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MCQ Writing Questions: 10 Question Types Step by Step

This guide teaches you how to solve the "student draft" Writing questions on Section I of the AP English Language and Composition exam. Each type has sample stems, a step-by-step method, the wrong-answer patterns to expect, a worked example, and two practice items drawn from original sample drafts written for this guide. Answers are in the Answer Key at the end.

What the Writing Questions Are

Of the 45 multiple-choice questions on the exam (60 minutes, four choices A–D since 2025, delivered in the **Bluebook** app), **20–22** are Writing questions. They come in three sets, each anchored to a "student draft": an argumentative essay of a few paragraphs with numbered sentences. Sets run roughly 7–9, 7–9, and 4–6 questions. The College Board describes the task as reading like a writer and choosing the revision that best achieves a stated goal.

Writing questions assess the four "writing" skill categories in the Course and Exam Description (CED):

SKILL CATEGORY	SKILLS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
2 Rhetorical Situation: Writing	2.A introductions and conclusions; 2.B audience beliefs, values, needs	add an opening sentence, write a conclusion, address a specific audience
4 Claims and Evidence: Writing	4.A claim plus evidence; 4.B thesis; 4.C qualify a claim	revise a thesis, add evidence, add a counterargument, delete a sentence
6 Reasoning and Organization: Writing	6.A line of reasoning and commentary; 6.B transitions; 6.C methods of development	add commentary, add a transition, move a sentence
8 Style: Writing	8.A word choice and tone; 8.B clear sentences; 8.C grammar and mechanics	combine sentences, maintain tone, fix punctuation

The skill that matters most on these questions is not grammar knowledge. It is **goal-matching**: every question states a goal ("The writer wants to..."), and the correct answer is the only choice that accomplishes that goal, in this draft, for this audience, without errors. Most wrong answers are perfectly good writing that does something

else.

The Universal Method for Writing Questions

1. **Read the stem first.** Underline the goal verb and its object: *add evidence to support the claim in sentence 7; maintain a formal tone; clarify the relationship between sentences 9 and 10.*
2. **Read only the sentences you need.** For most items that is the target sentence plus the sentence before and after. Read the whole draft once, quickly, before you start the set (about 90 seconds), so you know the thesis and the tone.
3. **Say the goal in your own words** and predict what a right answer must contain.
4. **Test each choice against three filters, in this order:**
 - **Goal:** Does it do what the stem asks? (Many choices fail here.)
 - **Fit:** Does it match the draft's claim, tone, audience, and tense, and does it connect to the sentences around it?
 - **Correctness:** Is it grammatically and logically clean?
5. **Eliminate and confirm.** The correct answer is the one that passes all three. If two remain, use the tie-breakers below.

Writing-Question Tie-Breakers

- **Precise beats fancy.** The most elaborate or “sophisticated” option is often wrong because it clashes with the draft's register.
- **Specific beats vague.** A choice that names the actual topic of the draft beats a generic one.
- **Shorter beats longer** when both accomplish the goal; extra words usually carry extra errors or off-goal content.
- **Check for a second job.** If the stem asks for evidence and a choice offers evidence plus a new claim, the new claim may take the choice out of scope.
- **Reread the stem one last time.** Many ties dissolve when you notice a single word: *qualify, skeptical, objective, conclude.*

The Writing-Question Distractor Patterns

PATTERN	DESCRIPTION
Grammatically correct but off-goal	Fine prose that accomplishes a different task (adds a claim when evidence was requested)
Fanciest-sounding revision	Elaborate, ornate, or sophisticated language that clashes with the draft's tone
Adjacent-claim evidence	Evidence that supports a nearby claim rather than the one named
Wrong logical relationship	A transition that signals contrast when the ideas are cause-effect, or the reverse

PATTERN	DESCRIPTION
Tone mismatch	Slang in a formal piece, or stiff diction in a conversational one
Overreach	A thesis or conclusion that claims more than the draft supports
Vague but safe	A generic sentence that could be pasted into any essay
Introduces new topic	A conclusion or transition that opens an idea the draft never develops
Redundancy	Repeats what the draft already says
Dangling or ambiguous structure	Modifier errors, unclear pronouns, faulty parallelism

The Sample Student Drafts

All three drafts were written for this guide as original practice material. Sentences are numbered as on the exam.

Draft 1: School Start Times

The following is a draft of an argumentative essay by a student writing for a school-board audience.

