

CHAPTER

9

Constructing the Body of the Essay and Supporting Syntax

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: Understand different organizational patterns and the role of syntax

KEY IDEA

Key Ideas

- ★ Practice with each of the major patterns
- ★ Examine professional examples and commentary
- ★ Review student samples and commentary
- ★ Practice with your own writing
- ★ Practice with transition, annotation, and voice

Yes! We are going to acknowledge that you have been putting in a great deal of effort so far. But, the operative phrase here is “so far.” You’ve only just begun. With the close reading, prewriting, planning, and introduction completed, you’re set to write the body of your essay.

Don’t doubt yourself. You ARE ready to write the body of your essay. You know your audience, your purpose, your assertion, and your rhetorical strategy. You know the major points that support your assertion, you know the sequence of your specific examples that illustrate each of your major points, and you’ve engaged your reader. Now what?

Here’s what—decide on your organizing principle. That’s the basic pattern that you’ll use to develop your presentation. You’re already familiar with these patterns; you’ve been using

*“What is written
without effort is read
without pleasure.”*

—Samuel Johnson

them for years. You just need to put them in specific context. **Each rhetorical strategy lends itself to a specific organizational structure.** These are:

- **Chronological order** deals with items in the time order in which they occur. The two strategies that use this pattern are **narration** and **process**.
- **Spatial order** details items as they appear in a particular environment: from right to left, top to bottom, front to back, etc. This pattern is most often used in **description**.
- **Subject by subject** discusses each subject in a separate paragraph or section.
- **Point by point** examines each point in a separate paragraph or section.

These patterns are used with **contrast/comparison**.

- **Categorizing** is the process of placing items in groups and examining each one of the categories and the items in it. Obviously, the rhetorical strategy that demands this pattern is **classification**.
- **A single cause leading to a single effect or multiple effects**
- **Multiple causes leading to a single effect or multiple effects**
- **A single effect and the single or multiple cause(s)**
- **Multiple effects and the single or multiple cause(s)**

These patterns are best used for the *cause/effect* strategy

- **Most important to least important or vice versa** can be used to organize almost any of the rhetorical strategies, especially analysis, explanation and *cause/effect*.
- **Deduction** is a pattern that works from the general (thesis) to specific/supporting details, while **induction** works from the specific examples/details to the general (thesis). **Argumentation** is the strategy that most often consciously employs these two patterns.

The organizational pattern is usually given to the writer in the very wording of the timed AP English essay prompt. However, when you are given a writing assignment that does not call for a specific type of organizational pattern, you will have to decide on the best one, based on your thinking, prewriting and planning.

Remember that each major point must play an important part in developing and supporting your assertion. In most instances, you discuss, analyze each major point, and support or illustrate it with specific examples, statistics, details, textual references, etc.

For each point:

- **Introduce it.**
- **Describe it.**
- **Discuss how it is connected to the assertion/claim/thesis.**

You always want to be aware of your thesis, your purpose, and your audience. Each paragraph in the body of your essay has to move your reader closer and closer to your goal, your final destination (your assertion), and you've got to do this making certain to show the interconnectedness among each of your major points with what we call "connective tissue," and what others term transitional elements.



Samples of the Body of the Essay

AP English Language

“A Presidential Candidate”

Informal diction contributes to the overall humor of this parody. Most of us expect a modicum of seriousness and dignity from our political candidates. And, we expect this to be evident in their speeches and writing. To the contrary, Twain uses “folksy” and regional words and phrases throughout the essay. In paragraph one, avoiding lofty language, the author writes “pretty much made up my mind” to tell his audience that he has made a decision, and he invites congressional scrutiny with “let it prowl.” Paragraph two has Twain’s grandfather “bowling up” a tree when he is chased from his house by the narrator. Using his own method to appeal to the common man, the candidate says, “If my country don’t want me. . . .”

Exaggeration also plays a major role in the creation of this humorous takeoff on campaign speeches. The anecdote about the author and his grandfather is in every way over the top. Treering and shooting his grandfather with buckshot is both ludicrous and highly improbable. The absurdity continues in paragraph four with the tale of his burying his dead aunt “under my grapevine.” In paragraph five, Twain takes a wide and caustic swing at political candidates who promise to stand up for the common man. He says, “. . . I regard the poor man, in his present condition, as so much wasted raw material.” The author’s outrageous suggestion to kill and cannibalize “the poor workingman . . .” and “. . . stuff him into sausages,” would have made Jonathan Swift very proud.

