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AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE · FREE RESOURCE

Verbs for Analysis, Signal Phrases, and Fallacies Quick Sheet

A one-stop sheet of 100 precise verbs for describing what a writer does, signal phrases for introducing sources, hedging language for qualifying claims, and a fallacy quick sheet that shows how each fallacy appears in multiple-choice reasoning items. Keep it beside you when you draft body paragraphs and when you practice commentary.

Part 1: 100 Verbs for What a Writer Does

Why precise verbs matter. The Chief Reader Reports describe the same weakness every year: students “identify strategies but fail to explain how choices affect readers.” Generic verbs (*says, shows, talks about, uses*) produce summary. A precise verb is a small act of analysis, because it commits you to a claim about what the writer is *doing*. The 2012 Chief Reader noted that stronger synthesis essays used “varied and descriptive verbs (‘argues,’ ‘offers a historical perspective,’ ‘contradicts’) instead of the generic ‘says’ or ‘states.’”

How to choose. Ask: Is the writer stating a claim, supporting it, softening it, opposing someone, moving the audience, or organizing the text? Then pick from the matching group.

Group A: Stating and Developing a Claim

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM (ORIGINAL)
argues	Builds a reasoned case	“Banneker argues that Jefferson’s own principles condemn slavery.”
asserts	States confidently, often without proof	“She asserts that failure is a form of data.”
contends	Maintains against opposition	“He contends that the penny’s costs outweigh its use.”
maintains	Holds a position steadily	“The author maintains that style serves argument.”
insists	Presses a point	“Lincoln insists the Union is perpetual.”
claims	States as true; neutral	“The speaker claims the law is unenforced.”

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM (ORIGINAL)
posits	Puts forward for consideration	"She posits that attention is a finite resource."
proposes	Offers a plan or idea	"The editorial proposes a three-year pilot."
suggests	Implies gently	"The anecdote suggests a deeper cause."
implies	Indicates without saying	"By omitting the date, he implies urgency."
declares	Announces formally	"She declares an end to the debate."
reasons	Moves step by step	"He reasons from the premise that schools are public goods."
concludes	Draws a final inference	"The writer concludes the policy is unsound."
emphasizes	Gives special weight	"She emphasizes the cost to children."
stresses	Underlines	"The passage stresses the speed of change."
underscores	Highlights	"The statistic underscores the gap."

Group B: Supporting and Illustrating

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
illustrates	Makes concrete with an example	"The story of the broken bridge illustrates neglect."
exemplifies	Is a typical case	"The mill exemplifies the economy of its era."
substantiates	Gives evidence for	"Source C substantiates the claim with survey data."
corroborates	Confirms with other evidence	"Source D corroborates the earlier report."
bolsters	Strengthens	"A second statistic bolsters the point."
grounds	Anchors in fact	"She grounds the appeal in personal history."
cites	Names a source	"He cites the 1900 census."
documents	Records with evidence	"The article documents the decline."
demonstrates	Shows convincingly	"The experiment demonstrates the effect."

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
establishes	Sets up as a foundation	"The opening establishes the speaker's credentials."
verifies	Confirms accuracy	"The footnote verifies the date."
dramatizes	Makes vivid and tense	"The anecdote dramatizes the stakes."
exposes	Reveals what was hidden	"The comparison exposes the hypocrisy."
reveals	Makes known	"The detail reveals her fear."
highlights	Brings into focus	"The chart highlights the outliers."

Group C: Qualifying, Softening, and Complicating

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
qualifies	Limits a claim	"She qualifies her praise with a single caveat."
concedes	Grants a point	"He concedes that costs will rise."
acknowledges	Recognizes an opposing view	"The writer acknowledges the skeptics' fear."
admits	Grants reluctantly	"She admits the plan is imperfect."
tempers	Moderates	"A hedge tempers the confident opening."
complicates	Adds nuance	"The second source complicates the first."
nuances	Adds subtlety	"The final paragraph nuances the thesis."
hedges	Avoids full commitment	"He hedges with 'perhaps.'"
limits	Narrows scope	"The phrase 'in cities' limits the claim."
reframes	Presents in a new light	"The speaker reframes loss as opportunity."
redefines	Changes the meaning	"She redefines 'bravery' as persistence."
distinguishes	Draws a line between	"He distinguishes persuasion from manipulation."
allows	Permits as possible	"The writer allows that exceptions exist."

