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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Thesis, Commentary, and Quote Integration Templates for Literary Analysis

A fill-in-the-blank toolkit for the three AP English Literature free-response essays: thesis templates for Q1, Q2, and Q3; "complexity" moves; topic-sentence frames; more than thirty commentary starters; rules and models for quoting poetry and prose; transitions; guidance for introductions and conclusions; and model sentences that show sophistication. Use the templates as scaffolding while you learn the moves, then say them in your own voice.

How to Use This Toolkit

Templates are training wheels, not a script. Readers on the AP exam are looking for a defensible interpretation, specific evidence, and commentary that explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. A template cannot supply an interpretation. It can only hold the shape of one while you fill it with your own thinking about the specific text in front of you.

The rule for every template below: if you can paste your sentence into an essay about a different poem or novel and it still works, it is too general. Put in the actual speaker, the actual word, the actual turn.

The essays are scored on the same 6-point analytic structure.

ROW	POINTS	WHAT IT ASKS
A. Thesis	0-1	A defensible interpretation that responds to the prompt
B. Evidence and Commentary	0-4	Specific evidence and commentary that explains how it supports a line of reasoning; for Q1 and Q2, how literary elements and techniques create meaning
C. Sophistication	0-1	Complexity of thought or argument, sustained through the essay

A reminder on timing: each essay is suggested at 40 minutes. A workable split is about 6 to 8 minutes to read and plan, 28 to 30 minutes to write, and 2 minutes to reread.

Part 1: Thesis Templates

A thesis earns Row A if it makes a defensible interpretive claim in response to the prompt. It does not earn the point if it restates the prompt, lists devices, or summarizes. The Row A mean is high (nearly everyone earns it), so the real job of a thesis is to set up a line of reasoning, which is what Row B and Row C reward.

What a weak thesis looks like

WEAK THESIS	PROBLEM
"The speaker has a complex response to the seasons."	Restates the prompt. Does not say what the response is.
"The poet uses imagery, diction, and metaphor to show the speaker's feelings."	Device list; fits any poem.
"The passage is about a man and his father."	Describes the subject.
"The speaker is sad."	Too simple; no complexity.

What a strong thesis does

1. **Names the specific attitude, experience, or portrayal** (not "complex," but what the complexity is).
2. **Holds two things at once** ("although," "yet," "even as").
3. **Hints at the means** (a shift, a repeated image, a narrator's irony).
4. **Points to a "so what"** (what the interpretation suggests about the human experience).

Q1 (Poetry) Thesis Templates

Prompt pattern: "analyze how [poet] uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex [attitude / experience / reflection]."

1. **The shift thesis.** "Although the poem opens by [surface attitude A], the turn at [line / word] reveals [deeper attitude B], suggesting that [insight about the human experience]."
2. **The tension thesis.** "Through [technique 1] and [technique 2], [poet] presents the speaker's [experience] as both [X] and [Y], so that [resolution or unresolved tension]."
3. **The gap thesis.** "The speaker claims [stated attitude], but [the imagery / syntax / sound] exposes [contradicting feeling], revealing that [insight]."
4. **The progression thesis.** "The poem moves from [state 1] through [state 2] to [state 3], and this movement shows that [interpretive claim]."
5. **The definition-of-terms thesis.** "For the speaker, [key term from the prompt] is not [common meaning] but [meaning specific to this poem], as [technique] makes clear."
6. **The not-simply thesis.** "The speaker's [attitude] toward [subject] is not simply [obvious reading] but [fuller reading], a complexity [poet] builds through [element]."
7. **The self-deception thesis.** "By [formal choice], [poet] lets the reader see what the speaker cannot admit: that [hidden feeling]."
8. **The reconsideration thesis.** "[Poet] has the speaker revise [earlier claim] by the final stanza, enacting the discovery that [insight]."