1. Every weekday morning, millions of American teenagers drag themselves out of bed before sunrise. (2) Many school districts begin classes before 8:00 a.m. (3) Schools should start later because teenagers are tired. (4) Researchers who study adolescent sleep have found that puberty shifts the body's internal clock, making it difficult for most teens to fall asleep before about 11:00 p.m. (5) A teenager who must wake at 6:00 a.m. therefore cannot get the eight to ten hours of sleep that pediatric organizations recommend. (6) Sleepy students are also less safe. (7) After one district moved its start time later, teen car crashes in the area dropped noticeably.
2. Some people argue that later start times would disrupt athletics and after-school jobs. (9) These concerns are real, but they can be managed. (10) Practices could be scheduled with lights, and employers in many communities already hire workers who are available after school. (11) Moreover, a team that plays on little sleep is more likely to be injured. (12) Schools should start later. (13) It is just plain dumb to keep forcing kids to wake up at the crack of dawn.

Draft 2: Public Libraries

The following is a draft of an argumentative essay by a student for a local newspaper's youth opinion page.

1. When people imagine a library, they often picture quiet shelves of books. (2) Today's public libraries are much more than that. (3) They lend laptops, host job-training workshops, and offer free tax help. (4) Libraries in rural areas often provide the only reliable internet access for miles. (5) In one county, library computers were used more than 40,000 times in a single year. (6) Some taxpayers wonder whether libraries are still worth funding in the age of smartphones. (7) Smartphones, however, do not help a person fill out a job application that must be uploaded as a PDF. (8) Libraries serve as community anchors. (9) Cutting their budgets would hurt the people who have the fewest alternatives. (10) A town that closes its library does not save money so much as move the cost elsewhere.

Draft 3: Urban Gardens

The following is a draft of an informative-argumentative essay by a student for a science class.

1. Vacant lots are often seen as eyesores. (2) In many cities they could become productive community gardens. (3) A garden can reduce neighborhood heat, because plants cool the air around them. (4) It can also improve access to fresh produce in places with few grocery stores. (5) Gardens require volunteers. (6) Organizing neighbors takes time and trust. (7) Studies in several cities have found that residents who garden together report stronger relationships with neighbors. (8) Because gardens depend on shared work, they can strengthen the very trust they need in order to succeed. (9) City governments should therefore lease vacant lots to community groups at low cost.

References below to "Draft 1," "Draft 2," and "Draft 3" mean these essays.

Type 1: Add or Revise a Thesis

What it looks like

- "The writer wants to revise sentence 3 so that it presents a defensible claim and previews the structure of the argument. Which of the following best accomplishes this goal?"
- "The writer wants to add a sentence at the end of the first paragraph that states the main claim. Which is best?"

Step-by-step method

1. A thesis must be **debatable** (a reasonable person could disagree), **specific** (names the topic and the position), and, when the stem says "preview," **structured** (signals the reasons that the essay will develop).
2. Read the body of the draft. The thesis must match what the essay actually argues: its reasons, its scope.
3. Test each choice: Is it a fact (not debatable)? A topic announcement ("This essay will discuss...")? Too broad? Too narrow? Does it overreach beyond the body?
4. Choose the one that takes a clear position, names the reasons the body develops, and stays within scope.

Distractor patterns to expect: restating the obvious as a fact, a topic announcement, a claim broader than the evidence, a claim about a different subtopic, vague "there are many sides."

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer wants to revise sentence 3 so that it presents a defensible claim and previews the reasons developed in the first paragraph. Which of the following best accomplishes this goal?

- A. Schools should start later because teenagers have strong feelings about mornings.
- B. Because adolescent biology makes early wake-ups harmful to teenagers' sleep and safety, school districts should move start times later.
- C. Many experts have studied teenagers and sleep, and their findings are interesting.
- D. Start times are a controversial topic that affects students, parents, and schools.

Thinking: The first paragraph develops two reasons: biology/sleep (sentences 4–5) and safety (sentences 6–7). A previewing thesis names both and takes a position. (A) offers a reason the paragraph never develops. (C) and (D) are announcements without a position. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

1.1 (Draft 2) The writer wants to add a thesis at the end of the first paragraph (after sentence 5) that makes a debatable claim and prepares for the rest of the essay. Which is best? (A) Public libraries exist in many American towns. (B) Because libraries now provide essential services that smartphones and private companies do not, communities should protect library funding. (C) Libraries are important to a great many people for various reasons. (D) Some people use libraries a lot, and other people do not.