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
balances	Weighs competing claims	"The editorial balances cost against benefit."

Group D: Opposing and Criticizing

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
refutes	Proves wrong	"Source B refutes the earlier estimate."
rebutts	Argues against	"She rebuts the objection that costs are too high."
challenges	Calls into question	"The passage challenges a common assumption."
disputes	Argues over	"He disputes the figure."
contradicts	Asserts the opposite	"The chart contradicts the claim."
undermines	Weakens the base of	"The anecdote undermines the statistic's authority."
undercuts	Weakens an argument by revealing flaws	"The irony undercuts the official line."
repudiates	Rejects strongly	"He repudiates the label."
denounces	Condemns publicly	"She denounces the policy."
condemns	Declares wrong	"The letter condemns the practice."
criticizes	Points out faults	"The review criticizes the pacing."
lampoons	Ridicules sharply	"The cartoon lampoons the minister."
ridicules	Mocks	"He ridicules the premise."
satirizes	Mocks to reform	"The piece satirizes the marketing of nostalgia."
dismisses	Treats as unworthy	"He dismisses the objection in a sentence."
discredits	Damages credibility	"The source discredits the witness."

Group E: Moving the Audience (Effects)

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
evokes	Calls up feeling or memory	"The image evokes shared grief."
elicits	Draws out a response	"The question elicits reflection."
provokes	Stirs strong reaction	"The comparison provokes unease."

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
invites	Welcomes participation	"The pronoun 'we' invites the audience in."
urges	Pushes toward action	"She urges graduates to act."
exhorts	Strongly urges	"He exhorts the nation to endure."
implores	Begs earnestly	"The speaker implores the legislature."
warns	Cautions	"The closing warns of delay."
cautions	Advises care	"The writer cautions against haste."
reassures	Calms	"The tone reassures the anxious audience."
appeals	Addresses a value or feeling	"The passage appeals to shared fairness."
cultivates	Builds over time	"She cultivates trust with candor."
positions	Places the audience in a role	"The metaphor positions readers as witnesses."
mobilizes	Rouses to action	"The refrain mobilizes the crowd."
galvanizes	Shocks into action	"The statistic galvanizes the room."
disarms	Removes resistance	"Humor disarms the skeptics."
flatters	Praises to win favor	"The opening flatters the judges."
shames	Evokes shame	"Kennedy shames the executives."

Group F: Organizing and Moving Through the Text

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
introduces	Opens a topic	"The first paragraph introduces the problem."
foregrounds	Puts in front	"The opening foregrounds the speaker's loss."
transitions	Moves from one idea to another	"The writer transitions from story to claim."
shifts	Changes direction	"The tone shifts at the colon."
juxtaposes	Places side by side	"She juxtaposes mansions with tenements."
contrasts	Highlights difference	"He contrasts past and present."

VERB	WHAT IT SIGNALS	SENTENCE STEM
parallels	Matches in structure	"The second sentence parallels the first."
echoes	Repeats earlier language	"The ending echoes the opening."
builds	Develops cumulatively	"The list builds momentum."
escalates	Intensifies in steps	"The examples escalate from minor to grave."
culminates	Reaches a peak	"The argument culminates in a call to action."
frames	Surrounds or presents with context	"A story frames the speech."
sequences	Places in order	"The writer sequences evidence from least to most severe."
anticipates	Answers an objection before it is raised	"She anticipates the audience's doubt."
summarizes	Condenses	"The final sentence summarizes the case."
defines	States the meaning	"He defines 'civility' narrowly."

That is 100 verbs across six groups. Verbs worth adding as you grow comfortable: **analogizes, personifies, magnifies, minimizes, trivializes, elevates, lends, tinges, colors, enacts, mirrors, reinforces, amplifies, softens, sharpens, narrows, broadens, links, aligns, distances.**

Verbs to retire (when you mean to analyze)

REPLACE	WITH
says, states, talks about	argues, asserts, observes, suggests
shows	demonstrates, reveals, illustrates (specify what)
uses	deploys, employs, relies on (and name the effect)
makes the audience feel	evokes, provokes, elicits, positions
helps	strengthens, clarifies, advances, grounds
is about	examines, explores, interrogates

The Choice, Effect, Purpose chain

A reliable skeleton for any commentary sentence:

[Writer] + precise verb + [specific choice, quoted] + so that / in order to + [effect on this audience] + which advances [purpose].

