The Simple AP® English Language Reasoning and Organization Cheat Sheet

5.A Line of Reasoning

What It Is

Line of reasoning: the order of claims & evidence that leads a reader step by step to the thesis.

Commentary is the glue: it explains how each piece of evidence moves the argument forward.

Trace It in a Passage

Map it: jot 3–5 words per paragraph in the margin (claim, example, concession, call to act).

Ask: what does this paragraph add? Why does it come here and not earlier in the text?

Paragraph job	Signal
Set up problem	Background, stats
Make a claim	should, must
Give support	for example, data
Concede	granted, some say
Rebut	however, yet
Conclude	thus, therefore

Does It Support the Thesis?

Strong line: every paragraph serves the thesis & the order builds toward the strongest point.

Weak line: gaps, repeated points or evidence that doesn't connect to the claim it sits under.

Momentum: each step should raise the stakes.

⚠ A list of 3 examples w/o explanation is not a line of reasoning; show the links.

✓ "The function of paragraph 4 is to..." → name its job in the argument, not its topic.

5.A Types of Reasoning & Flaws

Inductive vs. Deductive

Type	Moves	Example
Inductive	Specific → general	3 towns → trend
Deductive	General → specific	All X; this is X
Causal	Cause → effect	Ads → debt
Analogical	Like case → like	Lungs like filter

Inductive: examples → conclusion; it's only as strong as the number & quality of examples.

Deductive: starts from a principle the audience accepts, then applies it to this case.

Flaws in Reasoning

Fallacy	What goes wrong
Hasty generalization	Too few cases
Post hoc	After ≠ because
False analogy	Cases not alike
Slippery slope	Unproven chain
Either/or	Ignores options
Ad hominem	Attacks person
Straw man	Distorts opponent

Test: is there enough evidence? Are the cases truly alike? Is there another cause?

Ex: "Crime fell after the curfew, so it worked" = post hoc; other causes may explain it.

⚠ Don't just name a fallacy; explain how the flaw weakens the writer's specific claim.

✓ Pointing out a flaw in a synthesis source, w/ commentary, shows complex thinking.

5.B Organization Patterns

Common Structures

Pattern	Best for
Chronological	History, narratives
Order of importance	Build to strongest
Problem → solution	Policy claims
Compare & contrast	Weighing options
Cause → effect	Explaining why
General → specific	Deductive claims
Specific → general	Inductive claims

Classical Argument

Parts: intro → background → proof → counterargument & rebuttal → conclusion.

Rogerian: start w/ common ground & the other side's view, then offer a middle path.

Why Order Matters

Strongest last leaves a lasting impression; **strongest first** grabs a busy or skeptical reader.

Delayed thesis: saving the claim for the end builds trust w/ a resistant or skeptical audience.

Shifts (story → data, past → present) signal a new step in the argument; each one has a purpose.

Order test: could you swap 2 body paragraphs w/o losing anything? Then the order isn't working.

⚠ "Chronological" is a trap answer if the passage moves by importance, not by time.

✓ Ask how the order helps the purpose for THIS audience, not just what the order is.

5.C / 6.C Methods of Development

Methods & Their Jobs

Method	Use it to...
Narration	Show an experience
Description	Make readers see it
Comparison	Show likeness/difference
Cause-effect	Explain why/what next
Definition	Fix a key term's meaning
Classification	Sort into groups
Exemplification	Prove w/ examples

Choosing a Method

Purpose decides: define a disputed term before arguing; narrate to build emotion & trust.

Mix methods: one essay can tell a story, compare 2 policies & explain causes in turn.

Definition: writers often argue BY redefining a key term ("Freedom is not...; it's...").

In Your Essays

Argument essay: examples & cause-effect carry most paragraphs; a short story is a good hook.

Rhetorical analysis: name the method & explain why it suits the purpose & audience.

Description makes abstract stakes vivid, so readers feel the problem before the solution.

⚠ "She uses narration" earns nothing alone; explain the effect on the argument.

✓ Know these verbs: illustrate, define, contrast, classify, narrate, trace causes.

6.B Transitions & Cohesion

Transitions Show Relationships

Relationship	Words
Addition	moreover, also, further
Contrast	however, yet, instead
Concession	granted, admittedly
Cause/effect	therefore, thus, so
Example	for instance, e.g.
Emphasis	indeed, in fact
Sequence	first, then, finally
Conclusion	ultimately, in short

Choose by logic: name the relationship between the 2 ideas first, then pick the word that fits.

