The Simple AP® English Language Style Cheat Sheet

7.A Diction

Word Choice Matters

Diction: word choice; it shapes tone, credibility & how readers feel about the subject.

Denotation = dictionary meaning. **Connotation** = the feeling a word carries (+, −, neutral).

Neutral	Positive	Negative
thin	slender	scrawny
confident	assured	arrogant
protesters	activists	rioters
cheap	affordable	shoddy
old	seasoned	outdated

Kinds of Diction

Formal vs. informal: formal builds authority; informal builds closeness w/ readers.

Concrete vs. abstract: concrete ("cracked roofs") is vivid; abstract ("decay") states ideas.

Loaded language: charged words that push a view ("radical," "heroic"); watch for bias.

Analyze It

Ask: why this word & not a synonym? What does it reveal about the writer's attitude?

Ex: "The bill **guts** funding" vs. "**reduces** funding": same fact, a much angrier attitude.

⚠ "Uses strong diction" says nothing; quote the exact word & explain its effect on readers.

✓ Quote 1–3 words, not whole sentences, so you can analyze exactly what they do.

7.A Tone & Shifts

Tone = Attitude

Tone: the writer's attitude toward the subject or audience, built through word choice & detail.

Mood = how the reader feels; **tone** = how the writer feels. Don't mix them up.

Positive	Negative	Neutral/complex
admiring	bitter	objective
reverent	sardonic	detached
hopeful	indignant	ambivalent
celebratory	mocking	contemplative
earnest	condescending	wry

Name It Precisely

Avoid vague words (good, bad, emotional); pick 1 exact adjective & prove it w/ quotes.

Two-part tone: "bitter yet hopeful" shows a complex attitude & earns credit.

Shifts

Tone shift: a change in attitude, often after a turn word (but, yet, however) or new ¶.

Why shift? To pivot from problem to solution, or from concession to rebuttal, at a key moment.

Irony: saying the opposite of what you mean, or an outcome opposite to what's expected.

⚠ Satire can sound serious; look for exaggeration & irony before naming the tone.

✓ Tone MCQs: cut choices that are too extreme or the wrong direction (+ vs. −).

7.A Figurative Language

Comparisons

Device	What it does
Metaphor	Equates 2 unlike things
Simile	Compares w/ like/as
Analogy	Explains via a parallel case
Allusion	Borrows a shared reference
Personification	Gives human traits
Extended metaphor	Builds 1 image throughout

Analogy works when readers know the familiar case well; a weak match = false analogy.

Emphasis & Restraint

Hyperbole: exaggeration for emphasis.

Understatement: saying less for irony or calm.

Imagery: sensory detail that lets readers see, hear or feel the stakes; builds emotion.

Rhetorical question: asked for effect, not an answer; it hints at the writer's claim.

Analyze It

Ask: what is compared to what, & what does the comparison make readers feel or believe?

Ex: calling a law "a cage" frames it as confinement before any data or argument appears.

Allusion (Bible, history, myth) borrows authority the audience already grants to it.

⚠ Spotting a metaphor isn't analysis; explain what it suggests & why it fits the audience.

✓ Trace an extended metaphor from its first image to its last; it often frames the passage.

7.A Syntax: Sentences

Sentence Types

Type	Built from	Effect
Simple	1 clause	Direct, blunt
Compound	2+ ICs	Balance, link
Complex	IC + DC	Show relations
Fragment	Part only	Punch, emphasis

Periodic sentence: main clause comes last, after a build-up → suspense & emphasis.

Loose sentence: main clause first, then details pile up → a natural, relaxed, expansive feel.

Length & Rhythm

Short sentence after long ones = emphasis: "The bridge failed. Twice." The point lands hard.

Long sentences can mirror complexity, exhaustion or a flood of thought for readers to feel.

Sentence Functions

Questions invite readers to think; **commands** ("Act now") push them toward action.

Inversion: unusual word order ("Gone are the days...") stresses the first words.

Ex: "Despite the cost & the doubters, the bridge opened." → suspense lands on "opened."

Variety: mix sentence lengths for rhythm.

⚠ "A compound sentence" earns nothing; explain what the structure emphasizes.

✓ Check what comes LAST in a sentence; English puts the most emphasis at the end.

