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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Literary Argumentation (LAN) — Skills 7.A–7.E

A complete study guide to the Literary Argumentation big idea in AP English Literature and Composition: claims, theses, commentary, evidence, and control of writing. This is the skill set that turns your reading into points on the free-response section and into correct answers on the "student claim" multiple-choice items. Work through the concepts, follow the full essay-building walkthrough, then complete the practice set. Keys are at the end.

Why Literary Argumentation Matters on This Exam

Skill Category 7 accounts for 10–13% of the multiple-choice questions, about 6–7 of the 55, and these items look different from the rest: they present a student's claim, thesis, or paragraph about a passage and ask which evidence best supports it, which sentence is the strongest thesis, or which commentary best links evidence to claim. On the free-response side, the entire six-point analytic rubric is a rubric for Skill Category 7:

ROW	POINTS	WHAT IT MEASURES	SKILL
A: Thesis	0–1	A defensible interpretation responding to the prompt	7.B
B: Evidence and Commentary	0–4	Specific evidence plus commentary that builds a line of reasoning	7.A, 7.C, 7.D
C: Sophistication	0–1	Complex thought or argument	7.B, 7.C (and the whole essay)

Row B is worth four of the six points. Nationally, Row A means hover around 0.9 (almost everyone earns the thesis point), while Row C means hover around 0.04 to 0.07 (fewer than one essay in fourteen). Row B is where scores are made and lost: the 2025 Chief Reader Report gives Row B means of about 2.49 for the poetry essay and 2.29 for the prose essay.

The Enduring Understanding

LAN-1 (official, paraphrased): Readers establish and communicate their interpretations of literature through arguments supported by textual evidence.

In plain English: Reading literature well means making a claim about what a text means and *proving it from the text*. An interpretation is not an opinion and not a summary: it is a defensible statement about how the text works, supported by specific words and explained so a skeptical reader can follow the reasoning. If you cannot point to the words that make you say it, you have not yet earned the claim.

The Five Skills, Translated

SKILL	OFFICIAL WORDING (PARAPHRASED)	PLAIN ENGLISH	UNITS EMPHASIZED
7.A	Develop a paragraph that includes (1) a claim that requires defense with evidence from the text and (2) the evidence itself.	Write a paragraph that makes a claim someone could argue with, and back it with quoted or specific text.	1, 2, 3
7.B	Develop a thesis statement that conveys a defensible claim about an interpretation of literature and that may establish a line of reasoning.	Write a one-to-two-sentence answer to the prompt that makes an arguable claim about meaning and can preview your steps.	4–9
7.C	Develop commentary that establishes and explains relationships among textual evidence, the line of reasoning, and the thesis.	Explain how each piece of evidence proves your point and how your points connect.	3–9
7.D	Select and use relevant and sufficient evidence to both develop and support a line of reasoning.	Choose the right quotations and details, enough of them, and use them to move the argument forward.	3–9
7.E	Demonstrate control over the elements of composition to communicate clearly.	Write clean, organized, grammatical prose.	3, 6, 8

Notice the sequence. A **claim** is a single arguable statement; a **thesis** is the controlling claim of the whole essay; a **line of reasoning** is the chain of claims that builds from the first body paragraph to the last; **commentary** is the explanation that connects everything.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Claim, Evidence, Commentary

TERM	DEFINITION	TEST
Claim	A statement about the meaning or effect of the text that someone could reasonably dispute.	If no one could disagree, it is a fact, not a claim.
Evidence	Specific details from the text: words, phrases, images, structural features, events.	Could another reader find it on the page?
Commentary	Your explanation of how the evidence supports the claim.	Does it say <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> , not just <i>what</i> ?

Teachers use many acronyms for this (CEC, CER, TS-CD-CM), and the “Schaffer” ratio is useful: for each piece of concrete detail, write at least two sentences of commentary. Evidence is the smaller part of a strong paragraph; commentary is the larger part.

