

Refining Qualified Arguments

AP English Language ■ Unit 9

AP English Language



What we will cover

- 1 How Claims Are Qualified
- 2 Qualifying a Claim



Three moves, three different admissions

Three verbs, constantly confused, and each admits something different about the opposing argument.

- **Concede** – accept all or a portion of the competing claim as **correct**. You are agreeing the opposing point has merit.
- **Rebut** – offer a **contrasting perspective** on the argument and its evidence, or an alternative interpretation of the same facts.
- **Refute** – **demonstrate, using evidence**, that all or a portion of the competing claim is incorrect.
- The move you may make is the one your evidence allows. Refuting needs evidence of **error**; rebutting needs only an alternative **reading**, which is far more often available.

Three moves, three different admissions, in detail

Three different moves - and the evidence you have decides which one you may make

CONCEDE	REBUT	REFUTE
accept all or part of the competing claim as correct	offer a contrasting perspective, or an alternative interpretation	demonstrate, using evidence, that the claim is incorrect
needs: honesty	needs: another reading of those facts	needs: evidence of error
<i>and the CED says it RAISES your credibility</i>	<i>almost always available - this is the workhorse move</i>	<i>without that evidence, refuting is bluffing</i>

Then come back to your own position. An unreturned concession reads as agreement.

Concede accepts, rebut counters, refute disproves. Choose the one your evidence can actually support.

How Claims Are Qualified

Unit 9 is short and it is the course's final move: **how to handle the arguments that oppose yours**. Everything here is directly rewarded on the exam, and the three key verbs are constantly confused.

- **Effectively entering an ongoing conversation** about a subject means **engaging the positions that have already been taken**. An argument that ignores them is not participating in the discussion, only announcing into it.
- Evidence and sources will either **support, complement, or contradict** a writer's thesis. All three are usable – contradicting evidence is not a problem to be hidden but material to be handled.
- **Writers enhance their credibility when they refute, rebut, or concede** opposing arguments and contradictory evidence.
- **Concede** : writers **accept all or a portion of a competing position or claim as correct**, and agree that the opposing point has merit.
- **Rebut** : writers **offer a contrasting perspective** on an argument and its evidence, or provide an alternative interpretation.

How Claims Are Qualified, continued

The distinction is what your evidence lets you do. **Refuting requires evidence of error**; if you do not have it, refuting is bluffing and a reader will see it. **Rebutting requires only an alternative reading** of the same facts, which is far more often available.

Conceding requires honesty, and it costs nothing – the CED says explicitly that it *enhances* credibility.

The rubric, row by row

The essay has no single quality score. It has three rows, and each is won by different arithmetic.

- **Thesis – 1 point.** All or nothing, and decided by one sentence. The cheapest point on the paper to secure.
- **Evidence and commentary – 4 points.** Evidence carries you to the middle of the scale; the movement from there to the top is almost entirely **commentary**.
- **Sophistication – 1 point.** Not awarded for length or vocabulary. It is earned by the qualifying and counterargument moves in this unit.
- So a revision that adds another quotation is working the row where evidence has already **stopped** paying.

The rubric, row by row, in detail

THESIS

1 point

all or nothing, and decided by one sentence — so it is the cheapest point on the paper to secure

EVIDENCE AND COMMENTARY

4 points

evidence gets you to the middle of this scale; the movement from there to the top is almost entirely **commentary**

SOPHISTICATION

1 point

not awarded for length or vocabulary — see the qualifying and counterargument moves in this unit

Three rows, three different arithmetics – revise the one that is still paying.



Qualifying a Claim

For your own writing, the strongest and most reliable shape on Question 3 is:

- State your position, **qualified** to the ground your evidence covers.
- **Concede** the part of the opposing position that is genuinely correct.
- **Rebut or refute** the rest – rebut if you have an alternative reading, refute only if you have evidence of error.
- Show why your position **survives** the concession.

Qualifying a Claim, continued

Step 4 is the one most students omit, and it is where the sophistication point lives.

Conceding and then not returning to your own argument reads as having changed your mind.

Exam tips

- **Concede, rebut, refute** are three different claims. Do not use the words interchangeably.
- **Refute only with evidence of error.** Without it, rebut instead – an alternative interpretation is almost always available.
- **Conceding raises credibility**, by the CED's own statement. It is not a weakness.
- After conceding, **come back**. An unreturned concession reads as agreement with the other side.
- Use a transition that **ranks** the counterargument: *the strongest objection to this is beats some people say*.
- When analysing a text, notice when it addresses **no** counterargument. That absence tells you who it was written for.

Where the counterargument goes

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- **Refute only with evidence of error.** Without it, rebut instead - an alternative interpretation is almost always available.
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Counterarguments, and where they go

the CED point

transitions may be used to introduce counterarguments, and the transition itself signals the relationship

the signals

admittedly, granted, some would argue, it is true that

then the pivot

however, yet, still – the return to your own line

the other CED point

not all arguments explicitly address a counterargument

why it matters

true of the texts you read – and worth noting when analysing one, since the omission is itself a choice

in your own writing

the concession is where the sophistication point is most often earned

Naming a counterargument the text *does not* address is legitimate analysis. Silence is a rhetorical decision like any other.

Where the counterargument goes, in detail

WHERE YOU PUT IT	WHAT IT SIGNALS	USE IT WHEN
first — before your own case	you know the strongest version of the the reader probably holds it already other side	
inside each paragraph	every claim has been tested as it was the objections are specific to each claim made	
near the end	a duty discharged — or, done well, then one objection outweighs the rest real turn	

Concede early and the reader trusts you before your own case begins; concede late and it reads as an afterthought.

What earns the sophistication point

DOES NOT EARN IT

- longer words for the same idea
- a fourth body paragraph
- a counterargument mentioned and dropped
- a conclusion that widens to all of humanity

EARNs IT

- a claim qualified so that it is exactly defensible
- an objection answered, not noted
- tension between two of your own sources, named
- a consequence the prompt did not ask for

Every item on the right is a **move**, and every one of them appears elsewhere in this course. None of them is a matter of vocabulary

Worked example – conceding, then refuting

On a Question 3 prompt, compare two treatments of the same objection.

- **Low-scoring:** *“Some people disagree, but they are wrong.”*
- **Scoring:** *“The objection that the policy is too costly is correct as far as it goes: the direct expenditure is higher than any alternative considered. But cost is only decisive if the alternatives achieve the same result, and the same report shows they do not.”*

That paragraph **concedes** the cost and **refutes** the comparison with evidence. Naming an opposing position without engaging it is neither concession nor rebuttal.



Unit 9 – key takeaways

1

Three moves

concede, rebut, refute – not synonyms

2

Refute

only with evidence of error;
otherwise rebut

3

Concede

raises credibility; then come back

4

Rank

*the strongest objection beats
some people say*

Check yourself

- 1 Concede, rebut, refute – why not mix them?
- 2 When should you refute?
- 3 Is conceding a weakness?
- 4 What must you do after conceding?

Answers: they are three different claims ■ with evidence of error ■ no – it raises credibility ■ come back