

## Tone Practice

1. "If Jesus were alive today, the last thing he'd be is a Christian."  
—(or something like that) Mark Twain  
A. lugubrious   B. restrained   C. inflammatory   D. sarcastic   E. turgid
2. The sun won't shine, the birds won't sing, and the flowers won't grow since my cat Felix passed on to Feline heaven. Oh, I can't go on!  
A. elegiac   B. lugubrious   C. pretentious   D. mock-heroic
3. Your essay didn't quite succeed in terms of clarity.  
A. pedantic   B. factual   C. sarcastic   D. restrained
4. Want to go cruising for chicks with me, Father O'Connor?  
A. turgid   B. condescending   C. flippant   D. clinical
5. It came to my attention that the neighbor's nefarious cat was making clandestine trips into my garden to pilfer my tomatoes.  
A. pedantic   B. didactic   C. informative   D. learned
6. That guy should have to wear a scarlet S for "Slacker."  
A. moralistic   B. candid   C. allusive   D. petty   E. angry
7. Oh my goodness! You're locker is all the way in A-building?! And you still made it here on time?! That's quite an accomplishment!  
A. mock-serious   B. cynical   C. concerned   D. sympathetic   E. petty
8. Your mother was a hamster and your father smelled of elderberries.  
A. candid   B. complimentary   C. taunting   D. fanciful   E. colloquial
9. Because it is my cookie! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I hunger and have signed myself to a diet! Because I am not worth the chips in cookies you have baked. I have given you my brownie, leave me my cookie!!!  
A. insolent   B. irreverent   C. fanciful   D. clinical   E. burlesque
10. Those responsible for the witch-hunt for communists in the 1950's have sold themselves, too. Their names shall live in infamy. It's our duty to see that such events do not happen ever again.  
A. angry   B. sentimental   C. effusive   D. vibrant   E. moralistic
11. Those who seek to destroy America believe that it is responsible for moral decay around the world. Americans, on the other hand, believe they are the defenders of all that is good.  
A. mock-serious   B. concerned   C. colloquial   D. impartial   E. cynical
12. Ron Jenson fought bravely in World War II. He landed in Normandy on D-Day and survived that bloodbath with his courage intact. When he died last week, our country lost one more of its heroes, one more shining star in the battle for freedom.  
A. sardonic   B. sentimental   C. vibrant   D. detached   E. effusive

# The English Language Exam: Developing an Argument



by Ron Sudol  
Associate Provost, Professor of Rhetoric, and Director of the Meadow Brook Writing Project  
Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan

## Returning to Daytona

Last spring, I went to Daytona Beach for my seventeenth consecutive year as a Reader of the AP English Language and Composition Exam. I keep going back because the Reading provides a rare opportunity to engage with college and high school colleagues in a rigorous professional task. We create and sustain a consensus on writing quality and apply it to over 400,000 student essays fairly, consistently, and quickly.

This year, I was assigned to read Question Three, which called for students to write an argument. The directive says: "Carefully read the following passage by Susan Sontag. Then write an essay in which you support, refute, or qualify Sontag's claim that photography limits our understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence to develop your argument." There followed a provocative and somewhat cryptic three-paragraph excerpt from *On Photography*.

## Key to Success

Perhaps the single most important key to success on an AP Exam is the student's ability to see that the prompt identifies a task to be performed. Students who were successful on Question Three recognized key words in the prompt and were able to determine the task they were being asked to do.

## Claim and Argument

This question was not merely an invitation to write discursively on the subject of photography. The word "claim" in the prompt should have alerted students to the need for writing in argumentative form. This point was reinforced by the explicit mention of "argument" in the last sentence. The question requires that students understand what an argument is and know how to construct one.

## Support, Refute, or Qualify

The words "support, refute, or qualify" are technical terms that were not decoded in the question. Students need to know and need to have practiced these forms of argument during the term. (Some students misunderstood "qualify"; for example, "Sontag is not qualified to talk about photography.") In addition, these three words should signal to students that taking a position, even if a qualified one, is essential.

## Evidence and Develop

The word "evidence" is also important. Students need to know not only what constitutes evidence, but the difference between evidence and example. Even "develop" conveyed important signals -- their argument needed to move forward; they couldn't just make one little point and assume they were developing it by adding six redundant illustrations.

## Common Problems

Problems that prevented students from earning a high score on Question Three included:

Not taking a clear position or wavering between positions

- Substituting a thesis-oriented expository essay for an argumentative essay
- Being reluctant to engage in verbal combat because "everyone's entitled to his or her own opinion," so there's nothing to argue about
- Slipping out of focus by discussing imagery in general
- Trying to argue about photography by using evidence drawn from a literary reading list (for example, *Othello*, *The Scarlet Letter*) and sliding off topic into the theme of appearance and reality
- Lacking clear connections between claims and the data, and the warrants needed to support them
- Trying to analyze Sontag's rhetorical strategies or her style instead of arguing a point