Defensible versus Obvious versus Indefensible

TYPE	EXAMPLE (ABOUT “FIRE AND ICE”)	VERDICT
Fact	“The poem is about fire and ice.”	Not a claim
Obvious	“The speaker uses a metaphor.”	Not interpretive
Defensible	“The speaker’s casual diction makes apocalypse sound like a debating point, revealing a mind that has already lived through the extremes it weighs.”	Arguable and supported
Indefensible	“The poem is about the speaker’s love for his mother.”	No textual support

A defensible claim is one the text could reasonably support, even if you could imagine another reading. The rubric asks for “defensible,” not “the only correct one.”

Thesis

A strong literary thesis:

1. **Answers the prompt** (it uses the prompt’s key term and makes a claim about it).
2. **Takes a position** about meaning (not a topic, not a list of devices).
3. **Contains tension or complexity** (“although,” “yet,” “not simply... but”).
4. **May preview the line of reasoning** (the steps of the argument).
5. **Is specific to this text** (it would not fit any other poem or passage).

Weak thesis types the rubric names: a restatement of the prompt, a device list, a plot summary, and a claim so general it fits any text.

WEAK THESIS	WHY WEAK	STRONGER THESIS
"The speaker has a complex response to the seasons."	Restates the prompt	"The speaker's praise of autumn is shadowed by dread, since every image of abundance in the first stanza is already an image of ending."
"The author uses imagery and diction to convey the character's emotions."	Device list; fits any text	"Through the cold domestic details of the kitchen, the author shows a character whose grief has narrowed her life to what she can control."
"In this passage, a man looks at a painting and thinks about his wife."	Plot summary	"The duke's possessive grammar convicts him: in praising the portrait, he reveals that he has replaced his wife with the object he controls."

Line of Reasoning

A **line of reasoning** is the logical path of the argument: the sequence of claims that carry the reader from the thesis's first step to its last. The test: could you remove or reorder a body paragraph without anyone noticing? If yes, you have a list, not a line of reasoning. In a line of reasoning, each topic sentence adds something new, often reusing a key term from the thesis and extending it ("the speaker's despair" → "the speaker's reluctant recovery" → "the speaker's provisional peace").

Evidence: Relevant and Sufficient

- **Relevant:** connected to the claim, not just to the text.
- **Sufficient:** enough, and from enough of the text, to support the claim. Evidence drawn from only one part of the passage rarely supports a claim about the whole.
- **Specific:** the exact word, image, or detail. Compare "the speaker uses nature imagery" (general) with "the 'coppice gate' and 'spectre-gray' frost" (specific).
- **Indirect evidence** counts too: titles, punctuation, line breaks, secondary characters, repetition, the final line.

Commentary Moves

Strong commentary does at least one of these in each body paragraph:

1. **Decode the word:** the connotation of a specific word or phrase.
2. **Explain the technique's effect:** how a device shapes the reader's response.
3. **Link evidence to the claim:** "This matters because..."
4. **Link to other evidence:** "Compare the earlier image of..."
5. **Complicate:** "Yet the same detail also suggests..."
6. **Return to the thesis:** show how the paragraph advances the larger interpretation.

Sophistication (Row C), Briefly

The rubric names four pathways: (1) exploring complexities or tensions in the text; (2) placing the interpretation in a broader context; (3) accounting for alternative interpretations; (4) a consistently vivid and persuasive style. The rubric also names what does *not* earn it: sweeping generalizations offered as context, merely hinting at alternative readings, a single clever sentence not sustained, oversimplifying, and ornate language that does not advance the argument. Experienced teachers describe sophistication as a byproduct of a complex thesis and close word-level analysis, not a separate move. The wisest strategy is to build Row B first; many students aim for the sophistication point while leaving Row B at 2 or 3.

Embedding Quotations

- **Quote fragments**, not full lines, whenever possible (two to seven words).
- **Integrate** the quotation into your own sentence.
- **Cite line numbers** for poetry in parentheses; separate lines with a slash (/).
- **Never start or end a paragraph** with a quotation.
- **Follow every quotation** with commentary.

WEAK	STRONG
The speaker says “the world is too much with us.” This shows that the world is bad.	The speaker’s opening claim that “the world is too much with us” (line 1) casts modern life as an excess the soul cannot digest.