Between Paragraphs

Bridge sentence: link back at the start of a paragraph: "Beyond cost, safety also..."

Echo: repeat a key word from the end of one paragraph at the start of the next.

Other Cohesion Tools

Repetition of key terms, **pronouns** (this, these) & **parallel structure** tie ideas into 1 argument.

Weak transitions ("Also," "Another reason is") just stack points; they show no logic.

Concession → rebuttal: "Granted, ...; still, ..."

⚠ Two transitions w/ the same meaning (thus/therefore) can't both be right on a MCQ.

✓ Skip "Firstly / Secondly"; show HOW ideas relate (more important, as a result).

6.A Building Your Line of Reasoning

Plan Before You Write

Thesis → reasons: list 2–3 subclaims that prove the thesis; order them so each builds.

Topic sentences = subclaims: state a reason, not a fact or a quote, & link to the thesis.

Paragraph part	Job
Topic sentence	Subclaim
Evidence	Proof
Commentary	How it proves it
Link	Back to thesis

Connect the Paragraphs

Explain links: show how reason 2 extends, deepens or limits reason 1 in your commentary.

Escalate: move from personal → social → global so the stakes rise for the reader.

Ex: Phones should be banned in class b/c they cut focus (1), widen gaps (2) & erode trust (3).

Counterargument ¶: put it after your main reasons; concede, then answer w/ evidence.

Conclusion: show what your reasons add up to & why it matters; don't just repeat.

Why that order: personal → social → civic; the stakes rise for the reader at each step.

Topic sentence ≠ fact: state a reason.

⚠ In synthesis, organize by your reasons, not by source (Source A ¶, Source B ¶).

✓ Plan for ≈ 5 min: thesis + 3 reasons + the best evidence for each, before you write.

Reasoning & Organization on the MCQ

Reading Questions

Weight: reading 13–16% + writing 11–14% of the 45 MCQs (≈ 24–30% of the section).

Stem says	You do
"function of ¶"	Name its job
"shift"	What changes & why
"structure"	Overall pattern
"relationship"	How 2 parts link
"develops by"	Name the method

Shift Qs: look for changes in time, tone, focus or method & the reason for each change.

Writing Questions

Transition Qs: "Which choice best connects sentence 3 to sentence 2?" → predict first.

Placement Qs: put the sentence right next to the one it explains, defines or answers.

Delete Qs: cut a sentence that breaks the line of reasoning, even if it's true & interesting.

Combine Qs: pick the joining word that shows the logic between the ideas (because, although).

Purpose of a part: "The anecdote in ¶ 1 serves to..." → often introduces the problem.

Order Qs: the best order follows the line: setup → claim → support → response to critics.

⚠ "Furthermore" sounds formal but is wrong if the 2nd idea actually contrasts w/ the 1st.

✓ Cover the choices, name the relationship (same, opposite, result), then match it.

Reasoning & Organization on the FRQs

Synthesis (Q1)

Structure: thesis → 2–3 reasons; each paragraph uses 1–2 sources as evidence, not summaries.

Counterargument: answer the strongest opposing source near the end of the essay.

Rhetorical Analysis (Q2)

Organize by the writer's moves in order, or by strategy; both work if you analyze, not summarize.

Trace shifts: explain how the structure (story → data → call to act) builds the purpose.

Argument (Q3)

Order reasons least to most persuasive; save the biggest stakes for the last body paragraph.

Rubric row	What earns it
A (0–1)	Defensible thesis
B (0–4)	Line of reasoning
C (0–1)	Complex, cohesive

Time: ≈ 40 min per essay: 5 min plan, 30 min write, 5 min check your links & transitions.

Synthesis order: group sources by the reason they support; 2 sources in 1 ¶ = real synthesis.

RA thesis: "To rally [audience], X moves from [choice 1] to [choice 2]..." maps the body.

Argument ¶: reason → example → commentary.

⚠ 3 unconnected paragraphs read as a list, not a line of reasoning, & keep Row B low.

✓ End each body ¶ w/ a sentence that sets up your next reason so the line of reasoning shows.