

Course Companion

AP English Literature and Composition

Every topic handout in one volume

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Short Fiction I

AP English Literature and Composition

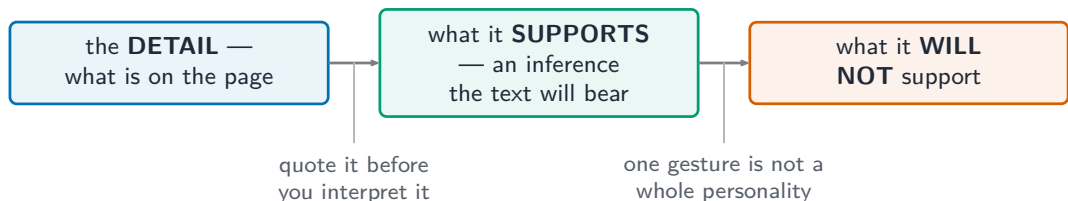
What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

AP English Literature reads texts in three genres across nine units - **short fiction, poetry, and longer fiction or drama**, each visited three times at increasing difficulty. Unit 1 installs the tools for all of them.

Character is revealed by three things, and the CED names them exactly:

- **Description, dialogue, and behaviour** , reveal characters to readers.
- Descriptions may come from a **speaker, narrator, other characters, or the characters themselves** - so who is describing is part of the evidence.
- **Perspective** is **how narrators, characters, or speakers understand their circumstances**, informed by background, experience, and values.
- A character's perspective is **both shaped and revealed by relationships** with other characters, the environment, and events.

That last point is the one that turns character notes into analysis. A character is not a list of adjectives; a character is a way of seeing, which becomes visible in what they notice, what they misread, and how they respond.



Over-reading loses as many marks as under-reading. Say what the detail **establishes**, and stop where the evidence stops

Textual Details That Convey Setting

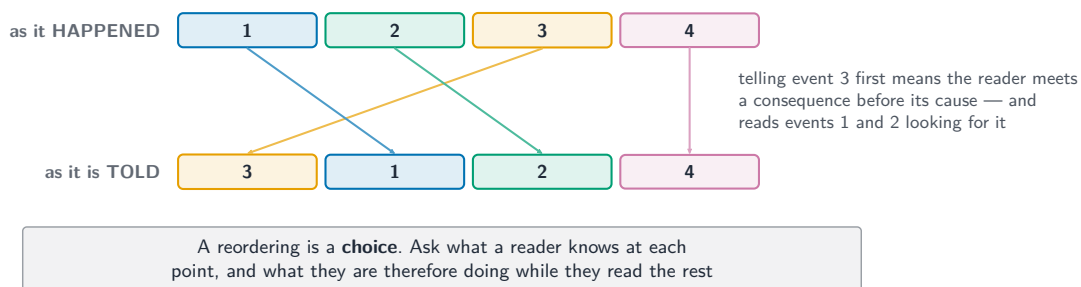
Setting includes the **time and place** during which the events of the text occur.

The CED's definition is deliberately minimal, and that is the trap. Setting earns marks not when it is described but when it is shown **doing something** - constraining a character, explaining a value, or contrasting with an interior state. A paragraph that establishes where a story happens has not yet made a claim.

How Plot Orders Events

- **Plot** is the **sequence of events** in a narrative; events are connected, each building on those before it.
- The **dramatic situation** includes the **setting and action** of the plot and **how the narrative develops** to place characters in conflict.

The word *sequence* is doing work. Plot is not the events but their **order** - and an author who reveals something late that happened early has made a choice you can analyse.



The Function of a Sequence of Events

Plot and the exposition that accompanies it focus readers' attention on the parts of the narrative that matter most to the text's meaning.

That sentence is the whole method for prose analysis: proportion is evidence. What the text lingers over, and what it passes in a clause, is the author telling you where to look.

Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

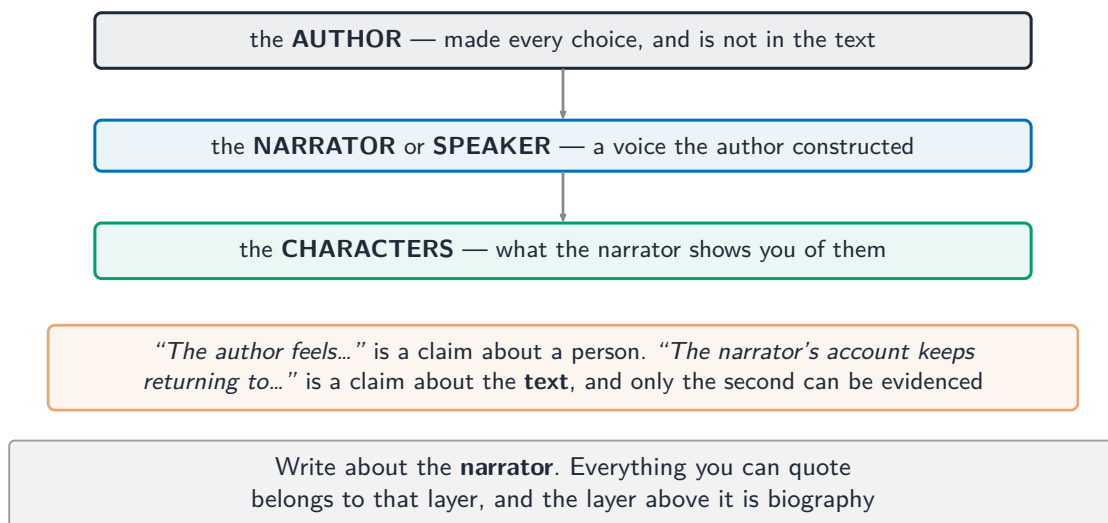
Point of view - and the limit is where the analysis lives

First person	Third person, observational	Third person, all-knowing
involved in the narrative; their relationship to events shapes what they can tell	an outside observer, reporting what is visible	an outside observer with access to every mind
cannot report what they did not witness - or will not admit	cannot enter any consciousness; motive must be inferred	gives up the suspense of not knowing - and chooses whose thoughts to show anyway

PERSPECTIVE is how they see. POINT OF VIEW is where they stand. The CED separates them, and so should you.

Perspective is how they see; point of view is where they stand. The CED separates them, and so should you

- **Narrators or speakers** relate accounts and **establish a relationship between the text and the reader**.
- **Perspective** refers to **how** narrators, characters, or speakers see their circumstances; **point of view** refers to **the position from which** they relate the account.
- **A speaker or narrator is not necessarily the author.** Never write “the author feels” about a first-person narrator.



The Function of Point of View

- Point of view contributes to **what narrators can and cannot provide** in a text, based on their position.
- Narrators **may also be characters**, and that role may influence their perspective.
- **First-person narrators are involved in the narrative**; their relationship to events and to other characters shapes what they can tell you.
- **Third-person narrators are outside observers**, and their knowledge may range from **observational to all-knowing**.
- The outside perspective of a third-person narrator **may not be affected by the events** of the narrative.

The analytical payoff is the *cannot*. A first-person narrator cannot report what they did not witness or will not admit, and every gap is meaningful. A limited third-person narrator confines you to one consciousness, which is a choice about whose experience counts.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

- In literary analysis, writers **read a text closely to identify details that, in combination**, enable them to make and defend a claim.
- A **claim** is a statement that **requires defence with evidence from the text**.
- The initial components of a paragraph are the **claim and the textual evidence** that defends it.

Note *in combination*. A single detail rarely supports an interpretive claim; two or three details that point the same way do.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). The AP Literature free-response section has three questions - **poetry analysis, prose fiction analysis, and a literary argument** on a work you choose - all marked on a **six-point rubric**: thesis 1, evidence and commentary 4, sophistication 1. For a prose fiction prompt asking how the author uses narrative techniques to reveal a character's attitude, a weak answer writes *"the narrator is first-person, which makes it personal."* A scoring answer uses the *cannot*: *"Because the narrator is a participant recounting events years later, the account gives us his present judgement of his younger self and withholds what the other characters thought - so the reader receives his self-criticism as the only available evidence, and must decide whether the harshness of it is accuracy or performance."* Point of view, its limit, and the effect on the reader.

Exam tips

- Character is a **way of seeing**, not a list of adjectives. Analyse what they notice and misread.
- **Setting must do something.** Describing where a story happens is not yet a claim.
- Plot is the **order** of events. A late revelation of an early event is an authorial choice worth analysing.
- **Proportion is evidence.** What the text lingers over is where the meaning is.
- **The narrator is not the author.** Never write "the author feels" about a first-person narrator.
- The analytical gold in point of view is what the narrator **cannot** provide.

Poetry I

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 2 is the course's first poetry unit, and it adds two things to Unit 1's toolkit: **structure** as an object of analysis, and **figurative language** handled precisely rather than by name-dropping.

One addition on character first: **characters reveal their perspectives and biases** through **the words they use, the details they provide, and the details they omit** .

That last item is the analytical opening. What a speaker does *not* mention, in a poem where everything is chosen, is evidence.

