the columnist's claim is valid.*

### Draft thesis and the opposing view

**Draft 1 thesis:** "Competition is good for young people because it builds character." Problems: absolute, ignores obvious counterexamples, reads as the mirror image of the columnist's equally sweeping claim.

**Skeptical reader's objection:** "Competition makes losers feel worthless and teaches kids to value winning over learning."

### Four ways to handle the objection

#### Token (earns nothing):

Some people say competition is harmful, but they are wrong because competition is good.

#### Concede and return:

Admittedly, competition can hurt children who lose repeatedly. Nevertheless, competition builds character.

#### Concede and rebut:

Admittedly, repeated losses can discourage a child who has no way to measure progress except against others. But the discouragement comes from how competition is organized, not from competition itself: a swimmer racing her own best time from last month meets the same pressure without the public ranking.

#### Concede and accommodate (revises the thesis):

The columnist is right that competition harms young people when it is the only measure of worth, but wrong to condemn competition itself. The evidence points to a narrower conclusion: competition develops persistence and focus when it is framed around improvement and when children compete against standards they can meet, and damages self-worth when it ranks them against each other without a path to progress.

### Revised thesis with the accommodation built in

"Competition helps young people when it measures improvement and harms them when it measures worth; so the columnist's claim is valid for ranked, win-or-lose contests and invalid for competition that asks children to beat their own best."

This thesis is defensible, qualified by condition, and engages the opposition in the claim itself.

## A body paragraph with engaged counterargument and complex sentences

The columnist's evidence is strongest where competition is public, ranked, and permanent. A middle-school science fair that posts the winners on a hallway wall teaches most of the school that it did not win, and for a child who is already unsure of her ability, that lesson can last longer than the project. Yet the same child, entered in a regional math league that reports only her own score and its change from the last meeting, may find the pressure that she dreaded turns into something closer to curiosity: not "Am I better than the others?" but "Can I solve what I could not solve in October?" The difference lies not in whether the contest exists but in what it measures, which is why a school that eliminates competition altogether removes both the harm and the benefit, while a school that redesigns it removes only the harm.

### What the paragraph does

| FEATURE                                                               | WHERE                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Concession that gives the opposing view its best case                 | First two sentences                                                                                           |
| Pivot and contrast                                                    | "Yet the same child..."                                                                                       |
| Concrete example in each direction                                    | Science fair vs. math league                                                                                  |
| Complexity explored (the key variable is what the contest measures)   | Final sentence                                                                                                |
| Engagement built into the line of reasoning, not a separate paragraph | Whole paragraph                                                                                               |
| Clause structure                                                      | Concessive opening, parallel contrast, and a "which is why" clause that converts the example into a principle |
| Mechanics                                                             | Colon introduces the revised question; the commas set off a nonessential adjective phrase; no splices         |

## How this shows up on the multiple-choice section

Typical stems:

- "In the third paragraph the writer qualifies the claim made in the second paragraph by..." (3.C)
- "The writer's concession in the sentence beginning '...' functions to..." (3.C)
- "The writer's attitude toward the counterargument raised in paragraph 4 is best described as..." (3.C)
- "The writer wants to qualify the claim in sentence 4 so that it is more defensible. Which version is best?" (4.C)
- "The writer wants to address a counterargument in the third paragraph. Which sentence would best accomplish this?" (4.C)
- "The dependent clause that opens the sentence primarily serves to..." (7.B)
- "The parenthetical / dash in the sentence '...' functions to..." (7.C)
- "The question in the final paragraph functions primarily to..." (7.A)

- "The tone of the passage is best described as..." (often with an irony answer such as "mock solemnity," "deadpan," or "wry")
- "Which of the following changes to the punctuation of sentence 3 would most clearly convey the writer's meaning?" (8.C)
- "The writer wants to acknowledge the beliefs of readers who \_\_\_\_\_. Which sentence would best accomplish this?" (2.B)