7.A Syntax: Patterns

Repetition Schemes

Device	Pattern	Example
Anaphora	Repeat start	"We shall fight..."
Epistrophe	Repeat end	"...of the people"
Parallelism	Same structure	"to see, to act"
Tricolon	Series of 3	"came, saw, conquered"
Antithesis	Contrast in balance	"not...but..."
Chiasmus	Reversed order	"Ask not what..."

Anaphora builds rhythm & urgency, & listeners remember it; speeches rely on it.

Antithesis sets opposites side by side in balanced clauses to sharpen a choice for readers.

Lists & Joining

Asyndeton: no conjunctions ("I came, I saw, I conquered") → speed, force & completeness.

Polysyndeton: many conjunctions ("and...and...and") → weight, abundance & a slow build.

Juxtaposition: contrasting ideas placed side by side to highlight the difference.

Analyze It

Template: "By repeating ___ at the start of each line, X builds ___, urging [audience] to ___."

⚠ Naming anaphora is the start; explain why repetition suits THIS moment & audience.

✓ Speeches are full of schemes; they make ideal evidence in rhetorical analysis.

7.B / 8.B–8.C Punctuation & Clarity

Punctuation for Effect

Mark	Effect
Dash —	Sudden emphasis, aside
Colon :	Reveal, explain, list
Semicolon ;	Balance 2 linked ideas
Parentheses ( )	Quiet aside
Italics	Stress a word
Ellipsis ...	Trailing, omission

Dash vs. parentheses: dashes spotlight an idea; parentheses whisper it as a side note.

Colon sets up a payoff: "She wanted one thing: respect." The word after the colon lands hard.

Clear, Effective Sentences

Active voice names the actor ("The council cut funds"); **passive** can hide blame.

Emphasis by position: put the key idea at the end of a sentence or paragraph, where it lands.

Concision: cut wordy phrases ("due to the fact that" → "because") so the argument stays sharp.

Conventions

Grammar & mechanics serve clarity; errors that blur meaning hurt the writer's credibility.

Ex: "Mistakes were made" (passive) avoids saying who made them; officials use it on purpose.

⚠ Passive voice isn't always wrong; writers use it on purpose to shift focus or hide who acted.

✓ Combining MCQs: pick the clear, concise choice that shows the right logic.

Style on the MCQ

Reading Questions

Weight: Style = reading 11–14% + writing 11–14% of the 45 MCQs, so ≈ 22–28% of the section.

Stem says	You do
"primarily serves to"	Name the effect
"tone of ¶"	Precise attitude
"word X suggests"	Use connotation
"figurative"	What's compared
"shift in tone"	Find the turn

In context: "As used in line 12, 'cultivate' most nearly means..." → reread the sentence.

Writing Questions

Word choice: "Which choice best maintains the tone?" → match register & attitude.

Precision: pick the exact, vivid word for the context, not the fanciest-sounding choice.

Combine / revise: the best version is clear, concise & keeps the original meaning & emphasis.

Method

Predict the effect or tone first, then match; check direction (+/−) & intensity of each choice.

Effect Qs: "The word 'merely' in line 8 serves to..." → often to dismiss an opposing view.

⚠ Extreme tone choices ("furious") are usually wrong unless the passage is extreme.

✓ For "effect" stems, the right answer ties the device to the passage's purpose.

Style on the FRQs

Rhetorical Analysis (Q2)

Analyze choices: diction, imagery, syntax & figurative language are your evidence.

Formula: writer + strong verb + choice + effect on the audience + the writer's purpose.

Weak verb	Strong verb
uses	deploys, invokes
shows	reveals, exposes
says	asserts, insists
talks about	examines, dismantles
makes readers feel	evokes, stirs, unsettles

Your Own Style

Argument & synthesis: precise words & varied sentences can help earn Row C.

Match register to the prompt's audience: formal & measured for a school board or city council.

Avoid: slang, clichés ("since the dawn of time") & filler words that weaken your voice & credibility.

Quick Wins

Embed short quotes (2–6 words) & analyze single words, not long passages that hide your analysis.

Group by effect: organize RA paragraphs by what choices DO (build urgency), not by device name.

⚠ A device list ("uses imagery, diction & syntax") w/o a purpose = a weak RA thesis.

✓ Tie every style choice to the writer's purpose & audience; that link is what Row B rewards.