9. **The paradox thesis.** "Paradoxically, the speaker's attempt to [do X] only intensifies [Y], a contradiction [poet] dramatizes through [technique]."
10. **The form-as-meaning thesis.** "By [following / breaking] the conventions of [form], [poet] suggests that [claim about the speaker's experience]."
11. **The distance thesis.** "Though the speaker appears [detached], [specific detail] reveals an investment in [subject] that the speaker's [syntax / restraint] struggles to contain."
12. **The title-lens thesis.** "The title [word] initially suggests [reading A], but the poem gradually reveals [reading B], so that the speaker's experience is [complex description]."

Worked example (original poem not provided; the thesis shows the structure only). For a poem in which a speaker watches her childhood home being demolished and speaks with a clipped, jokey tone until the last stanza:

Although the speaker narrates the demolition with brisk, almost comic detachment, the shift to fragmented syntax in the final stanza reveals that her jokes have been a way of standing at a distance from a grief she cannot yet name.

This thesis names the surface tone, the turn, the technique (syntax), and the deeper attitude.

Q2 (Prose) Thesis Templates

Prompt pattern: "analyze how [author] uses literary elements and techniques to portray [character's] complex [relationship / experience / response]."

1. **The narrator-stance thesis.** "Through [an ironic / sympathetic / detached] narrator, [author] portrays [character] as both [trait A] and [trait B], suggesting that [insight]."
2. **The foil thesis.** "By setting [character] against [secondary character], [author] reveals that [character's] [quality] is as much [flaw or strength] as [apparent reading]."
3. **The setting thesis.** "[Author] uses [setting detail] to show that [character's] experience of [place] is at once [X] and [Y], and so exposes [theme]."
4. **The syntax thesis.** "[Author] lets [sentence structure] enact [character's] state of mind, so that [experience] becomes not just something she describes but something the reader undergoes."
5. **The relationship thesis.** "The relationship between [A] and [B] is built on [apparent bond], yet [dialogue / gesture / narrative comment] reveals [concealed tension]."
6. **The reversal thesis.** "What begins as [apparent situation] becomes, through [structural choice], [reversed situation], a movement that reveals [insight]."
7. **The irony thesis.** "[Author] makes [character's] [self-image] ironic by [technique], inviting the reader to see [hidden reality]."
8. **The unspoken thesis.** "What [character] does not say, marked by [gaps / silences / interrupted speech], speaks louder than [what is said], and shows [insight]."
9. **The memory/time thesis.** "By [shifting between past and present / delaying the key detail], [author] shows [character's] [response] to be [complex description]."
10. **The motive thesis.** "[Character's] actions, though framed as [stated motive], are driven by [deeper motive], a gap [author] reveals through [detail]."

11. **The minor-character thesis.** "[Secondary character], easy to overlook, quietly reframes [main character's] [experience] by [function], so that the passage complicates [first impression]."
12. **The tone-shift thesis.** "The passage's shift from [tone A] to [tone B] mirrors [character's] growing awareness that [insight]."

Worked example. For a passage in which a young woman helps her mother pack a house while narrated by a gently ironic third-person voice:

Though the narrator's gentle irony makes the packing seem like routine housekeeping, small acts of delay, such as folding the same towel twice, reveal that the daughter is not preparing the house for sale but rehearsing her mother's leaving.

Q3 (Literary Argument) Thesis Templates

Prompt pattern: "choose a work of fiction in which [concept]. Analyze how [concept] contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." Q3's thesis may be a claim about the concept in the work or a claim about how the concept contributes to the interpretation of the whole. Define the key term for your text; the Chief Reader warns against drifting from the prompt's term.