### Sample MCQ set

**Passage for Questions 1-3.** *Original passage in the voice of a 1920s humorist, written for this guide.*

1. I have lately been informed that the modern citizen is too busy to read, and I can only say that I believe it entirely, having just spent forty minutes in a queue to learn this from a newspaper. (2) The remedy proposed by the authorities is a shorter book. (3) I have no objection to shorter books; I have written several, and none of them has ever been called long, though one or two have been called, with some truth, endless. (4) But I cannot help observing that the citizens who are too busy to read are not too busy to wait, to complain about waiting, and to explain to their neighbors, at length, the exact reasons they are too busy. (5) Perhaps what the modern citizen needs is not a shorter book but a longer queue.

1. The tone of the passage is best described as

- A. bitter and accusatory
- B. wry and gently mocking
- C. scholarly and detached
- D. nostalgic and sorrowful

2. The writer's statement in sentence 1 ("I believe it entirely, having just spent forty minutes in a queue") primarily functions as

- A. a sincere endorsement of the claim that citizens are too busy to read
- B. verbal irony that undercuts the claim by pointing to the citizen's willingness to wait
- C. a statistic that supports the authorities' proposal
- D. a concession that the writer's own books are too long

3. The final sentence (sentence 5) functions primarily to

- A. propose a serious solution to the problem of busy readers
- B. offer an ironic suggestion that mocks the authorities' premise by implying that citizens have time to spare
- C. introduce a new topic about the length of queues
- D. acknowledge that the writer's argument is weak

**Draft for Question 4.** *Original student draft.*

1. Self-driving cars promise to reduce traffic deaths. (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) Until the technology has been tested in snow, heavy rain, and crowded city streets, the promise remains unproven.

4. The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 1 that acknowledges the beliefs of readers who find the promise convincing, before sentence 3 qualifies it. Which sentence would best accomplish this?

- A. Anyone who believes this has not thought about it carefully.
- B. It is easy to see why many people find the promise persuasive, since human error is involved in most crashes.
- C. Cars have been in use for more than a century.
- D. Self-driving cars were invented in the twenty-first century.

Answers are in the Answer Key.

### How to attack these MCQ items

1. **Irony check.** If the literal reading makes the writer sound foolish or monstrous, look for irony. Ask what the writer would have to *mean* for the sentence to make sense as criticism.
2. **Tone items.** Pick words from the passage that carry attitude, then choose the descriptor that fits all of them. For ironic passages, “wry,” “deadpan,” “mock-solemn,” or “sardonic” are common.
3. **Concession items.** The correct answer says the concession grants a point **in order to** support what follows. Wrong answers say it weakens, contradicts, or abandons the thesis.
4. **Qualification items (Writing sets).** The correct version limits scope with a modifier or condition while keeping the claim. Wrong answers either make the claim absolute or retreat into vagueness (“some people think”).
5. **Acknowledge-the-audience items.** The correct answer is respectful and specific. Wrong answers insult, ignore, or change the subject.
6. **Punctuation items.** Match the mark to the relationship: semicolon for two related independent clauses; colon before an explanation; dashes or commas for nonessential elements.

## How this shows up on the free-response questions

### Argument (FRQ 3)

The prompt asks for “the extent to which” a claim is valid. That phrase invites qualification: your answer is almost never “completely” or “not at all.” Strong responses define the key term, take a conditional position, and treat the opposing view as a **stakeholder with a real case**. Build the counterargument into the line of reasoning at the point where a skeptic would object. Evidence from history, literature, current events, or experience is strongest when you explain its causal relationship to the abstract claim.

### Synthesis (FRQ 1)

Sources often disagree. The highest-scoring responses use one source to **qualify or complicate** another and describe what each source is doing, not merely what it says. Use the concessive thesis (“Although Source A shows ..., Source D reveals ...”) to show complexity from the start. Be careful with source credibility and bias, and do not let a one-sentence “Source C disagrees” stand in for engagement.