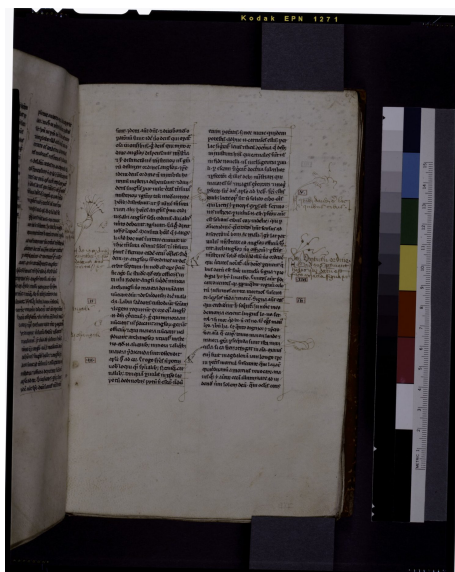
The Function of Structure in a Text

- **Line and stanza breaks** contribute to the development and relationship of ideas in a poem.
- **The arrangement of lines and stanzas** contributes to that development.
- A text's structure **affects readers' reactions and expectations** by presenting the relationships among ideas.

Structure in poetry is not decoration; it is punctuation for thought. Where a line breaks decides which words sit at the ends of lines, and the end of a line is the most emphatic position available. A sentence that runs past a line break asks the reader to hold something unresolved; one that stops at the break closes it.

THE CHOICE	WHAT IT DOES	WHERE TO LOOK
a break — stanza, chapter, section	forces a pause, and separates what it divides	the line either side of the gap
a turn	revalues everything already read	a conjunction, a shift of tense or address
a frame — a story inside a story	puts a teller between you and the event	the return to the outer voice
repetition with a difference	makes the difference the meaning	the second and third occurrences

Describing the shape is not naming the **function**. Say what the reader is made to do, and where in the text they are made to do it



The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

- **Contrast** can be introduced through focus, tone, point of view, character or speaker perspective, and dramatic situation.
- Contrasts are the result of **shifts** or **juxtapositions** or both .
- **Shifts** may be signalled by a word, a structural convention, or punctuation.
- Shifts may **emphasise contrasts** between particular segments of a text.

This is the most reliable route into an unseen poem. Find the shift - a *but*, a stanza break, a change of tense or address - and the poem divides into a before and an after. What changed, and what the change costs or gains, is very often the poem's argument.

BETWEEN CHARACTERS — a foil, showing what the other is by not being it

INSIDE ONE CHARACTER — what they say against what they do

BETWEEN SETTING AND FEELING — a cheerful room and a grief in it

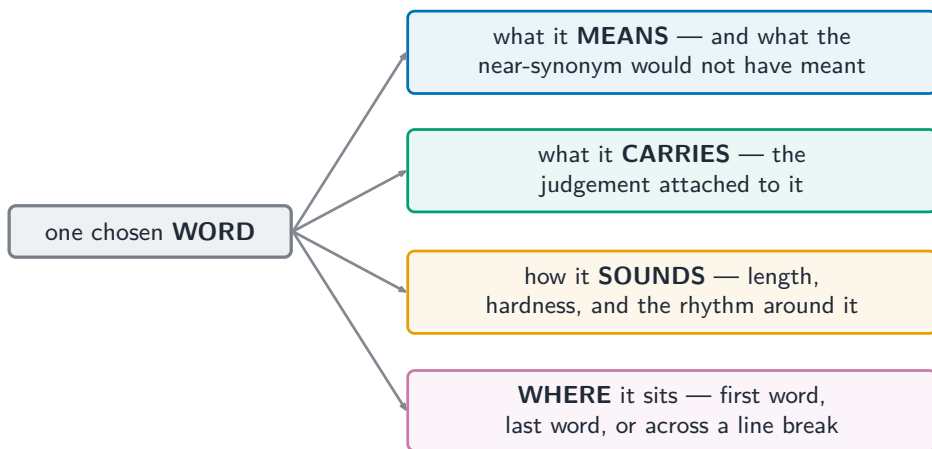
BETWEEN PARTS OF THE TEXT — a scene that answers an earlier one

Four places to look, not one. The contrast **inside** a character is usually the one that carries a complexity question

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

- An **antecedent** is a word, phrase, or clause that precedes its referent.
- **Referents are ambiguous if they can refer to more than one antecedent, which affects interpretation**.
- **Words or phrases may be repeated** to emphasise ideas or associations.
- **Alliteration** is the repetition of the same initial sound in adjacent or nearby words, emphasising those words.

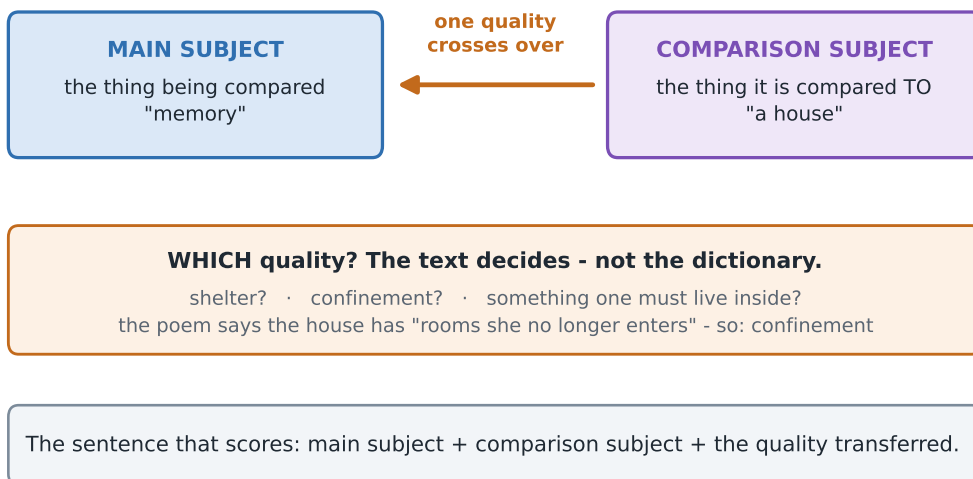
Ambiguous reference is worth special attention. In prose it is usually a fault; in poetry it is often a device, and a pronoun that could point two ways may be holding both meanings deliberately.



"Powerful" is not one of the four. Two of these are almost always available for any word worth **quoting**

The Function of a Simile

Simile and metaphor have the same parts



Name the main subject, name the comparison subject, then say which quality crossed over

- A **simile** uses “**like**” or “**as**” to liken two objects or concepts.
- Similes liken two different things **to transfer the traits or qualities of one to the other**.
- In a simile, the thing **being compared** is the **main subject**; the thing **to which it is compared** is the **comparison subject**.

Those two terms are the whole method. A scoring answer names the main subject, names the comparison subject, and then says **which quality was transferred** - because that quality is the claim the poem is making.

The Function of a Metaphor

- A **metaphor** implies similarities between two usually unrelated **concepts** to reveal or emphasise qualities of the main subject.
- The same main-subject and comparison-subject structure applies.
- Comparisons **draw on the experiences and associations** readers already **have** with the comparison subject - which is why a metaphor can fail with an audience that lacks those associations.
- **Interpretation of a metaphor may depend on the context of its use:** what is happening in the text may determine which of the comparison subject’s qualities

is meant.

That last point protects you from the commonest error, which is importing every association a word has. If a poem calls grief *a house*, the relevant quality might be shelter, or confinement, or the fact that one must live inside it. The text decides which.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

Same three components as Unit 1: a **claim** requiring textual defence, the **textual evidence**, and details identified **in combination**.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the speaker's use of comparison conveys their attitude. A weak answer: *"The poet uses a metaphor comparing memory to a house, which is effective."* A scoring answer uses the CED's terms and the context rule: *"The main subject is memory and the comparison subject a house, but the poem withholds warmth from the comparison: the house has 'rooms she no longer enters'. The quality transferred is therefore not shelter but confinement by a structure one built oneself - so the speaker's attitude to her own past is presented as inhabiting something she can neither leave nor fully occupy."* Main subject, comparison subject, transferred quality, and the attitude it conveys.

Exam tips

- What a speaker **omits** is evidence. In a poem, everything present was chosen.
- **Find the shift** first. A *but*, a stanza break, a change of tense - the poem divides there.
- **Line endings are the emphatic position.** Say which words the poet put there.
- An **ambiguous referent** in poetry is usually a device, not an error.
- Always name **main subject and comparison subject**, then the **quality transferred**. That quality is the claim.
- **Context decides which quality** a metaphor imports. Do not list every association the word has.

Longer Fiction or Drama I

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 3 is the first longer-fiction-or-drama unit, and the length changes what is analysable: characters can now **change**, conflicts can **intersect**, and setting acquires a **social and historical** dimension.