1. **The definition thesis.** "In [work], [author] defines [key term] not as [common meaning] but as [text-specific meaning], and this redefinition shapes the novel's argument that [theme]."
2. **The consequence thesis.** "[Character's] [key concept] leads to [consequence], and through that chain [author] argues that [theme about the work as a whole]."
3. **The double-edged thesis.** "[Key concept] in [work] is both [benefit] and [cost], and the tension between them structures the work's treatment of [theme]."
4. **The shaped-by thesis.** "[Author] shows how [key concept] shapes [character's] relationships, finally suggesting that [theme]."
5. **The motif thesis.** "Through the recurring image of [motif], [author] turns [key concept] into [broader meaning], so that the work as a whole becomes [interpretation]."
6. **The structural thesis.** "[Author] arranges [the work's order / frame / ending] so that [key concept] is revealed only gradually, and this delay reinforces [theme]."
7. **The irony thesis.** "[Character] believes that [key concept] will [expected result], but [author] reveals the opposite, showing that [theme]."
8. **The societal thesis.** "[Key concept] in [work] is less personal than social: it exposes [social system], and thereby argues that [theme]."
9. **The change-or-not thesis.** "By ending with [final situation], [author] suggests that [key concept] [transforms / fails to transform] [character], which makes the work an argument about [theme]."
10. **The foil thesis.** "[Character A] and [Character B] each respond to [key concept] differently, and the contrast clarifies [author's view]."
11. **The resolution thesis.** "[Key concept] drives the plot of [work] toward [ending], and in resolving it [author] affirms / refuses [value]."
12. **The ambiguity thesis.** "[Work] resists a simple judgment of [key concept], leaving [character] [in-between state], and this refusal is the work's central point about [theme]."

Worked example (a hypothetical prompt on a character who delays a decision, applied to *Hamlet*):

In *Hamlet*, indecision is not cowardice but a form of moral seriousness: Hamlet delays because he refuses to act on unverified knowledge, and Shakespeare uses that delay to argue that a conscience committed to certainty may be incapable of action in a corrupt court.

Part 2: “Complexity” Thesis Moves

Every post-2019 prompt uses the word *complex*. A complexity move holds two truths at once. These moves work for Q1, Q2, and Q3, and they are the most reliable path to Row C because they structure the argument.

MOVE	FRAME	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)
Surface vs. depth	“Appears to ___ but actually ___”	The speaker appears to celebrate the harvest but actually mourns what the harvest ends.
Both/and	“At once ___ and ___”	The narrator’s tone is at once tender and withering.
Concession	“Although , ”	Although the poem opens in praise, its verbs turn that praise into possession.
Not simply	“Not simply ___ but ___”	The relationship is not simply strained but strained by the very loyalty that holds it together.
Even as	“Even as , ”	Even as the speaker insists on forgetting, her precise detail keeps the memory vivid.
Cost	“The very thing that ___ also ___”	The very discipline that saves him also isolates him.
Inversion	“Rather than , ”	Rather than resisting the loss, the speaker catalogues it.
Process	“The speaker moves from ___ to ___”	The speaker moves from nostalgia to recognition that nostalgia was itself a way of leaving.
Appearance/reality	“What looks like ___ is in fact ___”	What looks like acceptance is in fact exhaustion.
Layered meaning	“The word X carries both ___ and ___”	“Keep” carries both possession and obligation.

Two questions that strengthen any thesis (from the Chief Reader recommendations)

1. **What do my key terms mean in this text?** If the prompt says “memory,” ask what memory *does* here. Is it recollection, intrusion, a refuge, a debt?

2. **Where does the text complicate my claim, and how do I adjust?** The best theses survive the text's strongest counterevidence by absorbing it.

The four official sophistication pathways, in thesis form

PATHWAY	THESIS MOVE
Complexities or tensions	"The poem sustains two opposed attitudes rather than resolving them: ___ and ___."
Broader context	"Read against [specific historical or literary context], the [element] takes on [added meaning]."
Alternative interpretations	"Although it is tempting to read the ending as [alternative], the [evidence] points instead to [your reading]."
Vivid, persuasive style	(not a thesis move; a quality of the whole essay: precise verbs, embedded quotation, varied sentences)

Context moves must be specific. "Throughout history, people have mourned" is a sweeping generalization and does not earn credit. A specific context, such as the Victorian crisis of faith behind Hardy's doubt, does.

Part 3: Topic-Sentence Templates by Idea

The most common structural mistake is organizing body paragraphs by device ("Paragraph 2: imagery. Paragraph 3: diction."). Organize by *idea*, and let the devices serve each idea. A topic sentence is a mini-thesis: it states a claim, uses the key terms from the thesis, and moves the argument forward.