Almost all of Twain’s selection of details contributes to the irony of this piece. We expect heroic details of the candidate’s war experiences, but this candidate describes and admits his cowardice in the face of battle, even while making a tongue-in-cheek reference to Washington. Instead of claiming to be a financial virgin as most candidates do, Twain readily characterizes himself as money hungry and willing to get it any way he can. Adding to the irony that is the basis for the announcement, Twain makes references to the U.S. Constitution and asks rhetorical questions about both his fitness for the presidency and his being a “victim of absurd prejudices.”

Analysis of the Body of the Essay

topic sentence Informal diction contributes to the overall humor of this parody. **transition** Most of us expect a modicum of seriousness and dignity from our political candidates. And, we expect this to be evident in their speeches and writing. To the contrary, Twain uses “folksy” and regional words and phrases throughout the essay. In paragraph one, avoiding lofty language, the author

ex. 1 writes “pretty much made up my mind” to tell his audience that he has made a decision, and

ex. 2 he invites congressional scrutiny with “let it prowl.” Paragraph two has Twain’s grandfather

ex. 3 “bowling up” a tree when he is chased from his house by the narrator. And, in his final

ex. 4 paragraph, the author uses his own method to appeal to the common man when says, “If my country don’t want me . . .”

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ex. 5 & 6 being a “victim of absurd prejudices.”

Comments

Because this is an AP English prompt that demands a specific type of response, the body paragraphs almost organize themselves. Pay close attention to the topic sentences, each of which markedly refer the reader to the thesis of the essay. Notice that each of the major points is developed using specific references to the text. For example, the first body paragraph contains four examples of informal diction, each of which is connected to the idea of humor and parody. The second body paragraph discusses the exaggeration Twain employs with three specific references to the text. The last major point concerns irony, and the writer examines this device by citing six textual references.

It is important to note that the textual references are NOT merely listed. They are incorporated into the framework of the paragraph, via both citations and comments, to support and illustrate each topic sentence (underlined). As an example, look carefully at the second and third sentences of paragraph three (bracketed). Including the reader in the comments, the writer vests the audience in the subject and tone of “A Presidential Candidate” and in the AP English essay, itself.

Last, the continuity is maintained throughout with clear transitions and echo words—what we term connecting tissue (blocked). Repeating key words *humor* and *parody* ties the first body paragraph to the opening paragraph. *Also* and *this*, together with the phrase *humorous takeoff*, refer to the previous paragraphs and are, therefore, the key transitions in the second paragraph. Connecting the third paragraph to the prompt and the other preceding paragraphs are the transitional words *Twain’s* and *this piece*. Rather than repeating Mark Twain over and over, the writer uses echo words, such as *author*, *narrator*, *this candidate*. And, Twain’s essay is referred to as *announcement*, *remarks*, *absurdity*, *caustic swing*, *parody*, *takeoff*.

AP English Literature

“Dover Beach”

Drawing his images from nature, Arnold creates a romantic scene that will later be contrasted in the final stanza. As he implores his love to look from the window at the world beneath them, the poet introduces the sea and the land, and the diction positions them as the dominant contradictory symbols of the poem. Although it is night, “moon, fair, light, gleams, and glimmering” all illuminate the “calm, full, and tranquil bay.” And yet, in his description of the “sweet night,” Arnold includes the word, “only” to imply something other than the idyllic vision. This change in mood is meant to make his beloved uneasy, so she will be receptive to him later when he proposes an antidote to the ensuing negative examples.

To further his position, Arnold juxtaposes the sea and the “moon-blanching land,” light and dark, and seeing and hearing. Now he orders his love to “Listen!” as well as look. This imperative is also for the reader, and we can hear, through onomatopoeia, the “grating roar” of the pebbles breaking the quiet tone. The following lines, 10–14, depend on sound devices and punctuation to develop contrast. A succession of caesuras breaks the iambic meter and makes the speaker and reader start and stop and start again, much like the rhythm of the waves themselves which “begin, and cease, and then again, begin.” Perhaps, Arnold is using this pattern as a parallel to the lovers’ relationship. It, too, may have its high and low tides.

