# The Simple AP® English Language Claims and Evidence Cheat Sheet



## 3.A / 4.A Claims

### What a Claim Is

**Claim**: a statement that needs evidence to defend it; a reasonable person could disagree.

**Thesis** = the main claim; **subclaims** (topic sentences) each prove 1 part of it.

### Types of Claims

| Type | Asks | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Fact | Is it so? | Phones ↓ focus |
| Definition | What is it? | Graffiti = art |
| Cause | Why? | Ads drive debt |
| Value | Good/bad? | Zoos are cruel |
| Policy | What to do? | Ban leaf blowers |

**Implied claim**: satire, irony or a story may never state the claim; infer it from the writer's choices.

### Find the Claim

**Look for**: should, must, therefore, clearly, in short, the truth is, rhetorical questions.

**Location**: often the 1st or last paragraph, or right after a turn word (But, Yet, Still) where it pivots.

**Test**: ask "What does the writer want me to believe or do?" Answer in 1 sentence = the claim.

**Claim vs. evidence**: the claim is the point; evidence is the proof that backs it up.

⚠ Topic ≠ claim. "Social media" is a topic; "Social media weakens friendships" is a claim.

✓ Predict the claim in your own words before you read the answer choices on MCQs.

## 3.A Evidence Types

### Evidence Supports a Claim

**Evidence**: facts, data, examples & testimony that make a claim believable to readers.

| Type | Best for | Risk |
|---|---|---|
| Statistics | Scale, trends | Cherry-picked |
| Expert opinion | Authority | Bias, outdated |
| Anecdote | Emotion, face | 1 case ≠ rule |
| Example | Concrete proof | Too narrow |
| Analogy | New ideas | False match |
| Personal exp. | Ethos, voice | Not general |

### What Evidence Does

**Functions**: evidence can illustrate, clarify, set a mood, give an example or amplify a point.

**Illustrate**: make an abstract idea concrete.
**Amplify**: stack examples to show size.

### Mixing Types

**Best mix**: a statistic (scale) + an anecdote (human face) → logic & emotion at once.

**Match the audience**: experts want data & sources; a general audience trusts vivid, relatable cases.
**Associate**: link the claim to a value or hero the audience already respects (allusion, analogy).
**Qualitative vs. quantitative**: stories & quotes show human impact; numbers show scale & frequency.

⚠ An anecdote proves only that 1 case happened, not that a general trend is real.

✓ On MCQs, name the evidence type AND its job: "The statistic shows the scale of..."

## 4.A Choosing & Using Evidence

### Strong Evidence Is...

| Test | Ask |
|---|---|
| Relevant | Does it prove THIS claim? |
| Sufficient | Enough to convince? |
| Credible | Who says so? Expert? |
| Recent | Still true now? |
| Representative | Typical, not outlier? |

**Relevance** beats impressiveness: a vivid fact that proves a different point hurts you.

### Source Credibility

**Check**: author's expertise, publisher, date, purpose & bias (who benefits?).

### Integrating Evidence

**Sandwich**: set up the source → quote or paraphrase → explain what it means.
**Paraphrase** data & long passages; quote only memorable words you plan to analyze afterward.

### Writing MCQs

**Stem**: "Which choice provides the most effective evidence to support the claim...?"
**Method**: restate the claim, then pick the choice that proves exactly that claim, no more, no less.
**Bias ≠ useless**: a biased source still shows what 1 side believes; name the bias when you use it.

⚠ The most dramatic choice is a trap if it supports a nearby idea instead.

✓ Match key words: claim says "cost" → right evidence names money, not safety.

## 4.A Commentary

### What Commentary Does

**Commentary**: explains how the evidence proves the claim & why it matters (the link).

**Ratio**: ≈ 2 sentences of commentary per quote or fact; the analysis earns the points, not the quotes.

### Weak vs. Strong Commentary

| Weak | Strong |
|---|---|
| Restates the quote | Explains its effect |
| "This shows that..." | "By calling X Y, she..." |
| Summarizes plot | Links to the claim |
| Vague ("powerful") | Names the effect |
| Ends at evidence | Ends at so-what |

### Build It

**Template**: "This [evidence] reveals ___ because ___, which proves [claim] for [audience]."

**Ask why**: Why this example? Why this word? Each answer = 1 commentary sentence.

**So what?**: end each paragraph by linking the point back to the thesis or a larger stake for readers.

**Analysis verbs**: reveals, exposes, underscores, reframes, complicates, implies, challenges.

**Avoid** vague praise ("powerful," "effective," "impactful") w/o saying HOW it works on readers.

⚠ "This quote shows that..." + a restatement of the quote = summary, not commentary.

✓ FRQ Row B rewards commentary that explains how evidence builds your line of reasoning.