A line of reasoning that builds

A three-paragraph body usually follows one of these progressions:

PROGRESSION	PARAGRAPH 1	PARAGRAPH 2	PARAGRAPH 3
Surface to depth	Establishes the surface attitude	Complicates it	Resolves or refuses to resolve
Stages	First movement of the passage	Second movement (the turn)	Final movement
Aspects	One facet of the character	A contrasting facet	How they collide
Cause and effect	The condition	The response	The consequence

Topic-sentence frames

For poetry (Q1)

- "In the opening quatrain, the speaker [verb] [surface attitude], but [word / image] already [hints at the complication]."
- "The turn at [line] [verb] the speaker's [attitude], shifting from [A] to [B]."

- "In the final stanza, [element] [verb] the earlier [claim], leaving [outcome]."
- "Throughout the poem, [repeated word or image] [verb] [idea], so that by [point] it means [new meaning]."
- "Even in the poem's most [calm / confident] lines, [detail] betrays [contradiction]."

For prose (Q2)

- "At first, the narrator [verb] [character] as [trait], but [detail] soon [complicates / reverses] that portrait."
- "The dialogue between [A] and [B] [verb] [relationship dynamic], particularly in [exchange]."
- "[Setting detail] [verb] [character's] inner state, turning [the room / the road] into [an extension of mind]."
- "The shift in [syntax / pacing / diction] in the passage's second half [verb] [change in character or narrator]."
- "[Secondary character's] [action or comment] [verb] [main character's] [quality], reframing the earlier [scene]."

For Q3

- "The first [scene / stage] of [work] establishes [key concept] as [meaning], through [moment]."
- "[Event or choice] complicates [key concept] by [how], revealing [new meaning]."
- "By the climax, [key concept] has become [transformed meaning], and [moment] makes that transformation visible."
- "In the final chapter, [author] returns to [earlier image or situation] to suggest that [key concept] [outcome]."
- "Read against the work as a whole, [minor character's story] [verb] the central argument that [theme]."

Making topic sentences connect

Each topic sentence should reuse one key term from the thesis and add one new term. A reader should be able to read only your topic sentences and follow an argument.

THESIS KEYWORDS	TOPIC SENTENCE 1	TOPIC SENTENCE 2	TOPIC SENTENCE 3
<i>celebration, dread</i>	"The speaker's celebration begins in concrete, sensory praise..."	"Yet the verbs of that praise already carry dread ..."	"By the closing lines, celebration and dread have become one gesture..."

Part 4: Commentary Starters (35)

Commentary is where Row B is won. It explains *how* the evidence supports the claim and *why* it matters. A good rule: write at least two sentences of commentary for every piece of evidence. These starters get you past "this shows."

Starters for explaining a word or phrase

1. "The word [X] carries connotations of [A], which [verb] the speaker's claim that [Y]."
2. "The choice of [X] over [alternative] suggests [difference in meaning]."
3. "The verb [X] casts [subject] as [role], implying [attitude]."
4. "By describing [thing] as [word], the speaker transforms [X] into [Y]."

5. "The adjective [X] quietly undermines [surrounding praise / claim]."

Starters for explaining structure or syntax

- 6. "The sentence delays its main verb until [point], which makes the reader wait just as the speaker waits."
- 7. "The abrupt shift to short sentences [verb] [emotional change]."
- 8. "The line break after [word] isolates it, so that [effect]."
- 9. "The dash interrupts [thought], enacting [mental state]."
- 10. "The parallel structure of [phrases] sets [A] and [B] side by side and makes their difference visible."
- 11. "The shift from [past to present tense / third to first person] collapses the distance between [A] and [B]."
- 12. "The final line echoes the first but changes [word], showing that [change]."

Starters for explaining imagery and figurative language

- 13. "The image of [X] appeals to [sense], making the reader experience [feeling]."
- 14. "The comparison of [A] to [B] brings with it [associated quality], which [verb] the speaker's attitude."
- 15. "By personifying [X], the speaker grants it [quality], so that [relationship] becomes [dynamic]."
- 16. "The metaphor does more than describe; it argues that [claim]."
- 17. "The image recurs in [place], and with each return it means more: [progression]."
- 18. "The allusion to [X] places the speaker's situation beside [parallel], suggesting [implication]."