1.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to revise sentence 2 so that it presents a clearer position that the rest of the essay supports. Which is best? (A) Vacant lots exist in many cities. (B) Some people like gardens. (C) Converting vacant lots into community gardens would offer cities environmental, nutritional, and social benefits. (D) Cities have many problems, and gardens are one thing that might help.

Type 2: Add Evidence

What it looks like

- “The writer wants to add evidence after sentence 6 to support the claim that sleepy students are less safe. Which of the following would best accomplish this?”
- “Which of the following sentences, if added after sentence 9, would most effectively support the writer’s claim about the cost of closing libraries?”

Step-by-step method

1. Identify the **exact claim** that needs support. Quote it to yourself.
2. Decide what kind of evidence would support it: a statistic, a study, an expert, an example, a concrete case. Prefer evidence that is **specific, relevant to the claim’s exact terms**, and **credible**.
3. Check each choice: Does it support *this* claim or an adjacent one? Is it a restatement (a claim, not evidence)? Is it an anecdote where data is called for, or the reverse?
4. Make sure the evidence does not contradict the draft or introduce a new topic.

Distractor patterns to expect: evidence for a nearby claim, a restatement of the claim, vague appeals (“experts agree”), an opinion presented as evidence, and evidence that actually supports the opposing view.

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 6 to provide specific evidence that sleepy students are less safe. Which is best?

- A. Teenagers who sleep fewer than seven hours a night are far more likely to be involved in drowsy-driving crashes, according to a national traffic safety study.
- B. Many teenagers enjoy staying up late with friends.
- C. Safety is one of the most important concerns facing any school.
- D. A good night’s sleep helps students feel better on test days.

Thinking: The claim is about **safety**. (D) is adjacent (about test performance). (B) is irrelevant. (C) is vague restatement. (A) is specific and ties sleep deprivation to a safety outcome. **Answer: A.**

Practice items

2.1 (Draft 2) The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 4 to support the claim that rural libraries are essential. Which is best? (A) Many rural residents enjoy the peace and quiet of country life. (B) In one rural region, more than half of households lack home broadband, and library branches are the only places offering free public access. (C) Internet service has improved in many parts of the country. (D) Some libraries have beautiful architecture.

2.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to add evidence after sentence 3 supporting the claim that gardens reduce neighborhood heat. Which is best? (A) Gardens are pleasant places to spend an afternoon. (B) A study in one city found that blocks with community gardens were measurably cooler on summer afternoons than comparable blocks without them. (C) Tomatoes grow best in full sun. (D) Many cities have heat problems.

Type 3: Add or Revise a Transition

What it looks like

- “The writer wants to add a transition at the beginning of sentence 8 to clarify the relationship between sentences 7 and 8. Which of the following best accomplishes this goal?”
- “Which of the following is the best revision of the underlined portion of sentence 11?”

Step-by-step method

- Read the sentence before and the sentence after. Name the logical relationship between them in one word: **addition, contrast, cause-effect, example, concession, sequence, comparison, restatement.**
- Match it to a transition family:

RELATIONSHIP	TRANSITION EXAMPLES
addition	moreover, furthermore, in addition
contrast	however, nevertheless, in contrast, yet
cause-effect	therefore, consequently, as a result, thus
example	for example, for instance, specifically
concession	admittedly, granted, although
restatement	in other words, that is
sequence	first, next, finally

- Check whether the choice is placed grammatically (punctuation after the transition, correct conjunction vs. adverb use).
- Reject transitions that sound fine but state the wrong relationship.

Distractor patterns to expect: right word family but wrong relationship, a contrast transition between ideas that agree, and a transition that adds a new claim.

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer wants to add a transition at the beginning of sentence 6 to show that it adds a further reason to the point made in sentence 5. Which is best?

- A. However,
- B. Moreover,
- C. For instance,
- D. In contrast,

Thinking: Sentence 5 gives one harm of early starts (too little sleep). Sentence 6 ("Sleepy students are also less safe") adds a second, related harm. That is addition. (A) and (D) signal contrast. (C) signals an example, but safety is a new reason, not an instance of sleep loss. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

3.1 (Draft 2) The writer wants to add a transition at the beginning of sentence 9 to show how it follows from sentence 8. Which is best? (A) In contrast, (B) For instance, (C) Consequently, (D) Meanwhile,

3.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to add a transition at the beginning of sentence 5 to signal that it introduces a challenge to the benefits described in sentences 3 and 4. Which is best? (A) Similarly, (B) However, (C) Therefore, (D) In addition,

Type 4: Delete a Sentence? Keep or Cut

What it looks like

- "The writer is considering deleting sentence 11. Should the writer make this deletion?"
- Choices pair a decision with a reason: "Yes, because...; No, because..."