The CED's additions on character:

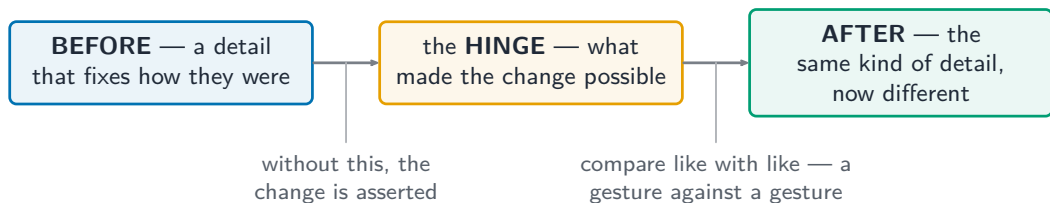
- The **description of a character creates expectations** for that character's behaviour, and **how a character meets or fails those expectations** is meaningful.
- Details associated with a character **contribute to a reader's interpretation** of them.
- A reader's understanding of a character's perspective **may depend on the perspective of the narrator**.
- **A character's perspective may shift** during the narrative.
- When narrators or characters **compare another character to something else**, they reveal their own perspective as much as the compared character's.
- **Readers can infer motive from a character's actions or inactions**

That last word - *inactions* - is the one worth keeping. What a character declines to do is evidence, and it is usually more revealing than what they do.

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

- A **dynamic character** develops over the narrative and often makes choices that directly or indirectly cause change.
- Character change can be **visible and external** - health, wealth, circumstance - or **internal**, in belief, value, or understanding.
- **Some characters remain unchanged** or are largely unaffected by events.

The unchanged character is not a failure of characterisation; it is often the measure by which the change in others is visible.



Three quotations, and the **middle** one is the one students omit.
A change with no hinge reads as two unrelated descriptions

Textual Details That Convey Setting

Setting now includes the **social, cultural, and historical situation** ,
in which the events occur - not only time and place.

This widens what setting can do. A social setting supplies the constraints a character must act within, and constraint is what turns a choice into a revealing one.

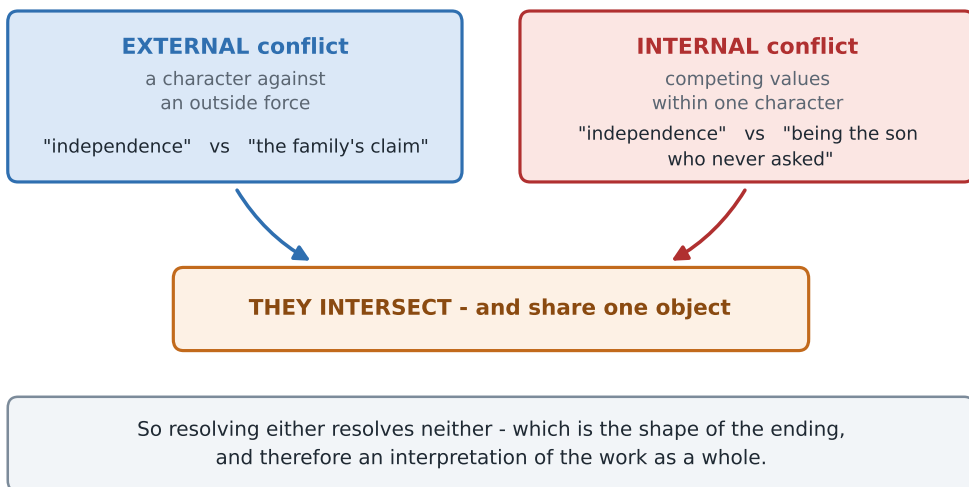
Significant Events in a Plot

- A narrative is delivered through a **series of events that relate to a conflict**.
- Events include **episodes, encounters, and scenes** that introduce and develop plot.
- **The significance of an event depends on its relationship to the narrative, the conflict, and character development.**

That third statement is the test for essay selection: an event matters to your argument only if you can say what it does to the conflict or to a character. Retelling a striking scene that does neither is plot summary, which earns nothing.

The Function of Conflict in a Text

Conflict is between competing VALUES - name them on both sides



A primary conflict heightened by an intersecting one is the standard shape of a novel or play

- **Conflict** is tension between competing values, either **within a character** - internal or psychological conflict - or **between a character and an external force**.
- A text may contain multiple conflicts, and often two or more **intersect**.
- A primary conflict can be heightened by additional conflicts that **intersect with it**.
- **Inconsistencies in a text may create contrasts** that represent conflicts of values or perspectives.

Note the definition: conflict is between **competing values**, not merely between people. Two characters who want the same object are in a dispute; two characters who want *incompatible goods* are in a conflict, and only the second produces meaning.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

Unchanged from Units 1 and 2: a **claim** requiring textual defence, **textual evidence**, and details identified **in combination**.

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

- A **thesis statement expresses an interpretation** of a literary text and **requires defence** through textual evidence.
- It **may preview the development or line of reasoning** of that interpretation - but is **not required** to list the reasons.

The key word is *interpretation*. A thesis that states what happens in the text is not a thesis; it is a summary. A thesis must say what the text **means** or **does**, which is by definition arguable.

SUMMARY

The narrator remembers her childhood home and then learns that it has been sold.

reports what happens; every paragraph can only report more

A LITERARY THESIS

By giving the memory more space than the loss, the narrator makes the reader feel the house as present before it is taken away.

names a **choice** and its effect, so the evidence is the text's own shape

A literary thesis is about what the text **does**, not what it contains.
That is also what stops an essay drifting back into summary

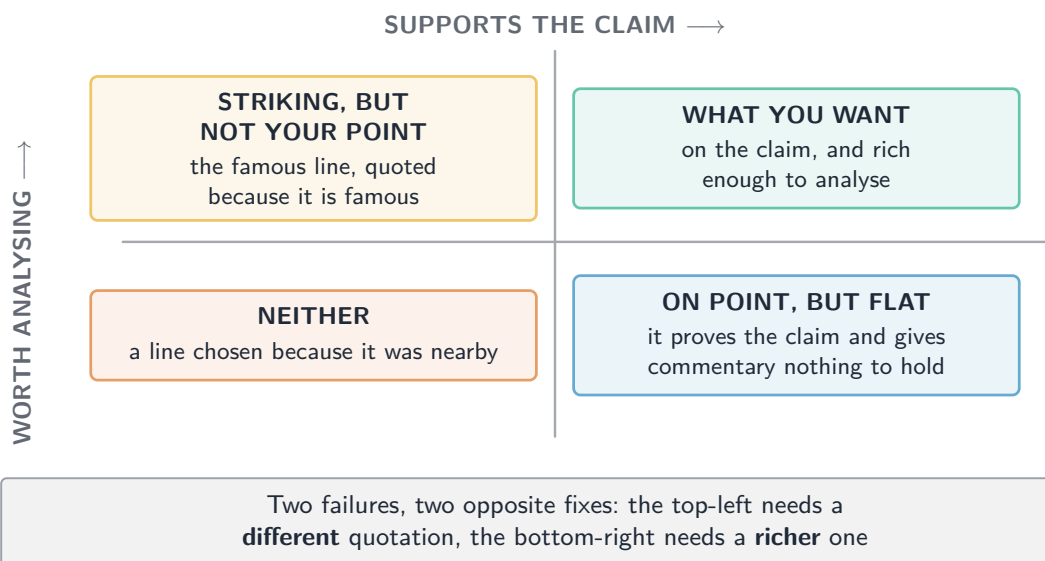
Developing Commentary

- A **line of reasoning** is the **logical sequence of claims** that together defend the overarching thesis.
- It is communicated through **commentary explaining the logical relationship** between evidence and claim.

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

- Writers use evidence **strategically** - to illustrate, clarify, exemplify, associate, or amplify.
- Evidence is **effective** when commentary explains its logical relationship to the claim.
- Evidence is **sufficient** when its **quantity and quality** provide apt support.
- **Developing an interpretation is a recursive process** : an interpretation can emerge, and change, as you read and write.

That last point is permission worth taking. If your reading changes while you draft, revise the thesis to match it.



Control Over the Elements of Composition

Grammar and mechanics that follow established conventions allow writers to communicate clearly. On this exam, control of language is not a separate mark but a condition of the others: an unclear sentence cannot deliver commentary a reader can credit.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Question 3 literary-argument prompt asks you to choose a work and analyse how a character’s conflict contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. A weak answer narrates the plot around the conflict. A scoring answer identifies **competing values** and lets them intersect: “*The protagonist’s external conflict with his family over the inheritance is heightened by an internal one: he wants the independence the money would buy, and he wants to remain the son who never asked for it. Because the two conflicts share a single object, resolving either resolves neither - which is why the novel ends with a choice that satisfies no one, including him.*” Two conflicts, named as values, and an interpretation of the whole.

Exam tips

- **Inactions reveal motive.** What a character declines to do is often the strongest evidence available.
- The **unchanged character** is the measure by which change in others becomes visible.
- Setting now includes the **social and historical** situation - it supplies the constraint that makes choices meaningful.
- Conflict is between **competing values**, not merely between people. Name the values.
- An event matters only if you can say **what it does to the conflict or to a character**. Otherwise it is plot summary.
- A thesis must state an **interpretation**, not what happens. Summary cannot be defended.

Short Fiction II

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 4 returns to short fiction with a much larger toolkit. Its two most valuable additions are **narrative distance** and the idea that **choices reveal values**.