Starters for explaining tone and attitude

- 19. "The tone here is [measured word], not [stronger word], because [evidence]."
- 20. "The speaker's [adjective] tone masks [underlying feeling]."
- 21. "The narrator's irony invites the reader to see [what character cannot]."
- 22. "The restraint of the language makes the emotion [more / less] [effect]."
- 23. "The humor here is not light but defensive, a way of [purpose]."

Starters for linking back to the thesis

- 24. "This matters because it shows that [thesis term] is not [simple reading] but [fuller reading]."
- 25. "In this way, the detail supports the larger claim that [thesis]."
- 26. "Here, [thesis term] begins to turn into [new term], preparing the reversal in the final stanza."
- 27. "This moment recasts the earlier [image / scene] as [new reading]."
- 28. "For [speaker / character], [X] becomes a way of [Y]."
- 29. "The effect is to complicate the reader's sympathy: [how]."

Starters for explaining absence, silence, and gaps

- 30. "What the speaker omits, [X], is as telling as what is said."
- 31. "The silence after [line] allows [implied meaning] to emerge."
- 32. "By refusing to name [X], the narrator makes [effect]."

Starters for explaining effect on the reader

- 33. "The reader is placed in [position], sharing [character's] [limited view / unease]."

34. "The detail unsettles the reader's expectation by [how]."

35. "The passage withholds [information] so that the reader, like [character], [experiences ____]."

A model paragraph (original poem lines are described rather than quoted)

Imagine a poem in which a speaker sits beside a hospital bed and describes the room with exacting calm: "the blinds, the chart, the water jug, the clock."

The speaker's inventory of the room sounds like composure, but its very exactness is the evidence of strain. The list moves from "blinds" to "chart" to "water jug" to "clock" in a flat, equal rhythm, as though each object were as important as every other, and this refusal to rank them suggests a mind that cannot afford to look at what matters most. The final item, "clock," lands as the only object that moves, so the calm accounting ends by ticking toward the fact the speaker will not say. In this way the inventory turns composure into avoidance, and the poem's complexity begins to emerge: control is how the speaker loves.

Notice: a claim, tight evidence, three or four sentences of commentary, and a return to the thesis idea in the last sentence.

Part 5: Quote Integration

Quotation is evidence, not decoration. The AP rubric does not require quotation for every point (Q3 evidence may be paraphrase of specific scenes), but in Q1 and Q2 specific words and phrases are your best evidence.

Five rules

1. **Quote fragments, not sentences.** A quotation of two to seven words, embedded in your own sentence, works harder than a whole line.
2. **Make the quotation part of your grammar.** Your sentence should read smoothly with the quoted words in it.
3. **Never let a quotation start or end a paragraph, or stand alone as a sentence.**
4. **Follow every quotation with commentary.** Two or more sentences of explanation, focused on specific words.
5. **Paraphrase plot, quote language.** If you are tempted to quote a plot event, paraphrase it. Quote only when the exact words matter.

The TLQ pattern (Transition, Lead-in, Quotation)

Transition + Lead-in naming who speaks + Quotation in quotation marks + commentary.

Example (original): *When the narrator admits that he "did not look back," the denial itself becomes a look.*

Poetry quotation: line numbers and slashes

SITUATION	FORMAT	EXAMPLE
A short phrase from one line	Quotation marks, line number in parentheses	The speaker calls the field "a ledger of weeds" (3).

SITUATION	FORMAT	EXAMPLE
Two or three lines run in	Slash with spaces to mark each line break; line numbers at the end	The speaker admits, "I counted every step / and still arrived too late" (7-8).
Four or more lines	Set off as a block (rare in timed essays; avoid)	Use fragments instead.
A word that sits at a line break	Mention the break in your commentary	The line break after "waiting" leaves the speaker, and the reader, suspended (11).

If the poem is unnumbered, cite by stanza ("stanza 2") or by position ("in the opening line," "in the final line").

