

Exercise walk-through

Using words and syntax for tone and style ■ 6.6

eXercise

You must be able to

- choose diction that does not overstate your evidence
- use qualification in the sentence as well as in the thesis
- vary syntax to mark the weight of a claim
- avoid a style that promises more than the argument delivers

Method — Diction matched to evidence

“Suggests”, “indicates”, “shows”, “proves” are not interchangeable. Using the strongest available verb for weak evidence costs credibility the moment a reader checks.

Method — Qualification at sentence level

“In the two districts studied, attendance rose” is more credible than “attendance rose” when only two districts were studied — and it costs one clause.

Method — Syntax and weight

Put the claim you most want believed in a short, plain sentence. Complex syntax around a central claim can read as evasion, however well constructed.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

State why “proves” and “suggests” are not interchangeable.

Solution 2.1

Method: Diction matched to evidence

Worked steps

they claim different strengths of support **B1**; using the stronger for weak evidence is a claim the evidence does not back **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain what sentence-level qualification adds.

Solution 2.2

Method: Qualification at sentence level

Worked steps

it states the scope of the finding in the sentence itself **B1**, so the reader is not misled about what was measured **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

Sentence: “Everyone knows that this reform has completely failed.”

- (a) State two weaknesses.
- (b) Rewrite it.

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

(a) “everyone knows” asserts consensus instead of evidence **B1**; “completely failed” overstates and invites a counter-example **B1**. (b) a rewrite that states an argued, scoped claim, e.g. “On the two measures the department itself set, the reform has not met its targets” **B2**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

Using “proves” for evidence that only suggests costs the writer

A length

B credibility

C coherence

D unity

Solution 3.1

Method: Diction matched to evidence

A length

B credibility 

C coherence

D unity

Worked steps

B. an overstated verb is checked and found wanting.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

A central claim is usually best expressed in

A the longest sentence available

B a short, plain sentence

C a rhetorical question

D a subordinate clause

Solution 3.2

Method: Syntax and weight

A the longest sentence available

B a short, plain sentence 

C a rhetorical question

D a subordinate clause

Worked steps

B. plainness reads as confidence; complexity around a claim reads as evasion.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 4 marks

Write two sentences making a claim whose diction matches evidence of moderate strength.

Solution 3.3

Method: Diction matched to evidence

Worked steps

claim expressed with a verb matched to the evidence **B2**; scope stated in the sentence **B2**.