Allusions to Sophocles and the Aegean allow Arnold to move from the immediate and specific images of the first stanza to a more general argument. Like the eternal sea, human misery is a common experience, and this example from the past will make his argument for loyalty and love more poignant and universal. His diction now is negative; the sea is “turbid, distant and northern.” It is possible his love has also been remote and cold. Again, one can infer that the “ebb and flow” may refer to inconstancies the lovers have endured.

The third stanza introduces a more abstract metaphor, linking religion and nature. This “Sea of Faith” reveals the speaker’s loss of belief and his disillusionment. With this negative example, Arnold contrasts the once “bright girdle furled with full faith” and the now “melancholy, drear, and naked” beaches swept by the “breath of night wind.” This analogy seems developed to elicit both empathy and response on the part of his beloved. He has lost everything—God and Nature, but she can be his salvation because, by implication, he still believes in her. She will be his faith, his light, his constant sea.

As the poem reaches its climax, the speaker again moves from the general to the specific. He returns to the present and implores his beloved to accept his fervent plea: “Ah, love, let us be true to one another!” Arnold emphasizes this assertion by contrasting it with the concluding lines of the poem. Only this line is a simple direct imperative. The rest of the stanza is a complex set of similes that reiterate the major points of the speaker’s argument.

In the first stanza, the couple was literally on the land, but, now, the world is “like a land of dreams.” Repetition reinforces what the dream may be: “so various, so beautiful, so new.” Immediately, this line is contrasted with a negative series focusing not on the dream, but on the reality: “neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.” The final simile, “as on a darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night,” is a direct contrast to the first stanza’s softly lit sea, solitude, and serenity. Arnold puts the final touch on his argument by implying that they, the lovers who are true, therefore, must be everything positive and enlightened because they are in sharp contrast to the images and techniques presented throughout the poem.

Analysis of the Body of the Essay

topic sentence Drawing his images from nature, Arnold creates a romantic scene that will be contrasted in the final stanza. As he implores his love to look from the window at the world beneath them, the poet introduces the sea and the land, and the diction positions them as the dominant contradictory symbols of the poem. Although it is night, “moon, fair, light, gleams, and reference glimmering” all illuminate the “calm, full, and tranquil bay.” And yet, in his description of reference the “sweet night,” Arnold includes the word, “only” to imply something other than the idyllic reference vision. This change in mood is meant to make his beloved uneasy, so she will be receptive to connection to him later when he proposes an antidote to the ensuing negative examples. **thesis**

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Comments

Obviously the writer of this essay has a clear understanding of the prompt and the poem. The paper is well focused, strongly based on the text, and clearly expressed. Specific references are appropriate and smoothly integrated into the essay. Topic adherence is reinforced throughout by echo words and connective tissue.

The essay’s thesis, that the poem is developed by contrast to persuade the lover to her partner’s viewpoint, is reiterated in each paragraph. The words, *contrast*, *contradictory*, and *opposition* are used to maintain this thread. Similarly, *argument*, *persuade*, *convince*, *point of view*, *position*, and *assertion* all focus the paper on its topic: the poem as an argument for reciprocal love. The illustrations of diction, meter, organization, metaphor, and similes relate the meaning of the poem and the essay directly to the prompt.

References to *now* and *then*, *again*, *first* and *last stanza*, *beginning*, *climax* and *concludes* serve as transitions to link and move the sections of the essay.

The level and thoroughness of analysis is the strength of the essay. The writer moves beyond the average paper by drawing a parallel between the movement of the lines and meter and the movement of the waves. This technical information is then carried over to the interpretive level with the insight that the ebb and flow of the sea might refer to the pattern of the relationship. The understanding and explanation of the use of contrast as a persuasive tool is also an upper level concept. The writer understands Arnold’s real motivation for the poem and is aware of the emotional manipulation occurring. Including inferences shows the readers of the essay the depth of the writer’s interpretive skills. The vocabulary, such as *juxtapose*, *idyllic*, *romantic*, *onomatopoeia*, *implication*, is used appropriately and also raises the level of the essay. Likewise, the sentence variety enhances the readability level.