Prose quotation

SITUATION	FORMAT	EXAMPLE (ORIGINAL)
Short phrase	Embed in your sentence	The mother "smoothed what could not be smoothed," a phrase that makes tenderness look like denial.
A longer sentence	Lead in with a colon or comma; keep it tight	The narrator describes the room: "It had the look of a place that had agreed not to be disturbed."
Dialogue	Quote only the telling words	Her reply, "Of course, dear," is polite enough to end the conversation.
Partial quotation with ellipsis	Use ... to skip words, and do not distort	He "wanted ... to be forgotten" only in the sense that he feared being remembered.

If the prose passage has line numbers, give them in parentheses. If it has none, you do not need to cite.

Integration models: weak to strong

WEAK	WHY	STRONG
"The speaker says 'I am tired.' This shows he is tired."	Quotation as a standalone sentence; commentary only restates	"By confessing that he is 'tired' only in the closing line, the speaker admits what his brisk inventory had tried to disguise."
"In line 4 it says 'the cold house.' This is imagery."	Names the device, explains nothing	"The 'cold house' makes the family's silence a physical condition, as though affection had been turned off like a stove."

WEAK	WHY	STRONG
"The author writes, 'She never returned to the village where she had grown up and where her family had lived for generations.'"	Long quotation, no analysis	"The narrator's emphasis that she 'never returned' makes the village a place defined by its absence."

Introducing quotations with variety

Avoid repeating "says." Rotate verbs that match what the text is doing:

admits, concedes, insists, confesses, declares, offers, protests, murmurs, snaps, whispers, lingers on, returns to, dwells on, settles on, circles back to, cuts off, trails into.

Model patterns:

- "In the phrase '**the speaker** ."
- "The speaker's description of ___ as '**reveals** ."
- "Her claim that ___ ('') **is undermined by** ."
- "When the narrator observes that '**the sentence** ."

Handling long evidence on Q3

Because Q3 asks about the whole work, evidence is often a scene rather than a phrase. Give the *specific detail*, not just the event.

GENERAL (WEAK)	SPECIFIC (STRONG)
"Jane leaves Thornfield because she learns of Rochester's wife."	"When Jane leaves Thornfield at dawn with only the money in her purse, she gives up the security of love for the dignity of self-respect, and the bare image of her on the road makes the cost concrete."
"Okonkwo is afraid of being like his father."	"Okonkwo's rule by the machete and the fist is built on a fear of weakness he inherited as shame: his father's debts and flute-playing haunt every order he gives."

Part 6: Transitions

Good transitions show the logic between paragraphs and sentences. In literary analysis they often signal movement through the work.

Between ideas

PURPOSE	WORDS AND PHRASES
Adding	furthermore, moreover, in addition, equally important, beyond this, likewise

PURPOSE	WORDS AND PHRASES
Contrasting	yet, however, still, conversely, in contrast, on the other hand, nevertheless
Complicating	even so, at the same time, and yet, but this is not the whole story, still more telling
Showing cause and result	therefore, as a result, consequently, so that, thus, hence, accordingly
Deepening	indeed, in fact, more precisely, more revealingly, above all
Illustrating	for instance, in particular, notably, as in, consider
Concluding a movement	ultimately, finally, in the end, by the closing lines, in the last analysis

Moving through a text

POSITION	PHRASES
Beginning	At the outset; in the opening lines; the first stanza establishes
Early	As the passage opens; initially; at first
Middle	Midway through; as the poem progresses; by the second stanza; as the narrator's attention shifts
Turn	At the volta; with the word "but"; when the syntax breaks; in the pivot of line ____
Late	By the final stanza; in the closing sentence; in the last lines
Return	Echoing the opening; returning to the first image; circling back

Paragraph-to-paragraph links

Use the last sentence of one paragraph to set up the first sentence of the next.

End of paragraph 2: ...and so the speaker's praise already contains the seeds of its own undoing. Start of paragraph 3: That undoing becomes explicit in the sestet, where the praise gives way to accusation.

Part 7: Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions: do's and don'ts

An introduction on a timed essay needs two or three sentences: a brief context that establishes the situation, and a thesis.