Step-by-step method

1. Identify what the sentence does: supports a claim, transitions, adds a counterpoint, or only repeats/digresses.
2. Test: if I remove it, does the paragraph lose **support, logic, or necessary context**? If yes, keep. If the paragraph reads the same or better, delete.
3. Read each option's **reason** critically. A correct decision with a false reason is wrong. If the reason says "it provides evidence" but the sentence is only an opinion, that choice fails.
4. Common delete reasons that are correct: it repeats information already given; it is off-topic; it undermines the tone. Common keep reasons that are correct: it gives evidence for the claim; it supplies a needed transition; it answers a counterargument.

Distractor patterns to expect: right decision, wrong reason; wrong decision with a plausible reason; reasons that describe a different sentence.

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer is considering deleting sentence 11 ("Moreover, a team that plays on little sleep is more likely to be injured."). Should the writer make this deletion?

- A. Yes, because the sentence introduces a new topic unrelated to the paragraph.
- B. Yes, because the sentence repeats information from earlier in the essay.
- C. No, because the sentence provides an additional reason that later start times would benefit athletics, directly answering the concern in sentence 8.
- D. No, because the sentence explains why teenagers have trouble falling asleep.

Thinking: The paragraph is answering the athletics objection. Sentence 11 turns the objection around: sleep helps athletes. (A) is wrong; it is on topic. (B) is wrong; injury risk is new. (D) misdescribes it. **Answer: C.**

Practice items

4.1 (Draft 3) The writer is considering deleting sentence 5 ("Gardens require volunteers."). Should the writer make this deletion? (A) Yes, because the sentence has nothing to do with the essay's topic. (B) Yes, because the sentence repeats the claim in sentence 3. (C) No, because the sentence introduces the practical challenge that sentences 6 through 8 discuss. (D) No, because the sentence provides statistical evidence for the benefits of gardening.

4.2 (Draft 2) The writer is considering deleting sentence 8 ("Libraries serve as community anchors."). Which is the best assessment? (A) Delete it, because the sentence is clearly false. (B) Keep it, because it provides specific numerical evidence. (C) Keep it as a general claim that bridges the specific services described and the conclusion about budgets, but consider developing it with an example. (D) Delete it, because the sentence only repeats sentence 1.

Type 5: Combine Sentences

What it looks like

- "The writer wants to combine sentences 4 and 5 to clarify the relationship between the ideas. Which of the following is the best combination?"
- "The writer wants to combine sentences 5 and 6 in a way that emphasizes the cost of the problem."

Step-by-step method

1. Name the relationship between the two sentences (cause-effect, contrast, addition, example). The best combination makes that relationship explicit.
2. Check the **grammar structure** of each choice: a comma splice, a fused sentence, a misplaced modifier, faulty parallelism, or a subordinate clause that reverses the logic.
3. Check **emphasis**: the idea you subordinate becomes the background; the idea in the main clause becomes the point. Which should be the point?
4. Check for **concision**: the best combination often removes redundant words.

Distractor patterns to expect: comma splice, a coordinating conjunction signaling the wrong relationship (*but* for cause-effect), subordinating the important idea, wordiness, dangling modifiers.

Worked example (Draft 3)

The writer wants to combine sentences 5 and 6 to show that the volunteer requirement is difficult because of the effort of organizing. Which is best?

- A. Gardens require volunteers, organizing neighbors takes time and trust.
- B. Gardens require volunteers, and organizing neighbors takes time and trust.
- C. Gardens require volunteers, but because organizing neighbors takes time and trust.
- D. Gardens require volunteers; organizing them is costly, in time and trust.