Control of Composition (Skill 7.E)

The rubric states that writing with errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth Row B point. Control means:

1. **Complete sentences** (no fragments or run-ons unless deliberate).
2. **Consistent tense**: write about literature in the present tense (“Wordsworth writes,” “the speaker laments”).
3. **Clear pronoun reference**.
4. **Precise word choice** (avoid “thing,” “very,” “society,” “relatable”).
5. **Varied sentences** and purposeful transitions.
6. **Punctuation of quotations** and titles (poem titles in quotation marks; novels in italics or underlined).

Full Essay-Building Walkthrough: From First Read to Finished Product

This walkthrough builds a complete response to a Q1-style prompt, so you can see how Skills 7.A through 7.E work together.

The Text

William Wordsworth, “The World Is Too Much with Us” (published 1807, public domain):

The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; The winds that will be howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; For this, for everything, we are out of tune; It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn; Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

The Prompt (written for this guide in the stable AP wording)

In the following poem by William Wordsworth, published in 1807, the speaker reflects on the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Wordsworth uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex attitude toward modern life and nature.

Step 1 — Read for the literal story (first read)

Who speaks? A speaker addressing “us,” a collective. Where? Standing on a “pleasant lea” (meadow) near the sea. What happens? The speaker accuses modern people of wasting their energy on work and money and losing the ability to feel nature; then, in the second part, wishes he were a pagan so that nature would feel alive.

Step 2 — Find the shift (second read)

The shift is at line 9: “It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be.” Signals: a short, blunt sentence, an exclamation, a change from accusing “us” to wishing “I,” and a change from general abstractions (getting and spending, powers) to mythic images (Proteus, Triton). Label it: *The poem moves from diagnosis to desire.*

Step 3 — Gather evidence tied to the prompt's key terms (third read)

The prompt's key words are **complex attitude**, **modern life**, **nature**. Notice, focus, interpret (the Chief Reader's three-step):

NOTICE	INTERPRETATION
“Getting and spending”	Participles with no subject: an endless, mechanical activity; commerce as a verb with no end
“we lay waste our powers”	The speaker uses a verb for war or devastation (“lay waste”) for ordinary economic life
“a sordid boon”	An oxymoron: a gift that is a degradation; the heart given away is a bargain that corrupts
“Sea that bares her bosom” / “winds... like sleeping flowers”	Nature personified as intimate, sensual, and gentle, a lover who is ignored
“It moves us not”	A flat, short sentence after long, rhythmic ones; the failure of response, rendered in plain syntax
“Great God! I'd rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn”	A startling wish that nearly contradicts the speaker's own Christian framing (“Great God!”)

NOTICE	INTERPRETATION
"Proteus rising from the sea; / ... Triton blow his wreathèd horn"	Specific classical sea-gods: the pagan alternative is vivid where modern perception is "Little"

Step 4 — Test the complexity ("Where does the text complicate my claim?")

The first reading is: *the speaker condemns modern materialism and longs for a nature-worshipping past*. But two details complicate it. First, "Great God!" invokes the Christian God even as the speaker wishes to be a pagan, so the wish is made from within the very creed he calls "outworn." Second, the speaker does not say he *would* believe in Proteus; he says "might I... have glimpses that would make me less forlorn," which is a modest hope for *less* sorrow, not for joy. The attitude is therefore complex: criticism and longing coexist with a recognition that the longing is impossible, since the speaker cannot choose to believe.

Step 5 — Draft the thesis (Skill 7.B)

Weak version: "Wordsworth uses imagery, personification, and allusion to show that people are disconnected from nature." (Device list; claims nothing about complexity.)

Strong version:

Although Wordsworth's speaker begins by condemning a modern world that has traded its capacity for wonder for "getting and spending," the poem's turn reveals that his protest is also a confession: he cannot return to the pagan vision he envies, and so his longing for "glimpses" of Proteus and Triton measures not what the world has lost but how little he can hope to recover.

Check against the five tests: answers the prompt (attitude toward modern life and nature); takes a position; has tension ("although"); previews a line of reasoning (condemnation, then turn, then confession of limitation); specific to this poem.

