

Claim, Grounds, Warrant-- More Review (Ambai)

If you are interested, many of the language templates I use later in this post are adapted from Andrea Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz' truly excellent book, *Everything's an Argument*, often used as a textbook in both AP English III and college Freshmen Composition. It gives many invaluable tools for how to improve your writing; is extremely readable; and, best of all, can be acquired for less than \$15.

CLAIM

For thesis statements on an AP prompt, you should always be thinking two parts:

Concept (X) reveals Meaning (Y)

where X is a writing strategy, a literary device, or other feature of a text, and Y is either the narrowed version of what the prompt is asking you to do or an implicit argument from the text itself (a theme).

Look at the bad thesis from "Yellow Fish" Sample Essay One:

The author creates the character through reflections and other various techniques.

Essentially this is saying: the author creates character through characterization, which is spectacularly unhelpful in learning anything useful about the text. If you are not proving something that helps the reader to better understand the text, what's the point of writing the essay in the first place? This means you want to avoid a thesis that "proves" the plot or that a literary technique is present in the text.

A better version of the thesis in the sample essay would be something like:

The author creates the character through Anu's reflections and perceptions in order to establish her empathetic nature.

Now the claim makes an argument that's potentially worth reading.

I would avoid a thesis that locks you into a particular structure in a timed writing setting because a) it often sounds mechanical, and b) it does not allow you to modify your plans as you go. These are first drafts, after all, and sometimes you realize (as you write) that your initial plan isn't quite what you want you want to do after all. Worse, you can find yourself biting off more than you can chew, committing yourself to an essay that you realistically don't have time to write in forty minutes.

On the topic sentence level, a good claim statement gives your body paragraphs a spine, creating a focus that is too often lacking in student writing.

Here's the second body paragraph from Sample Essay Four:

The author continues to paint the main character as sentimental and sad when she parallels the yellow dying fish on the sand to that of when her newborn daughter died. She compared and likened the fish's round eyes to that of her daughter's and the fish gasping for air to how her daughter open and close her mouth as if sucking. The character even likens the color of the "ash grey sea" to that of her child's ashes. This would cause the audience to see the main character's sadness and sentimentality and cause them to sympathize with her.

Notice it reads like a summary of the text, and I cannot emphasize enough how disastrous this is for your grade. If it had started with an actual topic sentence, however, it reads more like an argument (even if some of the explanation is still a little suspect):

Next, Ambai creates a connection between the infant Jalaja and the fish in order to explain Anu's reaction to it so that the reader can better understand her grief. For instance, the author continues to paint the main character as sentimental and sad when she parallels the yellow dying fish on the sand to that of when her newborn daughter died. She compared and likened the fish's round eyes to that of her daughter's and the fish gasping for air to how her daughter open and close her mouth as if sucking. The character even likens the color of the "ash grey sea" to that of her child's ashes. This would cause the audience to see the main character's sadness and sentimentality and cause them to sympathize with her.

The simple addition of topic sentences would probably be enough to raise the score of this essay one to two points on the AP rubric, *even if nothing else were changed*. Taking the time to clarify what the argument is going to be for each body paragraph is the single best way to improve your essays. First, it makes your essays read like an essay, and second, it focuses your writing on making an argument (instead of merely summarizing or making random observations).

GROUNDS

You have to introduce quotes; this is non-negotiable. What this means is that there is enough context to understand that a) you are giving an example, and b) everything in the quotation is understandable without having to go back to the text to clarify meaning. I should be able to follow your argument even if I have never read the text.

The need to do this is one of the reasons why I am such a big advocate of using your introduction (before the thesis) to set-up the characters and conflict for the text you are analyzing-- so that you don't have to spend time doing this later (where it is more likely to read as a summary).

As an example of what not to do, let's revisit body paragraph two from "Yellow Fish" Sample Essay One:

The reflection itself also serves purpose to the author. Anu says, "The mouth of the urn. Open it" (54). This statement is indicative of some level of shock Anu is experiencing. By giving Anu these lines, Ambai reveals to the reader that Anu is absolutely traumatized by this occurrence, and felt as if the ashes in the urn were somehow still

connected to the lost child. The author reveals this instance to portray to the reader why Anu is the way that she has portrayed her to this point in the story.

While I'm pleased to know that Anu says it, there is absolutely no context that would tell me when this happens in the text or why Anu is talking about an urn (*What urn?*).