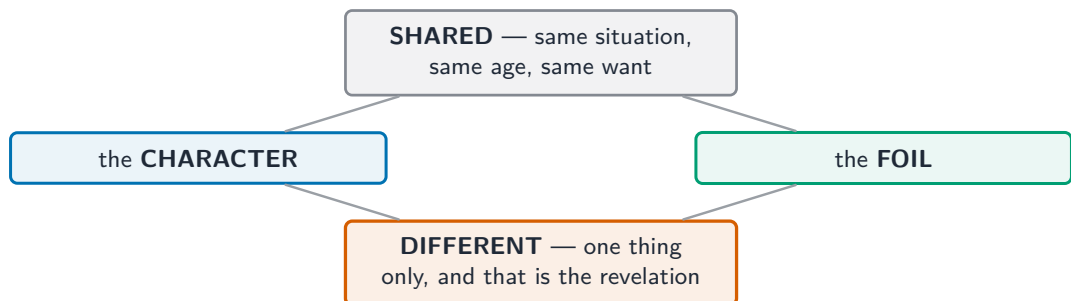
- The significance of characters is often revealed through their **agency** and through **nuanced descriptions**.
- **Characters' choices - in speech, action, and inaction - reveal what they value**

That second statement is the most practical sentence in the whole course for essay-writing. Whenever you need a claim about a character, look at a choice and ask what it must be true for that choice to have made sense to them.

The Function of Contrasting Characters

- The main character is the **protagonist** ; the **antagonist** opposes them.
- **Protagonists and antagonists may represent contrasting values.**

The word *may* is doing careful work. An antagonist is not necessarily a villain; the strongest antagonists hold a value the reader can also recognise as good, which is why the conflict is a conflict rather than a rout.



The contrast reveals nothing without the **shared** half. Name what the two have in common first, or the difference is just two descriptions

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

Conflict among characters often arises from tensions generated by their different value systems .

This is Unit 3's definition applied to relationships. Two characters in a long-running disagreement usually disagree about something prior to the argument they are having.

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

A setting may help establish the mood and atmosphere of a narrative.

Mood is the reader's feeling; atmosphere is the quality the text creates around events. Both are produced by selection - which details of a place the text mentions, and which it does not.

CONTEXT — it tells you what is normal here, so a departure can register

MIRROR — it carries the feeling the character will not state

CONSTRAINT — it limits what this character is able to do

ANTAGONIST — it is the thing being struggled against

The bottom row does **plot** work. A setting that constrains or opposes is not scenery, and saying so is a claim rather than a description

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

The environment a character inhabits provides information about that character.

This is a second route into character that avoids the trap of psychologising. A room described through its neglect, its order, or its borrowed furniture tells you about the person who lives there, and it is textual evidence rather than speculation.

How Plot Orders Events

Some patterns in dramatic situations are so common that they are considered **archetypes**, and these archetypes carry associations readers bring with them.

Use archetypes carefully: recognising one is a starting point, and the interesting analysis is almost always where a text **departs** from the pattern it invoked.

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

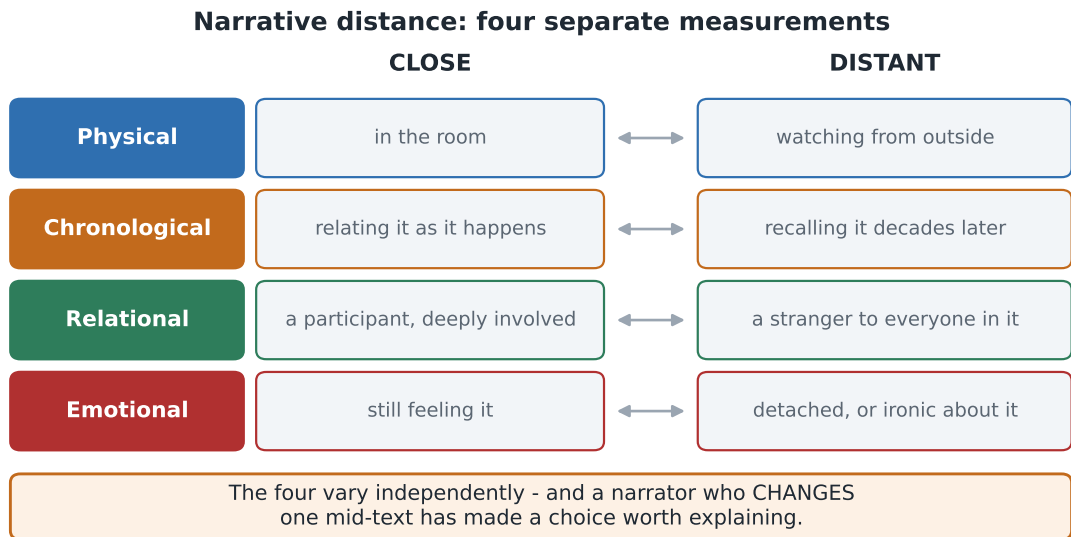
- The differences highlighted by a **contrast emphasise particular traits or characteristics** in the things contrasted.
- **Contrasts often represent conflicts in values** related to character, narrator, or speaker perspectives.

Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

Narrators may function as characters who directly address readers, and who either recall events or relate them as they occur.

That distinction - recalling versus relating as they occur - is the first axis of narrative distance below.

The Function of Point of View



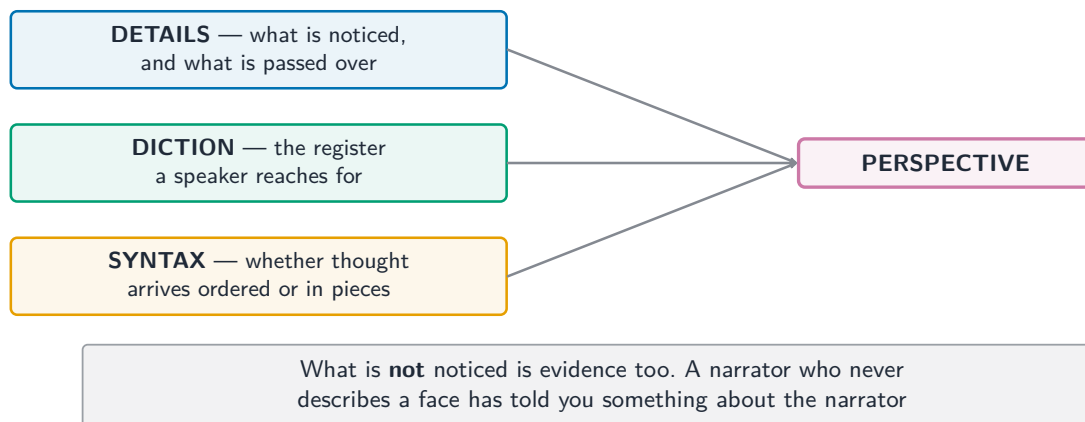
A narrator's position is not one fact but four, and any of them can be the analysis

- **Narrative distance** refers to the **physical distance, chronological distance, relationships, or emotional distance** between the narrator and the events or characters.
- **Stream of consciousness** is narration in which a character's thoughts are related through a continuous flow, often with little conventional ordering.

Narrative distance is the most powerful and least-used tool in this course. A narrator recounting their childhood forty years later is chronologically distant, and that distance supplies irony the child could not have had. Reduce the distance - a narrator relating events as they occur - and the irony vanishes, replaced by immediacy and unreliability.

Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

- Narrators' and characters' **backgrounds** and **perspectives** shape the tone they convey.
- **Descriptive words** not only qualify what they describe but **convey a perspective** toward it.
- **The attitude of a narrator or speaker toward an idea, character, or situation emerges** from these choices.



Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Unchanged: a thesis **expresses an interpretation** and requires textual defence; it **may** preview the line of reasoning.

Developing Commentary

- A **line of reasoning** is the logical sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary**.
- **Body paragraphs develop the reasoning and justify claims** using evidence.
- Effective paragraphs are **cohesive** and often use **topic sentences** to state a claim and explain the reasoning.

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Same four points as Unit 3: evidence used **strategically**; **effective** when commentary explains the relationship; **sufficient** in quantity and quality; and interpretation as a **recursive** process.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

Coherence occurs at different levels - within a sentence, between sentences, across the essay - and writers achieve it when the **arrangement of reasons, evidence, and details** makes the line of reasoning followable.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A prose fiction prompt asks how the author's narrative choices convey the narrator's attitude to a remembered event. A weak answer: *"The narrator is nostalgic and uses descriptive language."* A scoring answer uses narrative distance: *"The narrator relates a single afternoon from a distance of decades, and the distance is doing the work: he describes his own excitement in the third person - 'the boy ran' - before returning to 'I' for the disappointment. Choosing where to close the chronological gap lets him withhold sympathy from his younger self while claiming the loss as his own."* Distance, its variation, and the attitude it produces.

Exam tips

- **Choices reveal values.** Ask what must have been true for the choice to make sense to that character.
- An **antagonist is not a villain.** The strongest hold a value the reader can also recognise as good.
- **The environment tells you about the character** - and it is textual evidence, not speculation.
- Archetypes are a **starting point.** The analysis is where the text departs from the pattern.
- **Narrative distance** has four kinds - physical, chronological, relational, emotional. It is the most underused tool here.
- A narrator who **closes or opens the distance** mid-text has made a choice. Say what it produces.

