

Writing Body Paragraphs for Advanced Placement English Language Persuasive Argument and Synthesis Essays

This file contains sample paragraphs from papers scoring 8's or 9's on AP English Language free-response (or persuasive argument) and synthesis compositions. Please refer to my webpages on "Writing the Persuasive Argument" and "Writing the Synthesis Essay," under "Writing for the AP Exam," for more detailed information.

Look for patterns in the following essays.

You should note the following:

Concrete Illustrations of Abstract Ideas. Every paragraph will present concrete examples. Every single one. It is simply a must. Ideas that exist only in the mind are rarely convincing because your audience cannot see how they apply in the real world.

How and Why. The writers spend time explaining how and why their ideas are correct. You cannot simply assume that the reader will agree with you. Talk to your audience. Show the why they should think as you do. Explain your reasoning. Engage your audience.

Fully Developed Points. Examples and explanations take time. A detailed example should run 3-4 sentences. Commentary and explanation should be at least 2-5 sentences. Don't state that "Gandhi faced obstacles," show them!

unnatural; it was never intended to be anything else. Television, save for news programs, documentaries, and the like, has always been a method by which ordinary people escape the day-to-day routine, a hiatus in the long slog of work and financial concerns, a thrilling or hilarious experience shared with friends, even a chance to bring the family together and enjoy a movie with one another. My own family upholds the tradition of a weekly 'family movie night.' Every Sunday evening we gather in the living room with ^{good} food, and each other, and enjoy ^{the} Emperor's New Groove or George and the Dragon, ~~in~~ relishing in each other's company, grateful for the chance to have our parents all to ourselves, happy ~~to~~ to participate in a family ritual.

In addition television has provided a way

Note the writer's use of a specific concrete illustration to prove his abstract point that television is a way for people to escape daily concerns and spend positive time together.

In source A, John Taylor Gatto makes the case that ~~extra~~ schools are not necessarily needed for education. He says, "And plenty of people throughout the world today find a way to educate themselves without resorting to a system of compulsory secondary schools that all too often resemble ~~a~~ prisons." He makes a very true point. Most kids today are living in a world where technology makes learning easy access. I believe I would've done very well at

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learning microsoft tutorials online rather than having to ~~sacrifice~~ sacrifice a class that would've helped in college. Education is everywhere, and people learn to find ways to it without having to go to school and be imprisoned for almost 8 hours every day.

we supposedly live in a democratic nation but

This synthesis body paragraph begins with information from a source. The writer then explains HOW and WHY he agrees with source's author. Note the concrete illustration of "Microsoft tutorials." This paragraph would be severely weakened by the exclusion. Strong argumentative paragraphs ALWAYS use concrete illustrations.

Survival, of course, is a powerful motivator. Evolution runs on it; in this sense every organism on the planet ~~per~~ works due to adversity. This survival imperative is so powerful, it has been used beyond the biological creatures it is hard-coded into. Computers now make use of genetic algorithms, where competing solutions to a problem—say, the correct shape of an aircraft wing—are selected, mathematically “bred”, and mutated into a new generation. Adversity, it seems, elicits talents in more than humans. Prosperity, on the other hand, does

This writer is arguing that adversity brings out talents that would not otherwise be elicited. The reference to evolution is not fully developed, but it does show the author's understanding. He then connects this concept to computers and technological development. The writer shows a broad awareness and the concrete reference (aircraft wings) helps immensely. This paper scored an 8. Perhaps more concreteness would have elevated it to a 9—but no one can deny the impressive depth of thought.

In source A, David Livingston ~~was~~ evoked the economical importance of space exploration. The money spent on space research employs millions of people. Take source B for example (photo) and imagine how long and how many people it took to build that. Money poured into NASA, the billions and billions of dollars, is only good for mankind. Other departments that take government funding are not nearly successful. The NIH (source D) is one of these. The five year survival rate for childhood rose to only 80%! It's a complete failure. It should have raised it to 100%. Apparently diverting funds ~~from health~~ from health for space exploration is a sound decision. In fact, we should spend billions more on space exploration because the health of our people is much less important than the expansion of our people.

In addition, space exploration unites our globe. As ~~well~~ Michael Collins

I completely disagree with the author's point in this synthesis paragraph—but it doesn't matter. The writer presents information from the provided sources and uses it to make a reasonable argument. Though I don't personally agree with his conclusion, there is an undeniable logic. Thus, the paper scored well. Remember: You are being evaluated on presenting a reasonable argument. So long as you present clear and direct evidence for your ideas, and make an understandable connection between them, then you will score well.

severe or radical form of disagreement.
Boorstin claims that "dissension is [democracy's] cancer," but history provides us with many examples of the contrary. Southern abolitionists, suffragettes, and civil rights leaders were all in the minority at some time because they dissented. However, as they and their views became more popular, they all entered into the majority. If their views did not change, did they go from dissension to disagreement? From cancer to life blood?
Boorstin's argument seems to rest

The examples aren't as developed as they could be, but do see that this writer presents concrete historical movements and a simple logic: These figures were unapologetic dissenters whose views eventually became the majority. This paragraph is strengthened by the writer's style. Consider the power of the rhetorical questions at the end, which use Boorstin's own words. Short paragraph, but it makes an effective point.