## Rhetorical analysis (FRQ 2)

Irony, concession, and qualification appear as **rhetorical choices** in the passage. Describe them concretely: “She concedes that the plan is costly, then turns the concession into an argument that the cost shows how seriously the town takes its children.” For Row C, explain the **function of a tension** in the passage (for example, a speaker who honors a rival while arguing against him) and relate choices to each other.

### Rubric links

| ROW | SKILLS AT WORK                                                                                                                    |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A   | A qualified thesis that still takes a position.                                                                                   |
| B   | Commentary that handles objections inside the line of reasoning; specific evidence for both concession and rebuttal.              |
| C   | Nuance and tension explored consistently; implications and limits articulated in context; not a single token “although” sentence. |

## Review plan for the end of the course (Unit 9)

The CED recommends using your Progress Check results to target review. A practical sequence:

| WEEK | FOCUS       | ACTIVITY                                                                                                                                         |
|------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Diagnose    | Take the three FRQs timed, over three sessions (synthesis, rhetorical analysis, argument); score against the rubric rows; find your lowest row.  |
| 2    | Reading MCQ | Two reading sets per day, untimed first, then timed (about 10-12 minutes each); keep an error log naming the skill code and the distractor type. |
| 3    | Writing MCQ | Two writing sets per day (about 7-9 minutes each); read the stem first; label the goal in the stem before reading the choices.                   |
| 4    | Row B       | Rewrite one old essay’s commentary using Meaning, Impact, Purpose; shuffle the paragraphs test.                                                  |
| 5    | Row C       | Rewrite the introduction and one paragraph of an old essay with one deliberate move toward complexity; check against the “does not earn” list.   |
|      |             |                                                                                                                                                  |

| WEEK | FOCUS     | ACTIVITY                                                                                                                                                      |
|------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6    | Full mock | Take a full section I (45 questions, 60 minutes) and section II (2 hours 15 minutes) with a Bluebook-style environment; practice your essay order and pacing. |

Pacing reminders: about 80 seconds per MCQ; 15-minute reading period used for source annotation and a draft thesis; about 40 minutes per essay including a 3-5 minute plan; if short on time, write three strong body paragraphs and skip the conclusion before skipping the thesis.

## Practice exercises

Complete on paper. Answers are in the Answer Key.

### Exercise 1: Qualify (4.C)

Rewrite each claim to be more defensible by adding a modifier, a condition, or a limit. Keep the topic.

- "Technology isolates people."
- "Standardized tests measure nothing important."
- "Zoos protect endangered animals."

### Exercise 2: Rank the engagement (Unit 9)

Label each as TOKEN, CONCEDE-AND-RETURN, CONCEDE-AND-REBUT, or CONCEDE-AND-ACCOMMODATE.

- "Critics claim homework is useless, but they are mistaken."
- "Critics are right that homework in the early grades often builds little beyond habit, but the habit is not nothing: students who learn to work alone at ten are better prepared at fifteen."
- "Critics are right that homework assigned in bulk teaches only compliance, which suggests the rule should change from more homework to better-chosen homework."
- "Admittedly, homework can be tiring. Still, homework is essential."

### Exercise 3: Write the concession and rebuttal

For the claim "Cities should ban cars from downtown," write one concession sentence that gives the strongest opposing point fairly and one rebuttal sentence that uses a specific reason (not a bare assertion).

### Exercise 4: Identify the irony (Unit 8)

*Original passage.*

The city proudly announced that its new Department of Efficiency had been established to streamline the permit process. Applicants may now submit the required forms to any of four offices, each of which will direct them, with great speed, to one of the other three.

- a. Name the kind of irony. (b) Identify the words that signal it. (c) State the target and what the writer wants the audience to conclude.

### Exercise 5: Audience and comparison (1.B/2.B)

You must persuade (i) a group of farmers and (ii) a group of software engineers to support conserving water in a drought. Write one comparison for each audience that explains why short-term cuts protect long-term supply.