Step 6 — Outline the line of reasoning

PARAGRAPH	CLAIM (TOPIC SENTENCE)	KEY EVIDENCE
1	The opening quatrains diagnose a waste of power through diction that turns economy into devastation.	"getting and spending," "lay waste," "sordid boon"
2	Nature is portrayed as a lover whose intimacy goes unreturned, which makes the failure an emotional one.	"bares her bosom," "sleeping flowers," "It moves us not"
3	The turn to paganism is a desperate wish, not a program, and its modest phrasing exposes the speaker's own estrangement.	"Great God!," "I'd rather be," "might I," "less forlorn," "glimpses"

Each topic sentence extends the thesis's key terms (waste → estrangement → limitation).

Step 7 — Write a body paragraph (Skills 7.A, 7.C, 7.D, 7.E)

Wordsworth builds the diagnosis in the language of devastation. The phrase “we lay waste our powers” (line 2) borrows a verb that belongs to armies and plagues, so the ordinary labor of “getting and spending” appears as an invasion we conduct against ourselves. The two participles that open the line have no subject and no object, only an unending present tense, and the syntax enacts the repetitiveness it describes. When the speaker concludes the sentence with “a sordid boon!” (line 4), he joins two words that cannot sit together, since a boon is a gift and “sordid” is a stain; the oxymoron suggests that the bargain was never refused because it looked like a reward. The speaker’s accusation is therefore complicated by pity: this is not villainy but an unchosen habit, the kind of thing a collective does without noticing. That pity is what makes the later turn a plea rather than a sermon.

Annotated: Claim (topic sentence); evidence (three quoted fragments); commentary (verb connotation, syntax, oxymoron); complication (pity); link to the next paragraph (plea rather than sermon). Commentary is roughly twice as long as evidence. No quotation begins or ends the paragraph. Present tense throughout.

Step 8 — Score yourself against the rubric

ROW	WHERE EARNED
A (Thesis)	The thesis makes a defensible claim about attitude and complexity.
B (Evidence and Commentary)	Specific words from across the poem, commentary explaining effect (verb connotation, syntax, oxymoron), more than one technique, a line of reasoning. This is the path to 3 to 4.
C (Sophistication)	Possible through sustained attention to tension (protest as confession), but only if all paragraphs maintain it.

Step 9 — The conclusion (optional, short)

Wordsworth never lets the speaker settle into either rage or nostalgia. He leaves us with a man standing in a meadow, naming sea-gods he cannot believe in and asking only for a little less sorrow, which is perhaps the poem’s most honest admission about how a modern person receives the natural world: partially, belatedly, and with the awareness of his own exile.

Conclusions do not need to be long. Teachers advise avoiding “In conclusion” and extending to the larger meaning instead.

How Literary Argumentation Shows Up on the Multiple-Choice Section

Skill Category 7 stems look like this:

- “Which of the following claims about the passage is most defensible?”

- “A student is writing an essay arguing that X. Which of the following lines would best support this claim?”
- “Which of the following thesis statements best responds to a prompt asking about X?”
- “A student has written the following claim: [claim]. Which of the following pieces of evidence best supports it?”
- “Which of the following sentences best explains how the evidence [quoted] supports the claim?”
- “Which revision of the thesis best establishes a line of reasoning?”

Common wrong-answer patterns here are specific: **evidence that is true but off-topic, evidence from the right part of the text but supporting a different claim, commentary that merely paraphrases the evidence, a thesis that restates the prompt, and a claim that over-generalizes beyond the passage.**

Sample Questions (based on the Wordsworth poem)

1. A student claims that Wordsworth's speaker feels more regret than anger about modern life. Which evidence from the poem best supports this claim?

- A. “Little we see in Nature that is ours” (line 3)
- B. “we lay waste our powers” (line 2)
- C. “Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn” (line 12)
- D. “Great God! I'd rather be” (line 9)

Key: C. “Less forlorn” expresses a modest wish to ease sorrow, not an attack. (A) and (B) are accusations. (D) is an exclamation of impatience, which could support either reading and is less specific to regret than (C).