Another negative side effect of standardizing the reading lists of all high school English classes is mainstreaming. To ensure a well-educated young generation entering the world of adulthood at the end of their ^{high school} years, ~~in high school~~ one wants ^{capable} independent thinkers that can contribute to society. To generate such a capable group of citizens teachers should avoid mainstreaming and ~~avoid~~ "pop anthologies" (Lindow). As Fichtelbaum remarks one "can't trust anthologies." He elaborates by stating "teachers have to make their own decisions" regarding what literary works to include in their English classes. Incorporating a variety of sources guarantees a well constructed knowledge base for a particular piece of literature, with which the student can better understand and analyze the piece. Having drawn from a variety of sources also ensures that not all

For this synthesis essay response, note that the writer takes time to explain WHY teachers should choose books. Remember: In argument, do not simply give an opinion. Always explain WHY your opinion is the correct one. The more time spent explaining your thought process, the better.

~~any~~ It is an emblem of our thrift, a portrayal of one of our greatest presidents and a hallmark of our nation's storied past. The great symbols of our nation—the Washington Monument, the White House, Mount Rushmore—are carefully guarded and watched over. Great emphasis is placed on their preservation, for we see the value in honoring America's relics. Should the penny be treated any differently?

Ubiquitous and ordinary as it may seem, the penny is just as intrinsically valuable as all other sources of national pride.

Indeed, as documented in Source F, the federal government has already done well to secure the survival of the penny's symbolic worth by renewing the images of Lincoln. So crucial is the penny as a mark of our ~~history~~ national attribute of economy and as a portrait of our heritage that to ban it would be to ban a feature of American life.

This synthesis paragraph follows a simple structure. Claim. Evidence. Explanation. Note the penny is connected to other concrete examples (Rushmore, etc.). Do note the author's passionate style, as evidence in the last sentence. A confident tone in itself can be extremely persuasive. Don't be afraid to show a little attitude in your arguments! Also: Recognize subtle rhetorical strategies used by the author to make his argument. Rhetorical question ("Should the penny be treated any differently?"). And Bandwagon ("Indeed...the federal government has already done well....").

On the otherhand, readings that are absolute such as educational books can be harmful to one's thinking by narrowing opinions. ~~Science and history textbooks~~ Educational books such as science and history textbooks demand the learner to accept facts, and facts by definition only elicits one view. This severely limits the learners' view and cannot be useful in improving the world, because bias are brewed from it. For example, there is a saying that "winners write history." In China, who's history involved numerous changes in emperors the saying is true. Everytime a new dynasty is introduced, people are forced to accept the idea that their current king is and was always right. This is particularly achieved by rewriting ~~science~~ history textbooks as the Qin emperor did. Thus, textbooks can ~~severe~~ narrow one's mind through propaganda.

Great paragraph. It begins with a direct claim, followed by a brief explanation. The writer then uses a concrete example (China) to illustrate the point.

of the people representing themselves.

The right to vote is a duty as well as a privilege enjoyed by surprisingly few people around the world. In places where Democracy does not exist, the will of the people is never heard, or heard too late.

In Thomas Carlyle's history of The French Revolution, he illustrates the dangers of a nation run by an elite few who ignore the needs of the masses. The decadent French monarchs and nobility ruled as they saw fit, for their personal pleasures only. Eventually, however, the ~~the~~ voice of the people ~~that~~ was heard; it was shouted in the booming of guns and cannons, screamed by the dying patriots and aristocrats, and brought home by a fury of blood and terror and death. In a democracy, it is

1

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P. 4 of 4

minority of people voted, the will of the few could silence the will of the many, for a time. Unless the majority of the population expresses its voice in the governance of its country, ~~the~~ the voice has the danger of being expressed by more drastic means.

11

Interesting paragraph. Students were asked to argue whether or not voting should be compulsory. Although this writer does not address "compulsory" (or required, mandated) voting in this paragraph, his point is clear: The majority of people need to vote—and have their voice heard—to keep the peace. This writer used an extremely appropriate concrete historical example (the French Revolution). Note that this example was explained over 3-4 sentences. Be sure to detail some if not all of your examples—do not just casually refer to them. SHOW how they are appropriate.

paradox to which there is no clear consensus.

On one hand, media is a bane to existence. Television skews society, presenting perfect "barbie" doll actors, disasters that always resolves into happy endings, and enough drama in one day to fill up four lifetimes. Our immunity to violence and tendency to be unworried by death comes directly from overstimulation ^{of} the television ~~and~~ and radio set. ~~But~~ ^{For example,} here is a sample of everyday broadcasts: "Twelve soldiers died in Iraq today as a result of yet another suicide bombing attack. Meanwhile, new statistics have shown the Florida is the most popular vacation spot with the most affordable price. Many are flocking to the beach for sun, fun, and amazingly high waves." Illogical ^{inference} ~~deduction~~ of such ^{visions} ~~information~~ can numb the mind. Repeated showings of CSI, Law and Order, and other criminal investigations give viewers the false satisfaction that every criminal will be ~~perpetrated~~ caught and all crimes go unpunished. Society gives in to the escapism rampant throughout media sources.