### Exercise 6: Diction that reveals bias (7.A)

*Original sentence pair.*

1. "Opponents of the bill staged a protest outside the capitol." (2) "A mob of opponents of the bill descended on the capitol."
- a. Which words reveal the writer's stance in each? (b) What does each sentence invite the audience to assume?

### Exercise 7: Punctuation for clarity (7.C/8.C)

Correct and explain.

- a. "The senator who was elected in 2020 is retiring." (There are two senators from that state who were elected in 2020. Which one is retiring?) Rewrite so the meaning is: only one senator was elected in 2020.
- b. "The proposal was bold it was also expensive."
- c. "She had one concern, the cost."
- d. "He only wanted to borrow the book." (Rewrite to mean: he wanted nothing else from her but the book.)

### Exercise 8: Combine with concession (8.B)

Combine into one sentence that puts the concession in a dependent clause.

- a. "The tax would raise prices. The tax would fund the clinic."
- b. "The new schedule is popular with teachers. The new schedule has not improved test scores."

### Exercise 9: Analyze a concession (3.C)

*Original passage.*

I do not deny that the old courthouse is beautiful. It is also unsafe, inaccessible to anyone who cannot climb its steps, and too expensive to heat. A building that honors a community's past while excluding part of its present has stopped serving that community, however much it is loved.

- a. Identify the concession. (b) What does it accomplish? (c) Rewrite the last sentence in one clause that adds a qualifier.

### Exercise 10: Plan an essay with complexity

Prompt (original): *A scientist claimed, "The most important discoveries are made by people who were not looking for them." Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which her claim is valid.* Write: (a) a conditional thesis; (b) the strongest objection; (c) how you will engage it (concede-and-rebut or concede-and-

accommodate) and where; (d) one specific example for each side.

## Common misconceptions

| MISCONCEPTION                                     | WHY IT IS WRONG                                                                       | WHAT TO DO INSTEAD                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "I need a counterargument paragraph."             | The 2025 Chief Reader Report discourages formulaic counterargument paragraphs.        | Engage objections where they arise in the line of reasoning.                             |
| "Conceding hurts my argument."                    | Fair concessions build credibility.                                                   | Concede the strongest opposing point, then show why the claim still holds, or revise it. |
| "Complexity means taking no side."                | A complex claim commits to a specific, supportable position that includes its limits. | State conditions, scope, or a distinction.                                               |
| "Irony means sarcasm."                            | Sarcasm is one kind of verbal irony meant to wound.                                   | Identify the gap between literal and intended meaning, then the target.                  |
| "If the speaker says it, the writer believes it." | The speaker may be a persona.                                                         | Ask who the persona is and what the writer wants the audience to see.                    |
| "Qualifiers are weak words."                      | Used well they make a claim defensible.                                               | Make the claim as strong as the evidence allows.                                         |
| "Commas and dashes are interchangeable."          | They carry different emphasis.                                                        | Choose by how much attention the interruption should get.                                |
| "Satire is just humor."                           | It targets something with a purpose.                                                  | Identify target, purpose, technique.                                                     |
| "Sophistication needs advanced vocabulary."       | The rubric excludes ornate language that does not enhance the argument.               | Use precise words and explore genuine tension.                                           |

## Quick reference: Units 7-9 checklist

| QUESTION                                                                                          | YOUR ANSWER |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Where does the writer (or I) limit the claim, and with what word, condition, or distinction?      | _____       |
| What is the strongest opposing view, and is it stated fairly?                                     | _____       |
| Is the engagement concede-and-rebut, or concede-and-accommodate?                                  | _____       |
| Where in the line of reasoning does the objection naturally arise?                                | _____       |
| If irony is present, what is the gap between literal and intended meaning, and who is the target? | _____       |
|                                                                                                   |             |

| QUESTION                                                                   | YOUR ANSWER |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Which loaded words reveal a stance?                                        | _____       |
| Does each complex sentence rank its ideas clearly and punctuate correctly? | _____       |