The essay itself follows the pattern of the poem, and this approach maintains clarity. In addition, it opens and closes with direct references to the text that serve to unify the paper. The presentation is on task and accessible, reflecting good planning and prewriting efforts.

Student Samples

The transitions are bracketed for you.

Student A

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” is very idyllic, flowery even. Marlowe uses words like “pleasures,” “melodious,” and “pretty lambs,” for their connotative enhancements to the romantic tone of the poem. The line “And a thousand fragrant posies” is particularly powerful with its over-the-top image of a sea of flowers: “fragrant” with its hint of elegance, beauty, and grace, and “posies” reinforcing that image of soft, delicate, and perhaps gently swaying fields in which to frolic. The complete poetic mosaic, thus, creates a field of brightest colors, with the scent of sweet perfume and lazy bees droning overhead in this most romantic of rainbow paradises.

The second poem is the cynical twin of the first. Here, all the high-minded and romantic ideals are dashed into the “rocks grow[n] cold.” Line by line, stanza by stanza, Sir Walter Raleigh’s “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd” opposes the romantic attitude of the passionate shepherd of the first poem. The reply is: no, poor shepherd, you are a dreamer. “Cold,” “gall,” “fade,” and “wither” are all chillingly clipped answers to the shepherd’s lovesick plea. He would wither away, longing for the immortal nymph. Here, the poet presents a realistic (if somewhat pessimistic) viewpoint on life and love. The shepherd and the nymph become a metaphor for life and how nothing lasts forever; thus, everything is in vain.

This negative metaphor is developed by Raleigh’s use of nonflowery, realistic diction. For example, “Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten” is a far cry from the “posies” and fair lined slippers” of the first poem. The nymph’s reply is cold and harsh with heart-breaking negative connotations for the shepherd and others who read the poem. Romanticism is challenged, calling to light the follies of the optimistic and pining fantasies of Christopher Marlowe’s poem.

Comments

This successful contrast/comparison essay presents a thorough and well-organized series of points. They are substantiated by text and insightful interpretation. This student writer:

- demonstrates a thorough understanding of the prompt and its demands;
- clearly illustrates the differing attitudes toward life presented in the two poems;
- effectively develops comparison and contrast points;
- makes appropriate and meaningful references to the texts to support the analysis;
- uses inferences to draw conclusions about the underlying meaning of the poems;
- demonstrates strong topic adherence;
- employs a mature writing style.

Student B

From the very beginning, the specific tone of praise and empathy are established. The author’s choice of words praises Paret and looks at him and at his fighting style with a sense of awe. Descriptive phrases such as, “that he had an unusual ability to take a punch,” or that “he took three punches to the

head in order to give back two.” begin to lead an already shocked reader toward the inevitable ending. When Mailer uses the words “bouncing,” “headache,” and “bad maulings,” an image of an animal springing from a fight pop into mind. However, this animal doesn’t know when to give up, that is why he doesn’t lose a fight; he just receives bad punches or beatings. Because of details and diction like these, the reader knows this man Benny Paret was special and would not give up, no matter what.

As one begins to read the second paragraph, the tone changes slightly. Paret is still proud; however, his showmanship is faltering. This, in turn, leads to his demise which is unlike any other. Much like his entire boxing career, Paret’s death was brutal, but respectable. The first seven sentences in the second paragraph set the reader up for the climax. They detail the Kid’s “first sign of weakness,” and “inspired particular shame,” allowing the reader to see that, as Mailer states, “Paret began to wilt.” For the first time the crowd sees him as human, a man, a man about to take the last beating of his life.

When the writer begins to narrate the actual mauling, or should I say killing, he goes into gory animalistic detail, comparing Paret to a “huge boxed rat” and Griffith to a “cat ready to rip the life out . . .” Right away, the reader begins to imagine this poor fighter trapped in the corner and this ogre beating away at him. Later on, Griffith’s punches are compared to a “piston rod which has broken through the crankcase,” and to “a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin,” the pumpkin being Paret’s head. All of a sudden, the reader not only visualizes this murder but hears the sounds that go with it, the sound of “goosh” or “whoosh,” two sounds that aren’t very pleasant when talking about a human being’s head. Describing the force needed to pull Griffith away, Mailer talks about his uncontrollable power, much like a rabid animal in real life, one with no feelings, just waiting to win. Griffith is portrayed as a man with no remorse.