Example (original, on a hypothetical commencement speech): “By *juxtaposing* the graduates’ small worries with a single image of a flooded town, the speaker *reframes* ambition as responsibility, *positioning* the audience to hear her closing charge as a duty rather than advice.”

Part 2: Signal Phrases for Sources

Signal phrases introduce a source, show who is speaking, and tell the reader how to read the evidence. In FRQ 1 you should cite sources by letter and author (for example, “Source C, the Pew report,” or “Source E (Wilson)”) and put them in conversation. In FRQ 2 and FRQ 3 the same phrases help you embed text or outside evidence.

Neutral reporting

- According to Source B, ...
- As Source D reports, ...
- Source F explains that ...
- In Source A, the author notes that ...
- The graph in Source C indicates that ...
- Writing in a trade magazine, [author] observes that ...

Showing agreement or support

- Source A is echoed by Source E, which ...
- Source D corroborates this view by ...
- This position is bolstered by Source B’s data showing ...
- Source C extends the argument by adding ...
- Both A and F emphasize ..., though F goes further in claiming ...

Showing tension or disagreement

- While Source A emphasizes , **Source B reveals** . (*Sentence frame from the 2025 Chief Reader Report.*)
- Although Source C may oppose this position, ____.
- Source E offers a slightly different perspective by ____.
- Source B complicates this claim by pointing out ____.
- In contrast to Source A’s optimism, Source D warns that ____.

Qualifying a source’s authority

- Because Source F comes from an industry group, its estimate may favor ____.
- Source C, a peer-reviewed study, carries more weight than Source A, an opinion column, on the question of ____.
- Source D is limited by its small sample, but ____.
- The cartoon in Source B reduces a complex issue to a single image, which is effective for ____ but not for ____.

Introducing a quotation

FRAME	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)
"As [name] puts it, '...'"	As the author puts it, the city "has no appetite for change."
"In the words of [name], '...'"	In the words of the report, the program is "chronically underfunded."
"[Name] writes, '...'"	The columnist writes that vendors "cannot afford the permits."
"[Name] warns that '...'"	The study warns that "demand is outrunning supply."
Embedded fragment	She calls the policy "a quiet failure" that costs students time.

Putting sources in conversation

MOVE	FRAME
Group by stance	"Sources A and E both treat X as a safety question; Source D treats it as an economic one."
Use one source to qualify another	"Source B's figures qualify Source A's enthusiasm: the benefit exists, but only where ____."
Use a source to extend your reasoning	"Source C supplies the mechanism: ____."
Note a gap	"None of the sources considers , which matters because ."

Avoid: "Source A says ... Source B says ... Source C says ..." (additive handling), "as seen in Sources B, C, and E" (vague bundling), and "Source D proves ..." (overstates).

Part 3: Hedging and Qualifying Language

CED skills 3.C and 4.C: claims are made more defensible, and more sophisticated, by modifiers, counterarguments, and alternative perspectives. Learn to move along a scale from absolute to qualified.

The certainty scale

ABSOLUTE	STRONG	MODERATE	CAUTIOUS
always, never, all, none	usually, generally, most, tends to	often, many, frequently, commonly	sometimes, some, may, might, can
proves	demonstrates	indicates, suggests	hints at, raises the possibility
must	should	is likely to	could
is	is largely	appears to be	seems to be

Qualifiers that limit scope

- **By group:** for most adults, among urban students, in many districts
- **By condition:** when funding is stable, provided that schools adjust, unless costs rise
- **By degree:** to a large extent, in part, largely, partly, mostly
- **By time:** in the short term, historically, increasingly, at present
- **By evidence:** according to current research, in the available data, based on this source

Hedges for FRQ 3 ("extent to which")

- "Osaka's claim is valid for decisions that unfold in real time but less so for decisions that require planning."
- "To a significant extent, ; **however**, complicates this."
- "The claim holds as a corrective to , **but fails as a universal rule because** ."
- "It is valid under the condition that ____."

Over-hedging (do not do this)

If every sentence says "may" or "perhaps," the thesis stops being defensible. The rubric asks for a position.

Hedge the scope, not the stance.