## 3.B / 4.B Thesis Statements

### A Strong Thesis

**Thesis**: your main claim; it must be defensible & answer the prompt's question directly.

**May preview** your reasons: "Because X, Y & Z, the town should..." maps the essay.

| Weak thesis | Why it fails |
|---|---|
| Restates prompt | No position taken |
| Plain fact | Nothing to defend |
| "Uses ethos, pathos..." | List, no purpose |
| Too broad | Can't prove in 40 min |

### Open vs. Closed

**Closed**: lists your reasons (clear map, fixed order).
**Open**: states the claim only (more flexible).

### Thesis by Essay

**Synthesis**: take a position on the issue the sources discuss; don't just summarize what they say.
**Rhetorical analysis**: name the writer's choices AND their purpose for the audience.
**Argument**: take a clear position on the prompt's claim; qualifying it ("only when...") is allowed.
**Ex**: "Schools should start after 8:30 a.m. b/c teens' sleep cycles shift later, not b/c they're lazy."
**Placement**: put it early in your essay, usually at the end of the intro paragraph, in 1–2 sentences.

⚠ Row A = 0 or 1 point. A thesis that only restates the prompt or summarizes earns 0.

✓ Could a smart person argue the opposite? If yes, your thesis is defensible. If no, revise it.

## 3.C / 4.C Qualifying Claims

### Qualify w/ Modifiers

**Qualifier**: a word or phrase that limits a claim's scope so it's accurate & harder to attack.

| Absolute | Qualified |
|---|---|
| always | often, usually |
| all | most, many, some |
| never | rarely, seldom |
| proves | suggests, indicates |
| will | may, might, could |
| everyone | most students |

**Conditions**: unless, when, if, only if, in most cases; each one names a limit on the claim's reach.

### Counterarguments

**Counterargument**: an opposing view a fair reader might hold; raising it builds trust.
**Concede**: grant what's true ("Admittedly, bans are costly"). **Refute**: show why your claim still holds.

### Signal Words

**Concession cues**: granted, admittedly, of course, while it is true, some argue, critics claim.
**Rebuttal cues**: however, yet, still, even so; the writer's own view usually follows.
**Ex**: "Most cities should..." beats "All cities must..."

⚠ Don't over-hedge ("maybe, perhaps, in some ways"); qualify once, precisely.

✓ Concede a strong objection, then refute it; it shows the complex thinking readers reward.

## Claims & Evidence on the MCQ

### Reading Questions

**Weight**: Claims & Evidence = reading 13–16% + writing 11–14% of the 45 MCQs on the exam.

| Stem says | You do |
|---|---|
| "main claim" | Predict 1-sentence claim |
| "serves to" / "function" | Name evidence's job |
| "primarily to" | Purpose of the part |
| "qualifies" | Find the limit word |
| "assumption" | Unstated belief |

**Function Qs**: ask what the example DOES (illustrate, concede, contrast), not what it says.

### Writing Questions

**Revision stems**: add, keep or delete a sentence; pick the best evidence; pick the best qualifier.
**Keep/delete**: keep a sentence if it supports the paragraph's claim; delete it if it drifts off topic.

### Elimination

**Cut** choices that are too broad, too extreme (always, never) or off the stem's goal.
**Mark as you read**: C = claim, E = evidence, Q = concession, in the margin of reading passages.
**Assumption**: the unstated belief a claim needs to be true; if it's false, the argument fails.

⚠ A choice can quote the passage word for word & still name the wrong function.

✓ Underline the stem's goal (claim, evidence or qualify) & reject choices that serve another goal.

## Claims & Evidence on the FRQs

### Rubric Rows (all 3 essays)

| Row | Points | Rewards |
|---|---|---|
| A: Thesis | 0–1 | Defensible claim |
| B: Evidence & Commentary | 0–4 | Support + analysis |
| C: Sophistication | 0–1 | Complex thinking |

**Row B, 4 pts**: specific evidence for every claim + commentary that explains your reasoning.

### Evidence by Essay

**Synthesis (Q1)**: use 3+ of the sources; cite each (Source A) & explain it, not just quote it.
**Rhetorical analysis (Q2)**: quotes from the passage that show the writer's choices.
**Argument (Q3)**: your own examples: history, current events, books, science, life.
**Specific beats general**: name the event, place, date or person ("the 2010 Gulf oil spill").

### Sophistication (Row C)

**Earn it**: explain tensions or complexities, or put the issue in a broader context, w/ nuance.
**Time**: ≈ 40 min per essay; plan your claims & evidence for 5 min before you write anything.
**Rhetorical analysis tip**: quote short phrases, not whole sentences, then analyze the words.

⚠ A quote w/o any explanation (a "plop quote") keeps your Row B score low, however good it is.

✓ Each paragraph: claim → evidence → 2+ sentences of commentary → link to thesis.