Poetry II

AP English Literature and Composition

The Function of Structure in a Text

Unit 5 is the second poetry unit, and it does two things: it names the **forms** a poem can take, and it completes the figurative toolkit.

- **Closed forms** include **predictable patterns** in lines, stanzas, metre, and rhyme.
- **Open forms** may not follow expected or predictable patterns.
- **Structures combine in texts to emphasise certain ideas.**

The examinable question is never “which form is this?” but **what the form does**. In a closed form, the interesting moment is the departure - the line that runs long, the rhyme that fails to arrive. In an open form, the interesting moment is the imposition - the sudden regularity in a poem that has refused it.

Literal and Figurative Meaning

Words with multiple meanings or connotations add nuance or complexity that can contribute to interpretation.

In poetry, a word that could mean two things frequently means both. Resist choosing.

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

- **Descriptive words** qualify or modify what they describe **and affect** how the reader perceives it.
- **Hyperbole** exaggerates while **understatement** minimises. Exaggerating or minimising an aspect of a thing has an effect on how it is understood.

Understatement is the more powerful of the pair and the more often missed by second-language readers. A poem that describes a catastrophe as *inconvenient* is not being calm; the gap between the event and the word is the poem’s whole comment on it.

The Function of an Image or Imagery

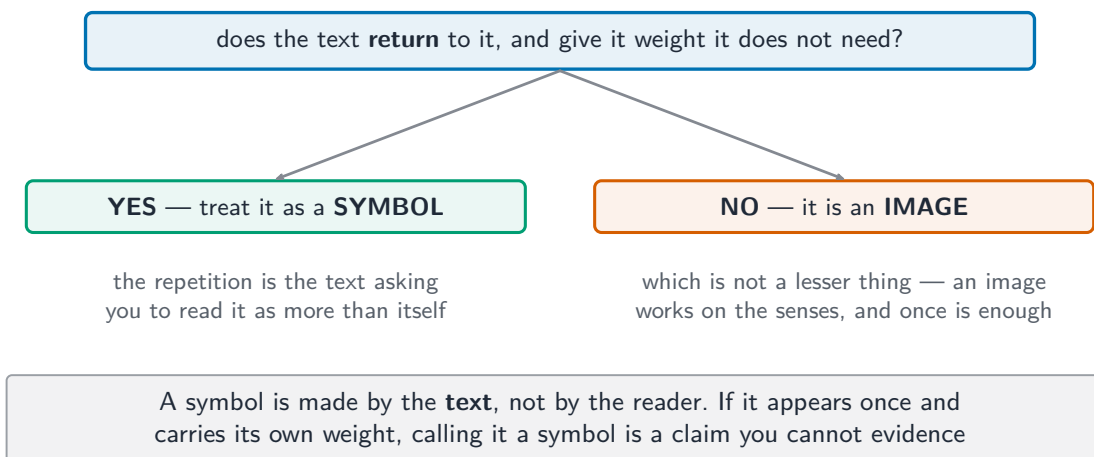
	What it is	What it DOES to the reader
Hyperbole	exaggerates	the gap between the thing and the word is the speaker's judgement of it
Understatement	minimises	calling a catastrophe "inconvenient" is not calm - it is comment
Imagery	a PATTERN of sensory images	a claim the poem makes without ever stating it
Extended metaphor	one comparison, sustained	if its terms CHANGE as it runs, that change is the argument
Personification	grants a human trait to a nonhuman thing	ask what granting it agency does - a wind that DECIDES is a claim
Allusion	imports meaning the poem never wrote	efficient, and risky: it works only for readers who recognise it

One device traced through a poem beats four devices named. The right-hand column is the half that scores.

Naming a device earns nothing. Saying what it does to the reader is the analysis

- Descriptive words **contribute to sensory imagery**.
- An **image** can be **literal**, or a form of comparison representing something through another thing.
- A **collection of images** - **imagery** - may **emphasise ideas** in parts of, or throughout, a text.

The plural matters. A single image is a detail; a *pattern* of images running through a poem is a claim the poem is making without stating it.



The Function of a Metaphor

- Metaphorical comparisons **do not focus solely on the objects compared**; they focus on the **particular qualities** the comparison brings out.
- Comparisons communicate **literal meaning** and may also convey **figurative meaning**.
- An **extended metaphor** is created when the comparison of a main subject and comparison subject **persists across a passage or a whole text**.
- Interpretation of an extended metaphor **may depend on the context of its use**.

An extended metaphor is the most rewarding thing to find in an unseen poem, because it gives you structure and meaning at once: you can trace how the comparison develops, and a comparison that *changes* as it extends is the poem’s argument in motion.

The Function of Personification

Personification is a type of comparison that **assigns a human trait or quality to a nonhuman object, animal, or idea**.

Treat it as a comparison with the same parts as any other: the main subject is the nonhuman thing, the comparison subject is a person, and the transferred quality is the human trait. Then ask the useful question - **what does granting this thing agency do?** A wind that *decides* is not the same claim as a wind that blows.

WHAT IT DOES	HOW IT DOES IT	WHAT TO SAY ABOUT IT
gives a thing INTENTION	it now acts, rather than merely happening	who or what is being blamed
makes a setting FEEL	the landscape carries the mood a character withholds	whose feeling this actually is
makes an abstraction ACT	time, death or fear becomes something you could meet	what the abstraction is made to want
sets the scale	a small thing given a will can dominate a passage	what has been made large, and what small

“It brings the object to life” is the **definition**. The third column is the commentary, and it is different every time

The Function of an Allusion

Allusions may reference **literary works including myths and sacred texts, other works of art, and historical events.**

An allusion imports meaning the poem has not written. That is its efficiency and its risk: it works only for readers who recognise it. When you meet one you do not know, say what the poem does with it structurally - where it is placed, what it interrupts - rather than pretending to a recognition you lack.



An allusion also **costs** something: it only works on a reader who knows the source, and choosing it says who the text expects to be read by

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Unchanged: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence, which **may** preview the line of reasoning.

Developing Commentary

A **line of reasoning** is the logical sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary** explaining the relationship between evidence and claim.

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Evidence used **strategically**, **effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, and interpretation as a **recursive** process.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

Transitional elements - words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or paragraphs - **assist in creating coherence**.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the poet's use of figurative language conveys the speaker's attitude. A weak answer catalogues: *"The poet uses personification, imagery, and a metaphor."* A scoring answer traces one device developing: *"The extended comparison of the tide to a creditor runs the length of the poem, but the terms change: in the first stanza it 'asks', by the third it 'takes what was always owed'. The comparison subject stays constant while the speaker's account of the relationship hardens - so the attitude the poem conveys is not fear of loss but the recognition that the loss was never hers to prevent."* One device, traced, with the attitude it produces.

Exam tips

- Never ask "which form is this?" Ask **what the form does** - and look for the departure or the imposition.
- A word with **two meanings often means both**. Do not choose prematurely.
- **Understatement** is the more powerful half of the pair, and the more often missed. The gap is the comment.
- A **pattern of images** is a claim the poem makes without stating it. A single image is only a detail.
- An **extended metaphor** that changes as it extends is the poem's argument in motion. Trace it.
- Cataloguing devices earns nothing. **One device traced** beats four devices named.

Longer Fiction or Drama II

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 6 is the second longer-fiction-or-drama unit and it adds the two most sophisticated tools in the course: **narrator reliability** and the **symbol**.

Different character, narrator, or speaker perspectives often reveal different information and develop different interpretations of the same events.

In a long work with several perspectives, the discrepancies between them are not a problem to reconcile. They are the text's method.

The Function of Contrasting Characters

Foil characters serve to **illuminate, through contrast, the traits, attributes, or values** of another character.

A foil is not an antagonist. A foil may be an ally, a sibling, a friend - what makes them a foil is that they are similar enough for the difference to be visible. The useful question is always: *what does this character have that the protagonist lacks, and what does the text do with that gap?*

Choices, Actions, and Speech Reveal Complexity

- Inconsistencies between the private thoughts of characters and their actual behaviour reveal tensions
- A character's **competing, conflicting, or inconsistent choices** contribute to **complexity**

This is where AP Literature parts company with simpler reading. Inconsistency is not a flaw in a character; it is the evidence that the character has an interior. A character who always acts on what they think is a position, not a person.

SAYS ONE THING, DOES ANOTHER
— and the gap is not explained away

WANTS TWO INCOMPATIBLE THINGS — and cannot give up either

PAYS A COST for the choice,
and the text lets you see it

CHANGES THEIR MIND —
and the reader is shown why

Each of these is **quotable**. “The character is complex” asserts what these four demonstrate, and the rubric marks the demonstration

How Plot Orders Events

Some narrative structures **interrupt the chronology** of a plot: **flashback**, **foreshadowing**, and **in medias res**.

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Those interrupting structures **affect the reader’s experience** of the narrative - what is known when, and therefore what is felt when.

The analytical move is always to ask **what the reader knows at that moment**. Foreshadowing gives the reader knowledge the characters lack, which converts suspense into dread. A flashback withholds until a later point, so the earlier scenes are read twice - once in ignorance and once in retrospect.