WEAK (OVER-HEDGED)	STRONG (QUALIFIED)
"Napping might possibly be somewhat helpful in some cases."	"For most adults, a short nap improves alertness enough to justify workplace policies that permit it."
"It could be argued that perhaps preservation laws are sometimes useful."	"Preservation laws are valuable chiefly as a check on speculative demolition, though they impose real costs on owners."

Concession and rebuttal frames

- "Admittedly, ; **nevertheless**, ."
- "Although , ."
- "It is true that , **but this overlooks** ."
- "Critics are right to point out ; **still**, ."
- "Even if ____ is granted, ____ follows."

Part 4: Fallacy Quick Sheet

Fallacies show up in MCQ items as the *flaw* in a writer's reasoning or as the reason a proposed revision is worse than the original. In FRQ 3 they show up in your reasoning (avoid them) and occasionally in the view you are rebutting (name them gracefully, without sneering).

How each fallacy appears in an MCQ: **Stem** (the question pattern), **Distractor tell** (the wording that signals the trap).

FALLACY	PLAIN DEFINITION	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)	HOW IT APPEARS IN MCQ REASONING ITEMS
Ad hominem	Attacks the person, not the point	"Her budget can't be sound; she has never run a business."	Stem: "The writer's response in paragraph 4 is weakened because it ____." Answer: "attacks the character of opponents rather than their argument."
Straw man	Distorts an opposing view	"Reformers want to abolish all tests."	Writing stem: "The writer wants to address a counterargument fairly." Wrong choices exaggerate the opposition.
False dilemma	Only two options offered	"Either we raise taxes or schools close."	Stem: "Which of the following is a flaw in sentence 8?" Answer: "presents only two alternatives." Tell: <i>either, only, must</i> .
Slippery slope	Unproven chain of disasters	"Allow one exception and the law will collapse."	Stem asks what the writer assumes. Answer: "that a small step will inevitably lead to extreme results."
Hasty generalization	Broad claim from few cases	"Two students loved it; the program is a success."	Revision item: "Which sentence best supports the claim?" Wrong choices cite a single anecdote.
Post hoc	A then B means A caused B	"Crime fell after the park opened, so the park cut crime."	Stem: "The writer's reasoning is flawed because it ____." Answer: "assumes a sequence implies cause."
Begging the question	Conclusion restated as premise	"It is wrong because it isn't right."	Writing stem: "Which sentence adds evidence?" Wrong choice merely restates the claim.
False authority	Authority outside expertise	"A famous chef says the vaccine is unsafe."	Source-credibility items: "Which source would be least reliable on ____?"
Bandwagon	Popularity as proof	"Everyone uses it, so it must be good."	Distractor tell: <i>widely accepted, most people agree</i> .

FALLACY	PLAIN DEFINITION	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)	HOW IT APPEARS IN MCQ REASONING ITEMS
Red herring	Irrelevant diversion	"Why fix the library roof when the stadium needs seats?"	Delete/keep item: "Sentence 11 should be deleted because it ___ the paragraph's focus."
Non sequitur	Conclusion does not follow	"She is kind, so she will win."	Stem: "Which of the following best describes the flaw?" Answer: "the evidence does not support the conclusion."
Equivocation	Meaning of a key term shifts	"Free" as <i>costless</i> then <i>unrestricted</i>	Stem: "The term '___' is used in two senses." Chief Reader: define terms; conflating adjacent concepts hurts.
Appeal to fear	Fear replaces evidence	"Without this app, you'll be lost."	Tone-adjacent: "alarmist."
Appeal to pity	Sympathy replaces relevance	"Give the contract to us; we have eleven employees."	Distractor tell: the appeal is emotional, not relevant.
Tu quoque	"You do it too"	"You criticize my spending but you buy coffee daily."	Dialogue passages; answer: "deflects criticism by pointing to the critic's behavior."
False analogy	Unlike things treated as alike	"A school is a factory; measure the output."	Stem: "The analogy in lines 34–37 is weakened because ___." Answer: "the two things differ in a relevant way."
Loaded language	Charged words bypass reasoning	"Bureaucrats are strangling business."	Writing stem: "maintain an objective tone." Wrong choices add charged words.
Appeal to tradition	"We've always done it"	"Cursive has always been taught."	Synthesis sources defending old practices.
Appeal to novelty	"Newer is better"	"It's the latest model, so it is superior."	Mirror of tradition.
Genetic fallacy	Judging by origin	"A tabloid published it, so it's false."	Source-evaluation items.
Composition / division	Part to whole or whole to part	"Each musician is excellent, so the orchestra is."	Rare reasoning item.