Thinking: (A) is a comma splice. (C) is a fragment-style error ("but because"). (D) has a pronoun problem: "them" is ambiguous (volunteers or neighbors). (B) is grammatical and connects the ideas by addition with a clear reading. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

5.1 (Draft 2) The writer wants to combine sentences 6 and 7 so that the objection and the response are clearly linked. Which is best? (A) Some taxpayers wonder whether libraries are still worth funding in the age of smartphones, smartphones do not help a person fill out an application that must be uploaded as a PDF. (B) Although some taxpayers wonder whether libraries are still worth funding in the age of smartphones, a smartphone cannot help a person fill out a job application that must be uploaded as a PDF. (C) Some taxpayers wonder whether libraries are still worth funding in the age of smartphones, and so smartphones do not help a person fill out a job application. (D) Smartphones are why some taxpayers wonder about funding, and applications must be uploaded as a PDF.

5.2 (Draft 1) The writer wants to combine sentences 1 and 2 into one sentence that emphasizes the scale of the problem. Which is best? (A) Millions of American teenagers drag themselves out of bed before sunrise every weekday morning, because many school districts begin classes before 8:00 a.m. (B) Many school districts begin classes before 8:00 a.m. and millions of teenagers wake before sunrise, every weekday morning. (C) Because many school districts begin classes before 8:00 a.m., millions of American teenagers drag themselves out of bed before sunrise every weekday morning. (D) Millions of American teenagers drag themselves out of bed, many school districts start early.

Type 6: Maintain Tone or Style

What it looks like

- "The writer wants to revise sentence 13 to maintain the formal, objective tone of the essay. Which is best?"
- "The writer wants to replace the word 'eyesores' with a more precise and formal term."

Step-by-step method

1. Identify the tone of the draft: formal, objective, measured, urgent, conversational.
2. Look at the target sentence: which words break the tone? (slang, name-calling, exaggeration, contractions in formal prose).
3. Choose the revision that **keeps the meaning** while changing diction to match. Do not choose a version that changes the claim or becomes stiff and ornate.
4. Watch for choices that fix the tone but add or lose meaning.

Distractor patterns to expect: still too casual, over-formal and wordy, fixes tone but changes meaning, adds an unsupported claim.

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer wants to revise sentence 13 ("It is just plain dumb to keep forcing kids to wake up at the crack of dawn.") so that it maintains the formal, measured tone of the rest of the essay. Which is best?

- A. It is totally unreasonable to keep making teenagers get up at dawn.
- B. Continuing to require teenagers to wake before dawn disregards the evidence about adolescent sleep.
- C. Anyone who supports early start times is clearly out of touch.

D. Early start times are the worst idea in the history of education.

Thinking: (A) keeps casual “totally.” (C) is name-calling. (D) is hyperbolic. (B) is formal, keeps the original meaning (the practice is unwise), and ties to the evidence. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

6.1 (Draft 2) The writer wants to revise the phrase “community anchors” in sentence 8 to be more precise for a general readership. Which is best? (A) places where neighbors hang out (B) institutions that many residents rely on and that hold a community together (C) super useful spots (D) things that weigh a town down

6.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to revise sentence 1 so that it uses more precise and neutral language. Which is best? (A) Vacant lots are ugly and gross. (B) Vacant lots are generally regarded as blighted or unused land. (C) Vacant lots are basically the worst. (D) Nobody likes vacant lots.

Type 7: Establish Credibility or Appeal to an Audience

What it looks like

- “The writer wants to address an audience of skeptical school administrators. Which version of sentence 12 best appeals to this audience’s concerns?”
- “The writer wants to add a sentence that establishes the credibility of the evidence in sentence 4.”

Step-by-step method

1. Name the audience and **what they value or fear**. Administrators: budgets, safety, schedules, liability. Taxpayers: cost and benefit. Parents: children’s well-being. Skeptics: evidence and reasonableness.
2. For credibility, look for **named sources, specific data, qualified claims, fair acknowledgment of limits**.
3. The right answer speaks to the audience’s concern in the audience’s terms. It does not insult, overpromise, or ignore the objection.
4. Reject choices that appeal to the wrong audience (emotional appeals to a skeptical, data-minded audience), or that sound manipulative.

Distractor patterns to expect: an appeal aimed at a different audience, emotional pressure where evidence is called for, vague authority (“experts say”), condescension.

Worked example (Draft 2)

The writer wants to revise sentence 9 for an audience of cost-conscious taxpayers. Which is best?

- A. Anyone who wants to cut library budgets doesn’t care about the poor.
- B. Cutting library budgets may appear to save money, but it would shift costs to emergency services, job programs, and schools that serve the people libraries now help.
- C. Libraries are wonderful and everyone should love them.
- D. Money is not the point when it comes to libraries.