THE DEVICE	WHAT IT DOES TO ORDER	WHAT THE READER DOES
FLASHBACK	an earlier event arrives late	re-reads what they already know in its light
FORESHADOWING	a later event is signalled early	watches for it, and reads the interval as delay
IN MEDIAS RES	the beginning is withheld	assembles the cause while following the effect
A WITHHELD FACT	one thing is kept back to the end	revalues every scene it was absent from

Answer in the **third** column. A sequence question is about what a reader knows and when, not about the order of events

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

Contrasts often represent contradictions or inconsistencies that introduce nuance, ambiguity, or contradictory interpretations .

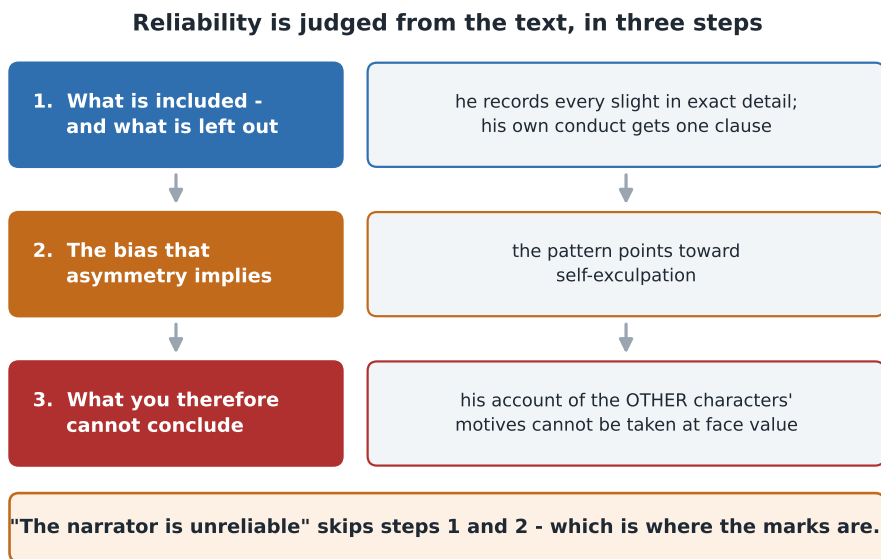
Note the last phrase. The CED explicitly permits a text to support more than one reading. An essay that acknowledges a competing interpretation and shows why its own is better is doing exactly what the sophistication point rewards.

Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

- A narrator’s or speaker’s **tone toward events or characters influences readers’ interpretations**.

- The **syntactical arrangement** of phrases and clauses can **emphasise details or ideas**.
- **Information included and not included** conveys the perspective of characters and narrators.
- A narrator's perspective **may influence the details and the amount of detail** in a text.

How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative



*Bias is inferred from what is included and omitted. Detected bias reduces reliability.
Reduced reliability changes what you can conclude about motive*

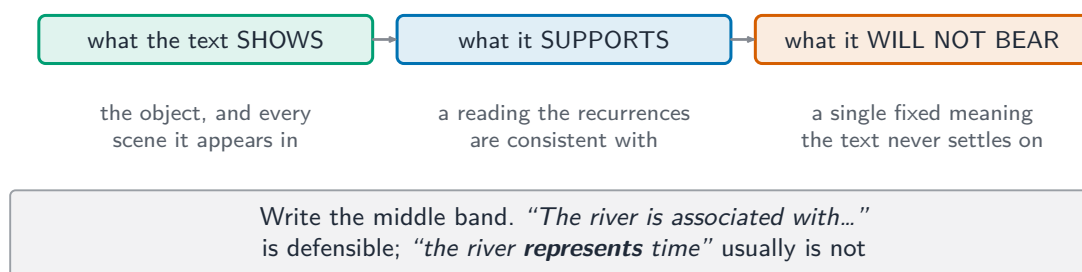
- Readers can infer narrators' biases by noting **which details they choose to include** and which they omit.
- Readers who detect bias in a narrator may find that narrator less reliable
- The reliability of a narrator may influence a reader's understanding of a character's motives.

The CED gives this as a chain, and reproducing the chain is what makes an answer analytical rather than impressionistic. You do not assert that a narrator is unreliable; you show the pattern of inclusion and omission, name the bias it implies, and then say what that bias prevents you from concluding.

The Function of a Symbol

- When a **material object** comes to represent an idea or concept, it becomes a **symbol**.
- When a **character** comes to represent an idea, that character becomes **symbolic**.
- A symbol is an object that **represents a meaning**, so it is said to be symbolic or representative of that meaning.
- **Certain symbols are so common and recurrent** that readers bring associations to them before reading.

The last point is a warning. A conventional symbol arrives with meanings attached, and the text may be using them, refusing them, or inverting them. Check what the text does before importing the convention.



Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

Unchanged from Units 3-5: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence; a **line of reasoning** of claims communicated through **commentary**; evidence used **strategically**, **effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, developed **recursively**.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

- Writers convey ideas through the **strategic selection and placement of phrases and clauses**.
- Writers use **words that enhance the clear communication of an interpretation**.
- **Punctuation conveys relationships** between parts of a sentence.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Question 3 literary-argument prompt asks how an unreliable narrator contributes to an interpretation of a work as a whole.

A weak answer asserts: *“The narrator is unreliable because he lies.”* A scoring answer runs the CED’s chain: *“The narrator records every slight he received in exact detail and summarises his own conduct in a clause - ‘there was an argument, and I left’. The asymmetry of detail implies a bias toward self-exculpation, which means his account of the other characters’ motives cannot be taken at face value. The novel therefore asks the reader to reconstruct a story the narrator is committed to not telling, and its subject is less the events than his need to arrange them.”* Inclusion and omission, the bias inferred, and what that bias prevents.

Exam tips

- Discrepancies between perspectives are **the method**, not a problem to reconcile.
- A **foil** is similar enough for the difference to show. Ask what they have that the protagonist lacks.
- **Inconsistency is evidence of an interior.** A perfectly consistent character is a position, not a person.
- For any structural interruption, ask **what the reader knows at that moment.** That is the effect.
- Reliability is a **chain**: inclusion and omission, then bias, then what you cannot conclude. Show all three.
- With a **conventional symbol**, check whether the text uses, refuses, or inverts the association before importing it.

Short Fiction III

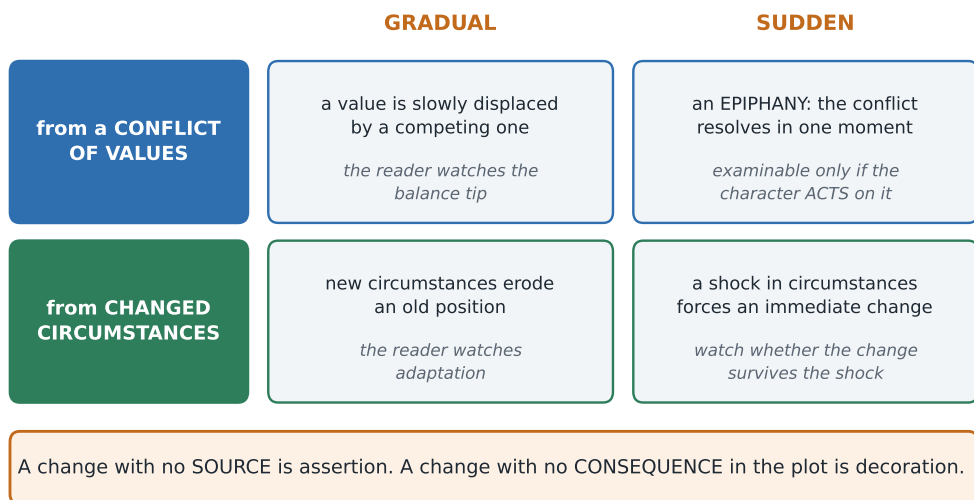
AP English Literature and Composition

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Unit 7 is the last short-fiction unit, and it sharpens two things: **how change happens** in a character, and **pacing** as a deliberate manipulation of time.

- Often the change in a character **emerges directly from a conflict of values** represented in the narrative.
- **Changes in a character's circumstances** may lead to changes in that character.
- Characters can change **gradually**, but they can also change **suddenly**.
- An **epiphany** may affect the plot by causing a character to **act on a sudden realisation**.

Two independent questions about any change in a character



A change with no source is assertion; a change with no consequence in the plot is decoration

The two axes are independent, which is what makes them useful. A change caused by a conflict of values can arrive gradually or in an instant, and an epiphany is only examinable when the character **acts** on it - a realisation that changes nothing has not affected the plot.

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

- A group or force can function as a character .
- Readers should examine how a character interacts with other characters.
- The relationship between a character and a group - including their inclusion in or exclusion from it - is significant.

The group-as-character idea is worth taking literally. A town, a family, an institution can hold values, exert pressure, and oppose a protagonist exactly as an individual antagonist would, and reading it that way often unlocks a story with no obvious opponent.