DO	DON'T
Name the author and title (underline or italicize titles of long works; quote titles of poems)	Start with a dictionary definition
State the situation in a clause ("In this passage, a daughter helps her mother pack...")	Summarize the whole text
Give the thesis in the first paragraph	Begin with "Since the dawn of time..."
Use present tense	Include biography or historical lectures unless they illuminate the claim
Go straight to the idea	Restate the prompt word for word

Introduction template

[Author]'s [poem / passage / novel] [title] [verb: dramatizes, traces, stages] [situation, in a clause]. [Thesis: defensible, specific, complex].

Example (original):

In "The Inventory," a speaker sits beside a hospital bed and lists everything in the room except the person in it. Although the list sounds like composure, its flat rhythm and its final, ticking item reveal a love that has taken the shape of avoidance.

Conclusions: do's and don'ts

A conclusion on a 40-minute essay should be short: one or two sentences that extend the argument rather than repeat it. If time is short, a fourth body paragraph is worth more than a long conclusion.

DO	DON'T
Return to the thesis idea in new terms	Begin with "In conclusion" or "In summary"
Widen to the work's meaning or the human experience	Repeat your thesis word for word
End on a specific image or idea	Introduce a new argument
Make the "so what" explicit	Use sweeping generalizations ("All people...")

Conclusion templates

1. **The extension.** "By holding [A] and [B] together to the end, [author] suggests that [wider insight]."
2. **The return.** "The poem ends where it began, with [image], but the image now means [changed meaning], and that change is the poem's argument."
3. **The consequence.** "If [claim] is true, then [implication for how we read the work or the human experience]."
4. **The question.** "What remains is not an answer but a question: [genuine question the text leaves open]."

5. **The context (carefully).** "Read in the light of [specific context], the speaker's [attitude] becomes [added meaning]."

Part 8: Sophistication Model Sentences

Sophistication is a byproduct of a complex thesis and close word-level analysis, not a separate flourish. It must be sustained. These model sentences show the four official pathways in action. All are original; they show structure and are not drawn from a particular text.

Pathway 1: Complexities and tensions

The speaker does not choose between grief and gratitude; she lets the same noun, "keepsake," carry both, so that the object she treasures is also the object that keeps her from moving on.

The narrator's courtesy is the cruelest thing in the scene: every polite subordinate clause postpones, and thereby intensifies, the verdict the reader knows is coming.

Pathway 2: Broader context (specific, illuminating)

Written in the decade after the Great War, the poem's refusal of consolation reads less as personal despair than as a generation's distrust of the elegiac forms that had comforted its grandparents.

Within the tradition of the Gothic novel, the house is not merely haunted; it is inherited, and the work asks whether guilt, like property, can be passed down.

Pathway 3: Alternative interpretations (engage and adjudicate)

A reader might take the closing image of the open gate as an invitation to leave. Yet the verb "swings," with its suggestion of motion without direction, implies that freedom here is only another form of drifting.

It is tempting to read the narrator as simply affectionate toward her sister. But the pattern of qualifying adverbs ("rather," "somewhat," "almost") argues that affection and judgment are working in the same sentence.

Pathway 4: Vivid, persuasive style (consistent, not ornamental)

The mother does not announce her disappointment; she arranges it, setting it on the table with the cups.

By the final stanza the winter is no longer weather but an audience, and the speaker, who began by describing it, ends by performing for it.

What does not earn sophistication

DOES NOT COUNT	WHY
"Throughout history, people have mourned."	Sweeping generalization, not context
One deep sentence in the last paragraph	Must be sustained
Ornate words without argument	"Ornate language that does not advance the argument" is explicitly excluded
"Some may disagree, but..." with no named alternative	Merely hinting
Inventing your own metaphors that distract from the author's	Reduces focus on the text

Part 9: A Complete Timed-Essay Skeleton

Use this as a planning scaffold during the 6 to 8 minutes before you write.