2. Which of the following is the most defensible thesis in response to a prompt asking how Wordsworth conveys the speaker's attitude toward nature?

- A. Wordsworth uses personification, allusion, and oxymoron to convey his attitude toward nature.
- B. The speaker is angry that people spend their lives working instead of enjoying the sea.
- C. Although the speaker condemns modern indifference to nature, his wish for pagan vision admits that he cannot recover a world in which the sea was alive.
- D. Nature is beautiful and humans should appreciate it more.

Key: C. It makes an arguable, specific claim with tension. (A) is a device list. (B) is a partial paraphrase. (D) is a generalization that fits any nature poem.

3. A student writes: “Wordsworth calls the exchange of the heart ‘a sordid boon.’ This shows that the speaker dislikes it.” Which revision best improves the commentary?

- A. The phrase “sordid boon” is a good example of Wordsworth's word choice, which is powerful.
- B. By combining “sordid,” a word of stain, with “boon,” a word of gift, Wordsworth suggests that the exchange is disguised as a reward, which explains why people accept it without noticing the loss.
- C. The speaker clearly dislikes the exchange because he says it is sordid.
- D. “Sordid boon” is an oxymoron, a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms.

Key: B. It decodes the words and explains the effect in terms of the argument. (A) is vague. (C) repeats the evidence. (D) names the device without explaining function.

4. Which statement best describes the relationship between this claim and its evidence? *Claim: The speaker's wish to be a pagan is partly self-aware. Evidence: "Great God! I'd rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn."*

- A. The evidence supports the claim because the speaker invokes the Christian God even while wishing to be a pagan.
- B. The evidence does not support the claim because the speaker clearly wants to abandon Christianity.
- C. The evidence is irrelevant because the line concerns religion, not self-awareness.
- D. The evidence supports the claim because pagan beliefs are older than Christianity.

Key: A. The mismatch between "Great God!" and the wish is the sign of self-awareness. (B) takes the wish too literally. (C) misses the connection. (D) is a true but irrelevant historical statement.

How Literary Argumentation Shows Up on the Free-Response Section

Every FRQ is graded on the same architecture: Thesis (0–1), Evidence and Commentary (0–4), Sophistication (0–1). The full rubric text and decision rules are in the official PDF linked at the top of this guide.

What a 4 in Row B does that a 2 does not (from the Chief Reader Reports)

FEATURE	2-POINT RESPONSE	4-POINT RESPONSE
Evidence	A few specifics and broad generalities, often from one part of the text	Specific words and phrases from across the whole text, including indirect evidence
Commentary	Names the device, paraphrases the quote, or says it "shows" the thesis	Explains how the language produces the effect and why it matters to the claim
Line of reasoning	Separate observations	Topic sentences that build, each advancing or complicating the last
Techniques	Identifies elements without function	Shows multiple elements working together toward the interpretation
Prose	Errors; device-by-device organization	Clear control; organization by idea

Question 3 differences

For the Literary Argument question, Row B's third point has no requirement to explain literary techniques, and the fourth point requires that the commentary consistently explain how the evidence supports the line of reasoning and that the response address the interpretation of the work as a whole. The most frequent weaknesses reported in the 2024 and 2025 Chief Reader Reports were evidence that was "too general," drift into plot summary, losing focus on the prompt's key term, and misreading the prompt (writing about decisions instead of indecision). Define the key term for your chosen work in your thesis, and keep returning to it.

A model Q3 thesis (2025 prompt on a character significantly affected by a memory; text: *Wuthering Heights*):

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë treats Heathcliff's memory of Catherine not as nostalgia but as a haunting that rewrites the present: every act of cruelty he commits is an attempt to make the world match a past it cannot restore, so that the novel presents memory as an engine of revenge rather than a source of consolation.