## Answer Key

### Sample MCQ set

- 1. (B).** The humor is gentle and self-aware ("endless," "a longer queue"); the writer mocks without bitterness. (A) is too harsh. (C) is not detached; there are jokes throughout. (D) nothing is mournful.
- 2. (B).** The writer says he believes the claim, but his evidence (forty minutes waiting) shows people have time to wait, so the statement undermines the claim. (A) takes the sentence literally. (C) no statistic is offered. (D) the books are discussed in sentence 3.
- 3. (B).** The suggestion that citizens need a longer queue mocks the premise that they are too busy by implying they have time. (A) takes it as serious. (C) the queue is a comic image, not a topic. (D) the sentence does not concede weakness.
- 4. (B).** It respects readers who find the promise convincing and gives a reason for their belief, setting up the qualification in sentence 3. (A) insults them. (C) and (D) are irrelevant background.

### Exercise 1 (model)

- a. "Heavy use of some social technologies can isolate people who already lack close contacts, although other uses help them connect." (b) "Standardized tests measure a narrow set of skills reliably but say little about creativity or persistence." (c) "Accredited zoos that run breeding programs have helped protect some endangered species, though many animals in zoos are not part of recovery efforts."

### Exercise 2

- a. TOKEN. (b) CONCEDE-AND-REBUT. (c) CONCEDE-AND-ACCOMMODATE. (d) CONCEDE-AND-RETURN.

### Exercise 3 (model)

Concession: "Downtown merchants are right to fear that a ban could drive customers to suburban malls."

Rebuttal: "Cities that have closed central streets to cars have often seen pedestrian traffic rise, because shoppers who walk linger longer, and a ban with delivery windows for businesses would protect merchants from the main logistical risk."

### Exercise 4

- a. Situational and verbal irony (a department meant to streamline instead creates a loop). (b) "proudly announced," "Department of Efficiency," "with great speed," "one of the other three." (c) Target: bureaucratic inefficiency; the writer wants the audience to conclude that the city's "reform" is empty and that applicants are being sent in circles.

**Exercise 5 (model)**

- i. "Water in a drought is like seed corn: eat it all this year and there is nothing to plant next spring." (ii) "A reservoir in a drought is like a server near capacity: it can handle the current load, but if usage keeps spiking, it will crash for everyone."

**Exercise 6**

- a. 1. "staged a protest" is neutral to slightly critical ("staged" can imply theatrical); (2) "mob" and "descended" are strongly negative. (b) (1) invites the audience to see a demonstration; (2) invites the audience to see an unruly threat and to side against the opponents.

**Exercise 7**

- a. "The senator, who was elected in 2020, is retiring." (b) "The proposal was bold; it was also expensive." (c) "She had one concern: the cost." (d) "He wanted only to borrow the book." (or "He wanted to borrow only the book.")

**Exercise 8 (model)**

- a. "Although the tax would raise prices, it would fund the clinic." (b) "Although the new schedule is popular with teachers, it has not improved test scores."

**Exercise 9**

- a. "I do not deny that the old courthouse is beautiful." (b) It shows fairness and acknowledges the audience's affection for the building, which lowers resistance to the criticism that follows. (c) "A building that honors a community's past while excluding part of its present may, however much it is loved, have stopped serving that community."

**Exercise 10 (model)**

- a. "Major discoveries often come from people who were not looking for them, but that happens mostly because those people were already trained to notice what others dismiss; so the claim is valid as a description of how discoveries arrive and incomplete as an account of who makes them." (b) "Many discoveries were the result of focused, deliberate research, such as the development of vaccines through systematic study." (c) Concede-and-accommodate, in the second body paragraph: grant that deliberate research produces major advances, then refine the claim to "discoveries often arrive unannounced to prepared minds." (d) For: a lab accident that revealed an unexpected property of a material (described accurately and briefly). Against: a long, planned research program that produced a vaccine.

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