Planning box (copy onto your paper):

1. Prompt's key term: _____
2. What does the term mean in THIS text? _____
3. Where does the text turn or complicate? _____
4. Thesis (one or two sentences): _____
5. Topic sentence 1 (idea, evidence): _____
6. Topic sentence 2 (idea, evidence): _____
7. Topic sentence 3 (idea, evidence): _____
8. Closing idea (wider meaning): _____

Paragraph skeleton (body paragraph, about 6 to 8 sentences):

1. Topic sentence (claim with thesis keyword and new term).
2. Lead-in and first piece of evidence (embedded fragment).
3. Commentary 1: explain a specific word or choice.
4. Commentary 2: explain how it supports the claim.
5. Second piece of evidence (different part of the text).
6. Commentary 3: connect the two pieces.
7. Closing sentence: link back to the thesis or forward to the next idea.

Time checks:

- Minute 8: thesis written.
- Minute 18: first body paragraph complete.
- Minute 28: second body paragraph complete.
- Minute 36: third body paragraph complete, conclusion started.
- Minute 40: stop and reread for clarity.

Part 10: Practice and Self-Check

Practice A: Upgrade these weak theses

Rewrite each into a defensible, specific thesis. Use any template above. (Model answers follow in the key.)

1. "The poet uses imagery to show the speaker's love for her mother."
2. "The narrator is very sarcastic about the town."
3. "In the novel, memory is important to the main character."
4. "The speaker has mixed feelings about the winter."

Practice B: Strengthen the commentary

Each item gives a claim and a piece of evidence. Add two sentences of commentary that explain a specific word and link to the claim.

1. *Claim:* The speaker's calm is only a surface. *Evidence:* The speaker describes the storm as "tidy."
2. *Claim:* The narrator is gently mocking her subject. *Evidence:* The narrator says the clergyman spoke "with the confidence of a man who had never been interrupted."
3. *Claim:* The daughter resists leaving. *Evidence:* The daughter folds the towel "a second time."

Practice C: Fix the quotation

Rewrite each sentence so the quotation is embedded and followed by commentary.

1. The speaker says "I counted the days." This shows she is waiting.
2. "She did not look up when he entered." This is characterization.
3. The poem has the line "The field is quiet now." This is imagery.

Practice D: Name the move

For each model sentence, name the complexity move from Part 2.

1. "What looks like patience is in fact fear."
2. "The very discipline that steadies her also isolates her."
3. "Rather than mourning the farm, the speaker inventories it."
4. "Although the poem opens with praise, the final stanza turns that praise into accusation."

Answer Key

Practice A: model rewrites (answers will vary; these are strong examples)

1. "Though the speaker's praise of her mother is built from domestic images, the shift from kitchen objects to absences in the final stanza reveals that her love has become a way of keeping a lost presence in the room."
2. "The narrator's irony toward the town is affectionate rather than savage: she exposes the villagers' pettiness through their own tidy habits, yet she names every one of them with care."

3. "For the protagonist, memory is not recollection but trespass: it enters the present uninvited and forces her to revise choices she thought were settled, so that the novel becomes an argument about the cost of living with an unfinished past."
4. "The speaker resents winter's confinement even as the stillness of the snow gives him the quiet to hear his own thoughts, a tension the poem leaves unresolved."

Practice B: model commentary (samples)

1. "'Tidy' is an odd word for a storm, and its domestic connotation reveals the speaker's attempt to shrink danger to something she can manage. The word's smallness exposes how large the fear it hides must be."
2. "'Never been interrupted' turns confidence into isolation: the clergyman's certainty has never met resistance, so it has never been tested. The narrator's mockery is therefore less about his belief than about the sheltered life that produced it."
3. "The second fold is unnecessary, and that surplus is the point: she is making the last task last. The domestic gesture becomes a quiet protest against the departure it serves."

Practice C: model rewrites

1. "By counting 'the days,' the speaker turns waiting into a ritual, a way of giving shape to a time that otherwise has none."
2. "Her refusal to look up when he enters, the narrator notes, makes his arrival into an event that she controls by ignoring it."
3. "The statement 'The field is quiet now' carries the weight of 'now': the quiet is a condition that follows something louder, and the poem's calm is the afterimage of that loss."

Practice D: the moves

1. Appearance/reality ("What looks like ___ is in fact ___")
2. Cost ("The very thing that ___ also ___")
3. Inversion ("Rather than , ")
4. Concession ("Although , ")

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