A model Q3 body paragraph:

Brontë makes memory the force that structures Heathcliff's revenge. When he returns to the Heights wealthy and transformed, he does not seek a new life but a restaging of the old one: he buys Hindley's debts, takes possession of the house in which he was humiliated, and reduces Hindley's son Hareton to the condition of servitude he himself once suffered. Each act is a deliberate echo of the past, and the narrator Nelly Dean, who watches him throughout, reports the pattern without ever being able to interrupt it. The significance of these echoes is that Heathcliff does not remember Catherine as a person who is gone; he remembers her as a presence the world still owes him. His revenge is therefore not triumph but a refusal to accept the pastness of the past, and that refusal explains why his final days are spent staring at an empty space, as if memory had finally replaced the world.

(Note on the model: Q3 paragraphs may paraphrase scenes with concrete specifics; they do not require direct quotation. The paragraph stays on the key term "memory" and links evidence to the thesis.)

Practice Exercises

Answers are in the Answer Key.

Exercise 1 (Skill 7.A). Write a claim about the closing line of Wordsworth's sonnet ("Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn") that is defensible and specific. Then identify two pieces of evidence that support it.

Exercise 2 (Skill 7.B). Evaluate these three theses as weak, adequate, or strong. For each weak one, state the problem (restatement, device list, summary, or overgeneralization).

- "In 'Because I could not stop for Death,' Dickinson uses personification to convey death."
- "Dickinson's speaker accepts death with a composure so complete that it becomes unsettling; the courtesy of the poem's diction conceals how little choice she has."
- "The poem is about a woman who goes for a ride in a carriage."

Exercise 3 (Skill 7.B). Write a thesis in response to this prompt, using "although" or "not simply... but": *analyze how Hardy uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex response to the winter landscape in the first stanza of "The Darkling Thrush."* (Stanza: "I leant upon a coppice gate / When Frost was spectre-gray, / And Winter's dregs made desolate / The weakening eye of day.")

Exercise 4 (Skill 7.C). Here is a student's paragraph. Rewrite the commentary so it explains *how* and *why*. "Browning's duke says 'that piece a wonder.' This shows that the duke thinks the painting is wonderful and is proud of it. He also says 'there she stands,' which shows she is still there."

Exercise 5 (Skill 7.D). A student wants to argue that Blake's "The Sick Rose" presents love as destructive. Select four pieces of evidence from the poem, ranked from strongest to weakest, and justify the order in one sentence each.

Exercise 6 (Skill 7.D). Identify the problem in this evidence use: “The speaker feels sad. For example, in line 1 he says ‘The world is too much with us.’ In line 3 he says ‘Little we see in Nature that is ours.’ In line 4 he says ‘a sordid boon.’” Rewrite it in two integrated sentences.

Exercise 7 (Skill 7.E). Correct the errors (tense, quotation punctuation, vague words, fragment) in this passage. “Wordsworth writes that the world is ‘too much with us’ he uses alot of words that are about money. Which makes it seem like society is bad. The speaker felt forlorn.”

Exercise 8 (Skills 7.A to 7.E combined). Using any short public-domain poem, write a complete response of 350–450 words: a two-sentence introduction with thesis, two body paragraphs (claim, evidence, commentary), and a one-sentence conclusion. Score it with the table in the Answer Key.

Common Misconceptions

“A thesis should list the devices I will discuss.” The rubric explicitly says a thesis that only names devices does not earn the point. Name the interpretation, not the toolkit.

“A thesis must be bold and unusual.” It must be defensible. A clear, accurate claim with complexity earns the point; an outlandish claim with no support does not.

“More quotes means better analysis.” Quote dumping (long quotations with no commentary) is a documented pitfall. Short fragments with developed commentary outperform long block quotes.

“If I name the technique, I have done the commentary.” Naming is at most 1 point’s worth. Row B requires explaining how the technique contributes to meaning.

“Plot summary shows I understood the text.” Summary of any kind caps Row B at 1. The reader of your essay has read the passage; they want your interpretation.

“The sophistication point is a separate paragraph.” It is a quality of the whole argument. A single “deep” sentence in the conclusion does not earn it.

“The conclusion needs to restate everything.” One or two sentences that extend the argument beyond the text are enough. Spend time on the fourth body paragraph (if you have time) before you polish the conclusion.