WHAT TO WATCH	EARLY IN THE TEXT	LATER
who speaks first	one of them always begins	the initiative has moved, or nobody begins
how they are addressed	a name, a title, an endearment	the same person, named differently
what is said aloud	the disagreement is spoken	it is understood and not mentioned
physical distance	where each is placed in a room	the same room, arranged differently

A shift is shown by **the same thing measured twice**. Two quotations of the same kind, far apart, are worth more than any adjective

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

- When a setting changes, it may suggest other movements, changes, or shifts in the narrative.
- Settings may be contrasted to establish a conflict of values or ideas associated with them.

Two settings placed against each other are rarely just two places. They usually carry the competing value systems the plot is testing.

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

- The way characters **interact with their surroundings** provides insights about them.
- The way characters **behave in or describe** their surroundings **reveals an attitude** toward those surroundings.

How Plot Orders Events

Pacing is the **manipulation of time in a text**, and several factors contribute to it - the length given to an event, the compression of long periods, the interruption of chronology.

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Narrative pacing may evoke an emotional reaction in readers by the order in which information is revealed.

Pacing is measurable and therefore very usable as evidence. Count the pages a text gives to an afternoon and to the following decade, and the disproportion is a claim about what mattered.

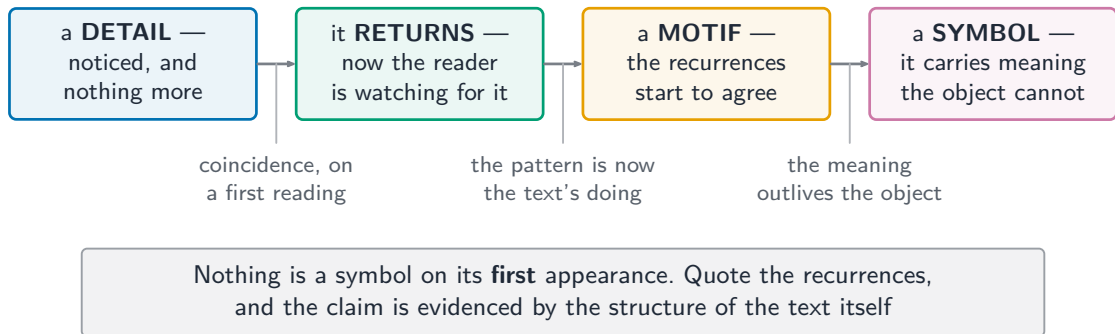
How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative

Some narrators or speakers may provide details and information that others do not or cannot provide.

Compare narrators where a text offers more than one. What one can say and another cannot is the clearest possible evidence of how the text is constructed.

The Function of a Symbol

- A **setting may become symbolic** when it is associated with abstractions - emotions, ideas, times of life.
- **Over time, some settings have developed associations** so strong that they almost universally symbolise something.



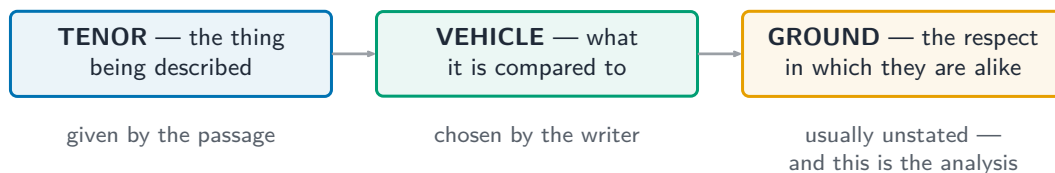
The Function of an Image or Imagery

A **motif** is a **unified pattern of recurring objects or images** used to emphasise a significant idea.

A motif differs from a symbol in that it need not stand for one thing. It accumulates: each recurrence adds to what the pattern means, which is why noting the *first* and *last* appearance is usually more productive than listing them all.

The Function of a Simile

The function of a simile relies on the selection of the objects being compared as well as the traits transferred. Both halves are choices, and both can be analysed.



the letter lay on the table like a summons — the ground is not “paper”, it is **something you cannot refuse**

Name the **ground**. A vehicle carries many possible likenesses, and saying which one is operating is the whole of the commentary

The Function of Personification

The CED adds the reverse move here: **assigning the qualities of a nonhuman object, entity, or idea to a person or character** - describing a person as mechanical, as weather, as an animal.

This is worth watching for, because it usually indicates a judgement. A character described in the vocabulary of machinery has been characterised, and by someone.

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- Unchanged: a thesis expresses an **interpretation** requiring textual defence.
- New: **more sophisticated literary arguments may explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation** - why this reading matters, not only that it is supportable. This is the sophistication point stated directly.
- New: **textual evidence may require revision to an interpretation** if the evidence does not support it.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A prose fiction prompt asks how the author’s use of pacing conveys the significance of an event. A weak answer: *“The story slows down at the important part.”* A scoring answer measures and interprets: *“The story gives four pages to a conversation lasting minutes and a single sentence*

to the three years that follow. The disproportion refuses the reader the consolation of aftermath: we are held in the moment of the decision and then denied any account of whether it was right, so the story's subject becomes the irreversibility of the choice rather than its consequences." Pacing measured, and its effect on what the reader is allowed to know.

Exam tips

- A change needs a **source** (a conflict of values, or changed circumstances) and a **consequence** in the plot.
- An **epiphany** is examinable when the character **acts** on it. A realisation that changes nothing is decoration.
- **A group can function as a character.** Try it on any story with no obvious antagonist.
- **Two contrasted settings** usually carry the competing values the plot is testing.
- **Pacing is measurable.** Count what gets space and what gets a clause; the disproportion is a claim.
- For a **motif**, compare the **first and last** appearance rather than listing every one.

Poetry III

AP English Literature and Composition

The Function of Structure in a Text

Unit 8 is the last poetry unit and it handles the hardest material in the course: the family of devices built on **contradiction**.

- **Ideas and images in a poem may extend beyond a single line or stanza**
- **Punctuation is often crucial** to understanding a text.
- **When structural patterns are created, any interruption in the pattern creates a point of emphasis**

That third statement is the most efficient reading tool in the course. Establish what the poem has been doing, then find the moment it stops doing it. That moment is where the poem points.

Punctuation deserves the emphasis it gets. In a poem, a semicolon and a full stop are different claims about how tightly two statements are joined, and a poem without punctuation has made a decision about how you must read it.

A CONJUNCTION — *but, yet, and still*, at the head of a line

A CHANGE OF TENSE
— the poem moves in time

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS —
it starts speaking to someone

A CHANGE OF SCALE — the
particular becomes general, or the reverse

The turn is where the poem stops doing one thing and starts another.
Find it from the **signal**, and the structure question answers itself

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

What happens to the contradiction? That is the separating question		
ANTITHESIS	IRONY	PARADOX
two opposites placed side by side	a mismatch between what is expected and what is	a contradiction that survives inspection
both remain true in their own terms	someone is aware of the gap	the contradiction IS the truth, not an error
"the harvest, and the emptied village"	"a generous year" - after we have seen the cost	"the fuller the barn, the fewer to eat from it"

Calling all three "irony" is the commonest lost mark in this unit.

Antithesis sets opposites side by side. Irony is a mismatch. A paradox contradicts and is still true

- **Juxtaposition** may create or demonstrate an **antithesis** .
- **Situational or verbal irony** is created when events or statements are **inconsistent with what is expected**.
- **Paradox** occurs when seemingly contradictory elements are juxtaposed, but the contradiction - which may be at odds with ordinary logic - reveals a deeper truth.

The distinction matters and students routinely collapse it. An **antithesis** places two opposed things together, and both remain true in their own terms. An **irony** is a gap between the expected and the actual - and someone, the writer or the reader, is aware of the gap. A **paradox** looks like a contradiction and survives inspection: the contradiction is the point, not an error.

The Function of Specific Words and Phrases

Ambiguity allows for different readings and understandings of a text by different readers .

In this course, ambiguity is a resource. An essay that identifies a genuinely ambiguous element, explores both readings, and then argues for one is doing exactly what the

sophistication point rewards - far more than an essay that pretends the text is simpler than it is.

AMBIGUITY — in the text

two readings, and the text supports both
you can quote for each
the tension between them is the point

VAGUENESS — in the reading

one reading, not yet worked out
“this could symbolise many things”
no quotation would settle it either way

Claiming ambiguity is a **commitment** to show both readings.
Without the two quotations it reads as the essay declining to decide

The Function of a Symbol

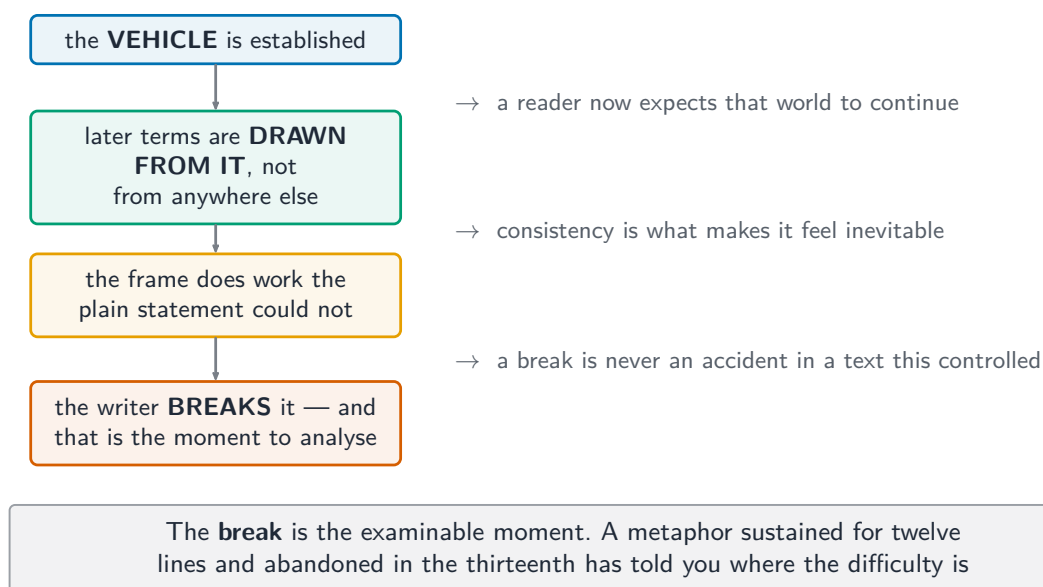
Symbols in a text, and the way they are used, may imply that a narrator, character, or speaker has a particular perspective.