Do not write beyond this border.

Similarly, web blogs, ^{run by ordinary citizens} ~~and newspapers~~, increasingly slanting the truth and overexaggeration the importance of minor occurrences. While news about celebrity Tom Cruise's new baby runs amok on front pages, debate on global warming and Alaskan wildlife preservation is scanty. The 8 trillion dollar deficit is unheeded yet the ^{name of a} new game console ^{and the proliferation of rumors} tops public interest charts. It is the lack of truth that has caused Newsweek to ~~misprint~~ print misleading rumors on Guantanamo Bay and Time Magazine to mistakenly aust Valerie Plame. Lewd and offensive material abounds on the internet and citizens ^{express} ~~show~~ more interest in the President's private life and exercising habits than in his domestic policy. All of this, and more is a direct result of the abundance of public statements in the media.

However, throughout history, it has been shown that public statements are also irreplaceable in the search for truth. Would Senator McCarthy lose power if there were not televised hearings of the army trials, in which one victim asked clearly, "have you no sense of decency?" It is a question asked often ~~at~~ the writer's of disreputable blogs, money-seeking television producers, and glory-seeking demagogues. But it is the sheer fact that society is allowed to ask this question that shows the importance of a system of freedomocracy. The very corruption and immaturity that is shown in public statements will never be eliminated if ~~things cannot~~ ^{their} existence is not made public. Problems would never be revealed in a communist society in which opinions are suppressed and corruption is allowed to fester.

It is important to keep in mind that

I simply love this essay.
Note this writer's broad awareness of current events.
He is able to connect the

topic (the value of a society in which everyone has an opinion) to the world around him. The many concrete illustrations and references add value to this paper. Also, note the irony: Even though the writer shows problem after problem, he concludes that we're better off this way. The "However," completely shifts the expected direction of the paper. Profound point, expertly and stylistically presented.

By now, you should clearly see the patterns of high-scoring argumentative papers. Here follows more examples without comment. Look for the same patterns.

~~errantry evidence behind him.~~
In the past century, two events in particular back up Thomas' claim of useful human discovery by serendipity. Take for example the discovery of penicillin, the antibiotic that in one single stroke revolutionized all of medical science and saved

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Question 3

have run rampant were it not for its detection by a deviation from established "protocol." Again, it was the "knack" of doing something the wrong way that conformity within a society.

Politics is another definite area where conformity is witnessed in the American lifestyle. The whole concept of voting breaks down to conforming with one side or the other. ~~that Americans~~, ~~to~~ Even when registering to vote, Americans are prompted to pick a party to affiliate or conform. ~~when~~ When voting for the office of President, Americans don't elect a man. They vote for the ideas that they have conformed themselves to, and the ideas to which they identify. The American political system relies heavily on group conformity.

Within American society, media is a driving force in conformity. In fashion magazines such as ~~Cosmopolitan~~ Cosmopolitan, women are constantly being flooded with the generic image of the beautiful and

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The pros of Singer's ~~the~~ theory, although few, are powerful and immediately obvious to all who view his argument. Yes, human nature is generous, it feels good to give and no one should be selfish. It even satisfies an innate sense of justice, fairness and equality: those who have more should give to those who have less. This method would tame the human sin of selfishness and thus even satisfies religious ideology — "help thy neighbor." No matter which way you look at it, Singer's argument is an undeniably noble undertaking which expands on human generosity and optimistically glorifies human nature. There is nothing morally wrong in what he is suggesting, and it would ~~at~~ even please some to act as martyrs and saints, masochistic in their own self-deprivation. Overall, its benefits suggest a rosy future for the human race.

However, while the supporters of Singer's method have righteousness, justice and logical reasoning on their side, those who oppose Singer may draw on the resources of realism,



ADDITIONAL PAGE FOR ANSWERING QUESTION 3

historical evidence, and their own brand of logical reasoning to support their own argument. In a practical sense, we must look at the consequences of this action and where they would fall — the first road block lies in the murky division between luxury and necessity. How necessary is toilet paper? We need to eat and drink and breathe to keep our bodies alive, but we can still exist without toilet paper, can we not? Yet our noses and a sense of modesty would not appreciate a human race sans toilet paper. Yet even when this sense of modesty has been abandoned, the effects still linger — what are toilet paper workers to do? If no one buys toilet paper, workers in those factories will be laid off and as a result, lack funds to feed themselves and their families, exacerbating the issue of human poverty. And what of the money given to those charities — in many cases, not 100% of that goes ~~to~~ directly to feeding and clothing the impoverished of the world.

When directly observed, "Singer's solution" is not only a naïve plan to undertake what millennia of human history