Thinking: Taxpayers care about cost. (B) speaks to the cost concern directly and previews sentence 10. (A) insults. (C) is vague. (D) dismisses the audience’s concern. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

7.1 (Draft 1) The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 4 that strengthens the credibility of the claim. Which is best? (A) Everyone knows teenagers are tired in the morning. (B) These findings have been reported by researchers at several universities and are reflected in the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics. (C) I have always had trouble waking up early. (D) Trust me when I say the science is clear.

7.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to revise sentence 9 to appeal to city officials concerned about budgets. Which is best? (A) City governments should be generous to gardeners. (B) Because leasing vacant lots requires little public spending and can reduce maintenance costs, city governments should lease them to community groups at low cost. (C) Gardens make everyone happy, so cities should do it. (D) It would be wrong for cities to keep lots empty.

Type 8: Placement of a Sentence

What it looks like

- “The writer wants to move sentence 11 to a different place in the paragraph to improve the logical sequence. Where is the best place for it?”
- “Where should sentence 6 be placed to best improve the organization of the paragraph?”

Step-by-step method

1. Find the sentence’s **job**: a general claim (topic sentence), specific evidence, commentary, a counterpoint, or a conclusion.
2. A sentence belongs **right after what it explains or supports**, and right before what depends on it. Check pronouns and references: “this study” must come after the sentence that introduces the study.
3. Try each candidate location by reading the sentence **in place**. Does the sentence before set it up? Does the sentence after follow naturally?
4. Reject locations that interrupt a cause-effect chain or separate a claim from its evidence.

Distractor patterns to expect: placing evidence before its claim, separating a pronoun from its antecedent, and putting a conclusion mid-paragraph.

Worked example (Draft 3)

The writer wants to move sentence 8 to improve the logical sequence of the paragraph. After which sentence should it be placed?

- A. After sentence 2
- B. After sentence 4
- C. After sentence 7
- D. Where it is, because it is already in the best location

Thinking: Sentence 8 (“Because gardens depend on shared work, they can strengthen the very trust they need”) answers the problem in 5–6 (volunteers need trust) using the evidence in 7 (gardeners report stronger relationships). It is already positioned after the evidence it interprets. Moving it earlier would separate it from “shared work” and “trust.” **Answer: D.**

Practice items

8.1 (Draft 1) The writer wants to move sentence 12 ("Schools should start later.") to improve the essay. Where should it go? (A) Delete it from the second paragraph and rely on sentence 3. (B) Leave it, because it is a clear restatement of the position at the end of the paragraph that rebuts objections. (C) Place it before sentence 8, since it introduces the counterargument. (D) Place it between sentences 4 and 5.

8.2 (Draft 2) The writer wants to move sentence 7 to improve the logic. After which sentence would it most effectively appear? (A) After sentence 3 (B) After sentence 5 (C) After sentence 6, where it is (D) After sentence 10

Type 9: Conclusion or Introduction Sentence

What it looks like

- "The writer wants a concluding sentence that reinforces the thesis and leaves the audience with a sense of urgency. Which is best?"
- "The writer wants to add an opening sentence that introduces the topic and engages the audience."

Step-by-step method

1. **Introductions** should orient the reader to the topic and hook interest, without making claims the draft does not support and without stating the thesis too baldly (unless asked). They should be specific.
2. **Conclusions** should reinforce the thesis, synthesize the reasons, and add significance (implication, call to action, broader stakes). They should **not** introduce a new topic or merely repeat the thesis word for word.
3. Check for the stem's special requirement: urgency, a call to action, a broader implication, a callback to the opening.
4. Reject generic sentences ("In conclusion, there are many things to think about"), new topics, and tone mismatches.

Distractor patterns to expect: new topic, simple repetition, overreach, a clichéd opener ("Since the dawn of time"), and an opener that states a fact unrelated to the essay's angle.

Worked example (Draft 2)

The writer wants a concluding sentence that reinforces the claim about cost and conveys the stakes for the community. Which is best?

- A. In conclusion, libraries are good.
- B. If a community weighs the real cost of closing its library, it will find that preserving this one institution is among the wisest investments it can make.
- C. Smartphones are changing everything about how we live.
- D. Next, we should look at how other cities fund their parks.