FALLACY	PLAIN DEFINITION	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)	HOW IT APPEARS IN MCQ REASONING ITEMS
No true Scotsman	Redefining to exclude counterexamples	"No real athlete skips practice."	Related to equivocation.

Three habits for reasoning questions

1. **Locate the claim and the evidence.** Fallacies live in the gap between them.
2. **Test with a counter-case.** Could the evidence be true while the conclusion is false?
3. **Prefer the answer that names the gap, not the label.** MCQ keys usually describe what is wrong ("assumes that ...") instead of using the Latin term.

Fallacies in FRQ 3: how to use them without sounding like a debate coach

Do not write "That is a slippery slope." Write: "The claim that one exemption will unravel the law depends on a chain of events no one has shown." Describe the flaw in plain language, then present your counter-evidence.

Part 5: One-Page Cheat Cards

Card 1: Commentary starters

- This choice matters because ...
- By ___, the writer positions the audience to ...
- The effect is to ...
- Here the writer assumes the audience values ___, so ...
- This moment sets up the later ...
- The cumulative effect of ___ and ___ is ...

Card 2: Eight questions that unlock any paragraph

1. Who is speaking and to whom?
2. What does the writer want the audience to think, feel, or do?
3. What concrete choice (word, image, structure) is on the page?
4. What does that choice make the audience see?
5. Why here, in this spot in the argument?
6. How does it connect to the previous paragraph?
7. How does it advance the thesis?
8. What would be lost if it were cut?

Card 3: Source-conversation checklist (FRQ 1)

- ☐ At least three sources cited, specifically.
- ☐ At least one body paragraph combines two sources.
- ☐ At least one source used to qualify another.

- ☐ The visual or quantitative source translated into plain language.
- ☐ Every cited source tied to the thesis, not just to the paragraph.

Practice: Choose the Better Verb

Replace the weak verb with a more precise one from the lists above, and justify your choice in half a sentence. Answers are in the Answer Key.

1. The speaker *talks about* the cost of delay, then *shows* how it affects families.
2. The writer *uses* a story to *help* the audience care.
3. In the final paragraph, the author *says* that exceptions exist.
4. The cartoon *makes fun of* the official's promise.
5. Source D *agrees with* Source A.
6. The second statistic *makes the first stronger*.
7. The poet *goes from* anger to calm.
8. The quotation *gets the audience to* trust the speaker.

Fallacy match

Match each sentence to the fallacy: (a) false dilemma, (b) hasty generalization, (c) post hoc, (d) ad hominem, (e) slippery slope.

9. "I saw two people cheat on that exam, so cheating is rampant at our school."
10. "Don't listen to his proposal; he failed math in high school."
11. "Either we ban all cars from downtown or we give up on clean air."
12. "Test scores rose after the new principal arrived, so she is responsible."
13. "If we allow phones at lunch, they'll be in class by spring, and soon no one will learn anything."

Answer Key

1. **Argues / warns** for "talks about"; **demonstrates / dramatizes** for "shows." Example: "The speaker *warns of* the cost of delay, then *dramatizes* its effect on families."
2. **Deploys / relies on** for "uses"; **positions the audience to care / elicits concern** for "help." Reason: both verbs name an effect.
3. **Concedes / allows / qualifies** for "says"; the choice depends on whether the sentence grants a point (concedes) or limits a claim (qualifies).
4. **Lampoons / ridicules / undercuts**. "Undercuts" best if the cartoon exposes a gap between promise and reality.
5. **Corroborates / echoes / aligns with**. "Corroborates" is strongest if D supplies evidence for A's claim.
6. **Bolsters / reinforces / corroborates**. Each names the support relationship.
7. **Shifts from ... to ...** or **moves from ... to ...**; **tempers** if anger softens gradually.

8. **Establishes credibility / cultivates trust.** "Establishes" works if the quotation supplies an authority; "cultivates" if trust is built across the passage.
9. **(b)** hasty generalization.
10. **(d)** ad hominem.
11. **(a)** false dilemma.
12. **(c)** post hoc.
13. **(e)** slippery slope.

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