A symbol is not free-floating. Someone in the text is treating that object as meaningful, and asking *who* attaches this meaning is often more productive than asking what the meaning is.

The Function of a Metaphor

- A **conceit** is a form of **extended metaphor**, common in poetry, developing **complex comparisons**.
- Conceits are often used to make **complex comparisons between the natural world and an individual**.
- **Multiple comparisons, representations, or associations may combine to affect one another** in complex ways.

A conceit is an extended metaphor that has been pushed further than seems reasonable, and the strain is deliberate. When analysing one, follow how far the poet takes the comparison and where it starts to resist - the resistance is usually the poem's real subject.



The Function of an Allusion

Because of **shared knowledge about a reference**, allusions create **emotional or intellectual associations** in readers who recognise them.

Note the condition: *shared knowledge*. An allusion is a bet on the reader's memory, and a poem that alludes heavily has chosen its audience.

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- A thesis expresses an **interpretation** requiring textual defence.
- **More sophisticated literary arguments explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation** - the sophistication point, stated by the CED.
- Evidence: **strategic, effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, developed **recursively**.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

Writers must acknowledge the words, ideas, images, texts, and intellectual property of others through attribution and citation .

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A poetry-analysis prompt asks how the poet's use of contrast conveys a complex attitude. A weak answer calls everything irony. A scoring answer separates the devices: *"The poem places the harvest against the emptied village - an antithesis, in which both are simply true. But the speaker calls the year 'generous', and the surrounding stanzas have shown what the generosity cost; that mismatch is verbal irony. The final line is neither: 'the fuller the barn, the fewer to eat from it' is a paradox, and it is the only statement the poem does not undercut - the contradiction is exactly the truth the speaker has arrived at."* Three devices, correctly distinguished, and an interpretation that needs all three.

Exam tips

- **Establish the pattern, then find the interruption.** The interruption is where the poem points.
- **Punctuation is a claim** about how tightly statements are joined. A poem without it has made a decision too.
- **Antithesis, irony, paradox are not synonyms.** Learn the three definitions precisely; conflating them costs marks.
- **Ambiguity is a resource.** Explore both readings, then argue for one. That is the sophistication point.
- Ask **who attaches the meaning** to a symbol. It is usually more productive than asking what it means.
- A **conceit** is a comparison pushed past comfort. Follow it to where it resists - that is the subject.

Longer Fiction or Drama III

AP English Literature and Composition

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Unit 9 is the final unit, and its subject is **how texts end** - and what an ending lets a reader conclude about the whole work.

- **Minor characters often remain unchanged** because the narrative does not focus on them; they may serve other functions.
- **Readers' interpretations are often affected by a character changing - or not - and by the nature of that change.**

The second is the interpretive move the whole course has been building toward. Whether a character changes is not a fact to report; it is the ground on which a reading of the work stands.

Choices, Actions, and Speech Reveal Complexity

- **A character's responses to the resolution of the narrative** - in words or in actions - are revealing.
- **Inconsistencies and unexpected developments in a character affect readers' interpretations.**

How a character behaves *after* the crisis is resolved is often the most compressed evidence in a text, and it is almost always overlooked, because by then the reader is finishing.

Significant Events in a Plot

- **Significant events often illustrate competing value systems** related to a conflict in the text.
- **Events collide and accumulate to create anticipation and suspense**

Note *accumulate*. Suspense is not produced by a single event but by a series that narrows what can still happen.

The Function of Conflict in a Text

Three things to establish about any ending		
1. The denouement	the resolution of the anticipation, suspense, or central conflicts	<i>what was settled - and for whom</i>
2. What is never shown	an unseen character, an action that preceded the first page	<i>the least-used evidence in the course, and often the strongest</i>
3. Whether it resolves at all	some plots have unresolved endings	<i>an unresolved ending is a CHOICE, not a failure to finish</i>
Question 3 asks for "an interpretation of the work as a WHOLE" - and an ending is how the parts add up.		

What was resolved, what was never shown, and whether the text resolves at all

- The resolution of the anticipation, suspense, or central conflicts of a plot may be called the **denouement** .
- **Sometimes things not actually shown** in a narrative - an **unseen character**, a **preceding action** - **affect the interpretation** of what is shown.
- **Although most plots end in resolution, some have unresolved endings** , and those affect interpretation too.

The middle point is the least used and often the most powerful. What a text keeps offstage - a death that happened before the first page, a character who is discussed and never appears - shapes everything the reader is shown, and is textual evidence like any other.

RESOLVED	UNRESOLVED	DISSOLVED
one side gives way, and the text says so	the conflict stands, and the text ends anyway	what was at stake stops mattering to the characters
The second and third are not failures of plot. A text that refuses to resolve is making a claim about the kind of problem it has shown you		
Say which of the three you have, and why the text chose it. "In the end everything is resolved" is the reading that fits fewest texts		

Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

- **Multiple, and even contrasting, perspectives can occur within a single text** and contribute to its complexity.
- **A narrator or speaker may change over the course of a text** as a result of actions and interactions.
- **Changes and inconsistencies in a narrator's or speaker's perspective may contribute to irony** or to a reader's judgement of reliability.

A narrator who changes is doubly analysable: as a character who developed, and as a lens that altered. When the lens changes, everything seen through it before is retrospectively re-lit.

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

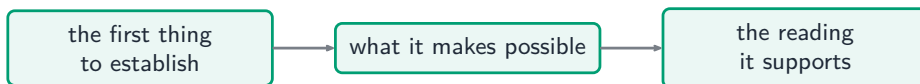
Unchanged: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence, which **may** preview the line of reasoning. At this stage, the thesis you are aiming for is one that could not be written before reading the whole work - a claim about how the parts add up.

ORDERED BY THE TEXT



evidence for the top row comes in page order, which is what makes it retelling

ORDERED BY YOUR CLAIMS



The bottom row may take all three quotations from the last page. Order by **claim**, and summary becomes structurally difficult

Developing Commentary

- A **line of reasoning** is the sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary**.
- **More sophisticated literary arguments explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation.**

For the Question 3 literary argument in particular, the phrase in the prompt is almost always “*an interpretation of the work as a whole*”. That phrase is a requirement: your

claim must be about the whole, and the passage or character you analyse must be shown to bear on it.

THE HABIT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TURN IT INTO
SUMMARY	<i>"Then she leaves and the house is sold."</i>	what the ORDER of those two facts does
DEVICE-SPOTTING	<i>"The poet uses a simile here."</i>	what the ground of the comparison commits to
BIOGRAPHY	<i>"The author had lost her own home."</i>	what the narrator's account keeps returning to
FEELING REPORTED	<i>"This makes the reader feel sad."</i>	the words that would produce it, quoted

Every row on the right is a **revision** of the sentence on the left — none of them requires new evidence, only a different question asked of it

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Evidence used **strategically**; **effective** with commentary; **sufficient** in quantity and quality; and interpretation developed **recursively**, revised when the evidence does not support it.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). A Question 3 prompt asks you to select a work in which a character's response to the resolution contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. A weak answer describes the ending. A scoring answer uses the unresolved ending and the offstage: *"The novel refuses a denouement: the trial's verdict is never given, and the brother whose death set the plot in motion never appears. What we are shown instead is the protagonist returning to work the following Monday. Because the text withholds both the verdict and the origin, that ordinary Monday becomes the only available measure of what has happened - and the interpretation the novel supports is that the loss was never going to be settled by an outcome, only absorbed."* An unresolved ending, an offstage cause, and a claim about the whole.

Exam tips

- Whether a character changes is **the ground of a reading**, not a fact to report.
- **How a character behaves after the crisis** is compressed evidence, and almost always overlooked.
- Suspense **accumulates**. It comes from a series that narrows what can still happen, not from one event.
- **What is never shown** - an unseen character, a prior action - is textual evidence. Use it.
- An **unresolved ending** is a choice with meaning, not a failure to finish.
- Question 3 asks for “**the work as a whole**”. That is a requirement, and it is where most answers fall short.