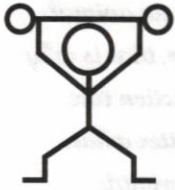
The last paragraph really hits home, making the reader say, “Wow” or “Oh, my G-d.” The idea of Paret dying on his feet, and the impact left on the crowd is almost overpowering. When Mailer chooses the word “hover” a certain heavy feeling just kind of hangs with the reader. The Kid’s death is slow and admirable. The metaphor “sank slowly” like a “large ship which turns . . .” gives a feeling of respect, the kind we give to great ships that sink at sea. In the last sentence, “the sound of Griffith’s . . . chopping into a wet log,” brutally drives home and reminds the reader of the relentless beating Paret sustained before he died.

Comments

The body of this student essay indicates a writer who understood both Mailer’s text and how to analyze the rhetorical strategies used by the author. This sample is a good model of an essay that smoothly integrates details and specific references into both the sentence and the paragraph.

Paragraph 1 points out Mailer’s use of descriptive words and phrases, cites specific examples, AND comments about the purpose and effect of these citations. Paragraph 2 provides an example of another form of citation. Here the writer refers to WHERE in the text the reference occurs. Note also how smoothly the details are integrated into the sentences. In paragraph 3, specific references are linked to the student writer’s main points, and he correctly makes use of the ellipsis. The final body paragraph also uses the ellipsis correctly and well when the writer pulls out just the phrases of a metaphor he needs to make a point. And, don’t forget to take note of the sequential transitional phrases we’ve blocked for you.

Workout 1



Go to your current writing portfolio or folder and choose one of your essays to examine closely.

1. The title of the essay is _____.

2. The subject of the essay is _____.

3. The purpose is _____.

4. The audience is _____.

5. My thesis statement is located in paragraph _____. It is

6. I have _____ major points in this essay. They are:

7. I've used the following organization method(s) to develop my points. (Check all that apply)

- Chronological order
- Spatial order
- Subject by subject
- Point by point examines
- Categorizing
- A single cause leading to a single effect or multiple effects
- Multiple causes leading to a single effect or multiple effects
- A single effect and the single or multiple cause(s)
- Multiple effects and the single or multiple cause(s)
- Most important to least important or vice versa
- Deduction
- Induction

8. My essay has _____ paragraphs.

9. The transitional elements in each of my paragraphs are:

¶ 2 _____

¶ 3 _____

¶ 4 _____

¶ 5 _____

¶ 6 _____

¶ 7 _____

¶ 8 _____

¶ 9 _____

¶ 10 _____

10. Each of my paragraphs has a topic sentence. ____ yes ____ no
11. Each of my body paragraphs has specific examples, references, etc., to support both my thesis and the topic sentence. ____ yes ____ no
12. I've made certain to avoid just listing examples, references, etc., ____ yes ____ no
13. I've connected each of my examples, or references, or points to the subject of my essay. ____ yes ____ no
14. If I had the opportunity to rewrite any of the body paragraphs of this essay, I would choose to rewrite paragraph _____ because _____
_____.
15. Here's my revision: _____



We strongly urge you to work through this and other writing and revising activities with members of your English class or members of your peer reading group. Having other readers provide you with feedback and vice versa is vital for strengthening your writing skills.

Supporting Syntax

Remember that part of your responsibility as a writer is clarity, whether you're composing the opening of your essay, the body, or its conclusion. As writing trainers, we can tell you

that there are particular syntax problems that you should be aware of and that you should try to avoid if you want to ensure this clarity. Consider the following three topics.

Incorporating Quotations and References from the Text into a Sentence

There are several techniques that allow you to place a specific textual reference in the sentence:



STRATEGY

- The reference to the speaker or writer or character; for example, *According to Mark Twain . . .*
- Citing the location of the reference; for example, lines 3–5 of paragraph 2 pose a rhetorical question.
- Placing the reference inside the sentence to illustrate a point; for example, *Dickens's diction such as "somber," "wasted," and "suffocating" establishes the motif of illness and death.*
- A general reference; for example, *In the first part of the poem . . .*
- Beginning a sentence with a quotation; for example, *"But why you ask me, should this tale be told to men grown old, or who are growing old?"* signals a transition in the poem.
- Splitting references; for example, *"An insurmountable precipice"* faces Hester in her quest for equality, and mustering courage, she is able to *"start back from a deep chasm."*
- AVOID THE LAUNDRY LIST. For example, There is frequent use of assonance in the poem, such as *"woe," "bemoan," "lone," and "o'er."* (This list is NOT linked to any meaning or point being made.) The solution: With such words as *"woe," "bemoan," "lone," and "o'er,"* the poet's assonance approximates the sounds of someone lamenting.