“I should fix my essay so it looks polished.” Readers expect timed drafts. Cross-outs and a rough ending are fine. Errors that block meaning are what cost the fourth point.

“For Q3, any book I half remember is fine.” Pick a work you know in detail, with at least three concrete scenes, and define the prompt’s key term in your thesis.

Quick Reference: Sentence Frames for Commentary

- “The word “ **carries a connotation of** , which suggests that...”
- “By placing ___ beside ___, the author makes visible...”
- “The shift from ___ to ___ enacts...”
- “This detail complicates the earlier ___ by showing...”
- “Rather than , **the speaker** , which reveals...”
- “The absence of ___ here mirrors...”
- “This matters because it shows that...”

Quick Reference: Analytical Verbs

complicates, undercuts, dramatizes, exposes, reframes, withholds, enacts, mirrors, resists, concedes, qualifies, culminates, intensifies, interrogates, juxtaposes

Answer Key

Exercise 1 (model). Claim: The closing line returns the poem to concrete sound after thirteen lines of abstraction, suggesting that the speaker can imagine recovering wonder only through the senses, and only in a mythic past. Evidence: (1) “hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn” (an auditory image, specific and decorative, after the abstractions “getting and spending” and “powers”); (2) the sentence structure “Have sight of... / Or hear...” which ends the poem on a sense (hearing) rather than a conclusion.

Exercise 2. (a) Weak: device list; it names a technique and a topic but makes no claim about meaning. (b) Strong: defensible, specific, contains tension. (c) Weak: plot summary.

Exercise 3 (model). Although Hardy’s speaker begins by surveying the winter landscape with apparent detachment, the “spectre-gray” frost and the “weakening eye of day” turn the scene into an elegy, suggesting that his desolation is not only about the weather but about the sense of an ending he cannot name.

Exercise 4 (model rewrite). Browning’s duke calls his late wife’s portrait “that piece a wonder,” a phrase that reduces a woman to a work of art and reveals the possessiveness of a man who values a likeness he can control. The mild word “wonder” places the painting in the vocabulary of connoisseurship, so the duke seems to be offering a compliment while actually admitting that the object pleases him more than the person did. His closing phrase, “there she stands,” confirms the substitution: the verb is one we use for statues, and the present tense of “stands” suggests that the duke prefers a wife who cannot move.

Exercise 5 (model ranking). (1) “his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy” — the strongest, because it directly joins “love” and “destroy.” (2) “crimson joy” — shows the pleasure that is invaded, supporting the claim that love and destruction share a space. (3) “found out thy bed” — suggests intimacy as the site of harm. (4) “O Rose thou art sick!” — the weakest, because it announces illness without specifying love as the cause.

Exercise 6 (model). Problem: the evidence is a list of quotations introduced by line numbers, with a vague claim (“sad”) and no commentary. Rewrite: The speaker’s regret emerges in the compressed bitterness of “a sordid boon” (line 4), which treats the exchange of the heart for profit as a bargain that corrupts what it offers. His complaint that “Little we see in Nature that is ours” (line 3) turns the loss into one of ownership, so that the grief is not just that people are busy but that they have forgotten what belongs to them.

Exercise 7 (model correction). Wordsworth writes that the world is “too much with us,” and many of his words concern money, such as “getting and spending.” This diction makes modern life seem like an exchange in which the speaker’s powers are traded away. The speaker feels forlorn. (Errors fixed: run-on, vague “alot,” fragment beginning “Which,” shifting tense (“felt”), and the unspecific word “society.”)

Exercise 8 (scoring table).

ROW	CRITERION	SELF-SCORE
A (0–1)	Thesis states a defensible interpretation (not a device list, restatement, or summary)	—

ROW	CRITERION	SELF-SCORE
B (0–4)	1: general evidence/summary; 2: some specific evidence and explanation but no clear line of reasoning; 3: specific evidence for all claims and some explanation of how at least one technique contributes to meaning; 4: consistent explanation and multiple techniques	—
C (0–1)	Sustained complexity, context, alternative reading, or vivid persuasive style throughout (not a single sentence)	—
Control	Errors that interfere with meaning cap Row B at 3	—

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