Thinking: (B) echoes sentence 10, adds the stakes, and keeps the register. (A) is generic. (C) and (D) introduce new topics. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

9.1 (Draft 1) The writer wants to add a final sentence that reinforces the position and leaves the board with a sense of responsibility. Which is best? (A) Many people have opinions about school schedules. (B) By moving start times later, the board can protect the health, safety, and learning of the students it serves. (C) Sleep is

something everyone needs. (D) Next year, the school board should also consider changing lunch schedules.

9.2 (Draft 3) The writer wants to add an opening sentence to the essay that engages the reader and introduces the topic. Which is best? (A) Gardens are plants. (B) Walk down almost any city block and you are likely to pass a patch of weeds and broken glass where something far better could grow. (C) Since the beginning of time, people have grown food. (D) This essay is about vacant lots.

Type 10: Counterargument and Concession

What it looks like

- “The writer wants to acknowledge an opposing view before sentence 9. Which sentence would best do this without undermining the position?”
- “Which version of sentence 9 best qualifies the claim while maintaining the writer’s position?”

Step-by-step method

1. A good concession **names the opposing view fairly** (not as a strawman), grants what is reasonable in it, and then pivots to the writer’s position (*although, while, admittedly, it is true that... but*).
2. A good **qualification** narrows the claim with modifiers (*often, in many cases, most, generally*) so it becomes more defensible without giving it up.
3. Reject choices that abandon the position, dismiss the opponent as foolish, or overstate the concession so the draft contradicts itself.
4. Check that the pivot returns to the writer’s thesis.

Distractor patterns to expect: strawman, capitulation (concedes the whole argument), dismissal, a sentence that raises an objection but never answers it.

Worked example (Draft 3)

The writer wants to acknowledge a limitation of community gardens before arguing for leasing. Which sentence, added after sentence 8, is best?

- A. Gardens will solve every problem a city has.
- B. Admittedly, a garden cannot replace a grocery store, but it can supplement the fresh produce available in neighborhoods that have few options.
- C. Opponents of gardens simply do not understand cities.
- D. Gardens are too difficult to maintain, so cities should not support them.

Thinking: (B) concedes a real limit and pivots to what gardens can do. (A) overreaches. (C) dismisses. (D) abandons the position. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

10.1 (Draft 1) The writer wants to revise sentence 9 (“These concerns are real, but they can be managed.”) to more fully acknowledge the opposing view while keeping the position. Which is best? (A) These concerns are meaningless. (B) Although the concerns of coaches and working students deserve serious consideration, they can be addressed through scheduling changes without giving up the benefits of later start times. (C) The concerns are so serious that the board should reconsider. (D) Everyone has concerns about change.

10.2 (Draft 2) The writer wants to qualify the claim in sentence 9 so it is more defensible. Which is best? (A) Cutting library budgets would always ruin communities. (B) Cutting library budgets would likely hurt most the residents who have the fewest alternatives. (C) Cutting library budgets is a terrible idea no matter what. (D) Cutting library budgets will never save money.

Type 11: Adjust for a Specified Audience or Add Commentary

This type covers two stems that appear often and are easy to confuse.

What it looks like

- Audience: "The writer wants to revise sentence 12 for an audience of high-school students who have not studied sleep science."
- Commentary: "Which of the following sentences, if added after sentence 7, would best explain how the evidence supports the claim in sentence 6?"

Step-by-step method

1. For **audience adjustments**, identify what the audience already knows (define technical terms for novices; omit explanations experts do not need) and what they care about.
2. For **commentary**, remember that evidence does not explain itself. A commentary sentence says what the evidence **means for the claim**: "This pattern suggests that..."; "These results show that..."; "In other words,...". It should not merely restate the evidence.
3. Choose commentary that links evidence to the **claim**, using the claim's key terms.
4. Reject choices that repeat the evidence, introduce new evidence when commentary was requested, or move to a different claim.

Distractor patterns to expect: restating the evidence, a new unrelated claim, evidence instead of commentary, jargon for a lay audience.

Worked example (Draft 1)

The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 7 that explains how the evidence supports the claim in sentence 6. Which is best?

- A. A district moved its start time later.
- B. This decline suggests that when teenagers get more sleep, they are better able to drive safely, which links school schedules directly to public safety.
- C. Car crashes are common.
- D. Many parents worry about car crashes.