KEY IDEA

We recommend that you use a combination of the above techniques in any given essay. We also want to stress the importance of making certain that you link any and all of your references to a specific point you are making.

Using Transitions

Why worry about transitions? Simple. They constitute the primary connective tissue within the body of your essay. Transitions will:

- connect the various parts of the essay to both your thesis and to the preceding paragraph
- enable you to move from one thought to another without confusing your reader
- set up a sequence, if needed
- indicate cause and effect
- delineate the areas of contrast and comparison

Below is a brief listing of frequently used transitional words and phrases:

- Most often used and most "natural" transitions in sentences or brief sequences of sentences: *and, but, or, nor, for, yet*
- Some other commonly used transitions between paragraphs or sections of longer works:

___ (numerical) *first, second, third, primarily, etc.*

___ (sequential) *then, finally, next*

___ (additional) *furthermore, moreover, again, also, similarly*

___ (illustrative) *for example, for instance, to illustrate*

___ (contrast, comparison, alternative) *on the other hand, nevertheless, conversely, instead, however, still*

_____ (cause and effect) *therefore, consequently, as a result, accordingly*

_____ (affirmation) *of course, obviously, indeed*

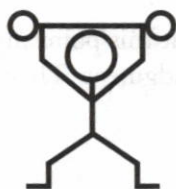
Active and Passive Voice

You've probably heard this more often than you can remember—"Avoid the passive voice." And, most of the time, you've ignored this piece of advice or used the passive voice without realizing it. Well, we're asking you NOT to ignore it and NOT to use it if at all possible. Nothing can add a deadening quality to your writing than passive voice.

We know; we know; you want to sound as "intelligent" as you possibly can, and using long, involved sentences with multisyllabic words that only a thesaurus could love is the way to do it. WRONG! Knowing your material and presenting it clearly is your best bet.

Just what is active and passive voice?

To answer this question, look at the following sentences:



The ball was driven by Paul.

1. What is the subject? _____
2. What is the verb tense? _____
3. Is the verb simple or compound? _____
4. What is the prepositional phrase? _____
5. How many words are in the sentence? _____

Paul drove the car.

1. What is the subject? _____
2. What is the verb tense? _____
3. Is the verb simple or compound? _____
4. Is there a prepositional phrase? _____
5. How many words are in the sentence? _____

Which of the two sentences has the subject of the sentence doing the action? _____

Which one has the subject being acted upon? _____

When the writing lets the reader know that the subject is **doing the acting**, you have **active voice**. When the subject is acted upon or is the goal of the action, and, therefore, NOT responsible, you have **Passive Voice**.

With this in mind, identify which of the two sentences above is active and which one is passive. Without a doubt, we know you chose the second as active and the first as passive.

Here's another example:

The new free trade agreement was signed last night.

Who signed the treaty? Who do we blame if the agreement falters? We don't know, do we? Passive voice avoids responsibility. It is a primary tool of those who wish to obfuscate or those who lack confidence and decisiveness.

Why not give the true picture and write:

Last night, the President of the United States and the President of Mexico signed a new free trade agreement.

More "Avoiders"

There are two AP English "idiosyncrasies" we would like to see every student avoid.

1. Avoid this type of phrase: *Poe uses diction . . .*

A writer doesn't *use* diction. His or her word choice is *categorized* as diction. Therefore, the proper phrasing would be: *Poe's diction . . .*

2. Avoid the judgmental qualifiers; for example, "Wordsworth's *masterful* use of the English language. . ."; "The *magnificent* argument . . ."

Masterful and *magnificent* are qualifiers. You may be at a later date, but at this point in your academic career, you are NOT in a position to make this type of judgment. They are just empty fillers and do nothing to enhance your essay.

The solution: *Wordsworth's use of language . . .*

This argument . . .