Thinking: Commentary connects the evidence (crashes dropped) to the claim (sleepy students are less safe) through an inference. (B) does exactly that. (A) restates. (C) and (D) are off-point. **Answer: B.**

Practice items

11.1 (Draft 3) The writer wants to add a sentence after sentence 7 that explains how the evidence supports the claim about trust. Which is best? (A) Residents who garden together report stronger relationships. (B) These findings suggest that working side by side on a shared project builds the trust that neighbors need to organize other efforts. (C) Many cities have community gardens. (D) Relationships matter.

11.2 (Draft 1) The writer wants to revise sentence 4 for an audience of high-school freshmen who may not know the term “internal clock.” Which is best? (A) Researchers have found that puberty induces a phase delay in the circadian rhythm. (B) Researchers who study teenage sleep have found that during puberty, the body’s natural sense of when to feel sleepy shifts later, so most teens cannot fall asleep before about 11:00 p.m. (C) Teens are weird about sleep. (D) Sleep research is complicated.

Pacing and Strategy for the Writing Sets

STEP	TIME	NOTES
Skim the draft once	60–90 seconds	Get thesis, tone, and paragraph structure
Answer each question	45–60 seconds	Stem first, targeted rereading
Flag and move on	after 75 seconds	Return in the review block

Writing questions are usually faster than Reading questions, so bank time here. A good target is to finish each Writing set 1–2 minutes under budget.

Common Traps Across All Writing Types

1. **Choosing the best prose instead of the best answer.** The stem names a goal; accomplish that goal.
2. **Ignoring the sentences around the target.** A sentence that sounds good alone may repeat its neighbor or break a pronoun reference.
3. **Overlooking a small grammatical error** in the “best-sounding” choice (comma splice, dangling modifier, subject-verb disagreement).
4. **Selecting the longest, most sophisticated option.**
5. **Failing to check the reason** in keep/delete questions.

Answer Key

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
1.1	B	Debatable, specific, and previews the services-versus-alternatives reasoning. (A) is a fact; (C) is vague; (D) is trivial.
1.2	C	Names a position and previews three benefit areas that the essay develops (heat, produce, trust). (A), (B), (D) take no clear position.
2.1	B	Specific, rural, and ties free access to the claim. (A), (C), (D) do not support that libraries are essential.

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
2.2	B	Specific study about heat on blocks with gardens. (A), (C), (D) do not support the claim.
3.1	C	Sentence 9 follows from 8 (community anchors, so cutting them hurts). Cause-effect.
3.2	B	Sentences 5–6 introduce challenges to benefits; “However” signals the turn.
4.1	C	It introduces the volunteer challenge developed in 6 through 8.
4.2	C	A bridging general claim; it can stay, ideally with an example. (A) is unsupported. (B) is false; no numbers. (D) is false; sentence 1 pictures shelves of books, not community roles.
5.1	B	Subordinates the objection and states the response; no splice. (A) is a comma splice; (C) misstates logic; (D) is garbled.
5.2	C	Makes cause explicit, keeps scale in the main clause. (A) reverses causation; (B) lacks a comma and is awkward; (D) is a comma splice.
6.1	B	Precise and appropriately neutral. Others are casual or negative.
6.2	B	Neutral, precise. (A), (C), (D) are slangy or absolute.
7.1	B	Names sources and organizations, increasing credibility. (A), (C), (D) rely on assertion or personal opinion.
7.2	B	Appeals to budget concerns. (A), (C), (D) are vague or moralizing.
8.1	B	A restatement placed after rebutting objections works as a wrap-up. (C) would precede the concern it summarizes; (D) is in the wrong paragraph; (A) removes a needed conclusion.

ITEM	ANSWER	EXPLANATION
8.2	C	Sentence 7 answers the objection in 6 and is correctly placed.
9.1	B	Reinforces the position, directs the board to action. (A), (C), (D) are generic or new topics.
9.2	B	Engages with a concrete image and introduces the topic. (A), (C), (D) are vague, clichéd, or an announcement.
10.1	B	Acknowledges coaches and working students fairly and pivots. (A) dismisses; (C) concedes the case; (D) is vague.
10.2	B	"Would likely hurt most" qualifies. (A), (C), (D) use absolutes.
11.1	B	Interprets the finding in terms of trust and organizing. (A) restates; (C), (D) are generic.
11.2	B	Explains "internal clock" in plain terms while retaining the 11:00 p.m. fact. (A) uses jargon; (C), (D) are uninformative.

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