Some simple context, however, both clarifies the quote and helps set up the analysis that follows it:

For instance, when presented with the ashes of her infant Jalaja, Anu says to her husband Arun, "The mouth of the urn. Open it" (54).

Now there is almost zero room for confusion or misunderstanding on the reader's part, and it makes the analysis much more understandable. Now I understand why this would be shocking or indicative of trauma (to use the analysis in the original paragraph): Anu's child has died.

Grounds – Introducing Evidence

- For example/instance
- As an example/illustration/demonstration
- To illustrate/demonstrate/explain
- One example/instance
- Another way
- More specifically
- [X] states/explains/says, " _____."
- As [X] puts it/states/explains/says, " _____."
- [The author] writes/says/explains, " _____."
- When [something happens], [a character] states/explains/says, " _____."
- [context], [the author/a character] writing/saying/stating/explaining, " _____."
- In [X]'s view, " _____"
- Another way
- More specifically

WARRANT

In general, the quality of your warrants determines the quality of your argument, so the most thought should be devoted to making sure that you're actually proving what you claim that you are proving. For student writers, this generally means extending the explanation one or two steps beyond where they feel comfortable to avoid the dreaded "So what?" comment in the margins.

Go back to our bad paragraph from "Yellow Fish" Sample Essay One:

The reflection itself also serves purpose to the author. Anu says, “The mouth of the urn. Open it” (54). This statement is indicative of some level of shock Anu is experiencing. By giving Anu these lines, Ambai reveals to the reader that Anu is absolutely traumatized by this occurrence, and felt as if the ashes in the urn were somehow still connected to the lost child. The author reveals this instance to portray to the reader why Anu is the way that she has portrayed her to this point in the story.

Notice the way that the warrants do nothing but make more claims. For example, to say, “This statement is indicative of some level of shock Anu is experiencing. By giving Anu these lines, Ambai reveals to the reader that Anu is absolutely traumatized by this occurrence, and felt as if the ashes in the urn were somehow still connected to the lost child,” is *the beginning* of an analysis, not the end, since a) it does not really address the quote directly (always a bad sign), and b) there is no self-evident connection between the idea of opening an urn and trauma; the writer is supposed to clarify this link (explain), not just point it out.

A reasonable revision of the warrant would look something like this:

This statement is indicative of some level of shock Anu is experiencing. By giving Anu these lines, Ambai reveals to the reader that Anu is absolutely traumatized by this occurrence, and felt as if the ashes in the urn were somehow still connected to the lost child, as if she cannot face the idea of Jalaja’s absence and must confront the truth in a more tangible, visceral manner (to open the urn and see for herself). The more natural response, in other words, would be to grieve with Arun, but Anu cannot allow herself to admit that the child is dead, that all that remains are ashes; she must confront death directly in order to believe.

Notice how I restated at the end. I cannot emphasize enough how powerful restatement is when you’re trying to make a complicated point, allowing you to elaborate in such a way so that you’re simultaneously clarifying.

Warrant – “What this shows…”

- [X] matters/is important because _____.
- Although/while [X] may seem unimportant/trivial, it is in fact crucial because it establishes/demonstrates/illustrates/indicates/reveals/shows _____.
- [X] has important consequences for [Y] because _____.
- The significance of [X] is _____.
- [The author] states/writes, “_____,” establishing/demonstrating/illustrating/indicating/revealing/showing _____.
- When the author states, “_____,” it establishes/demonstrates/illustrates/indicates/reveals/shows _____.

Warrant -- Not Stated, but Implied

- Although [X] never says it directly/explicitly, it is clear/obvious that _____ because _____.
- One implication of _____ is _____.
- While [X] never admits as much, it is clear/obvious that _____ because _____.
- Although it might seem that _____ [is true], in fact _____. The reader understands this because _____.

Warrant – Restatement

- In other words, _____
- What [X] really means by this is _____
- In short, _____
- To put it another way, _____

MORE TRANSITIONS

Cause/Effect

- accordingly
- as a result
- consequently
- hence
- it follows, then
- since
- so
- then
- therefore
- thus

Comparison

- along the same lines
- in the same way
- likewise
- similarly

Addition

- also
- and
- besides
- furthermore
- in addition
- in fact
- indeed
- moreover
- so too

Conclusion

- ultimately
- hence
- to conclude
- thus
- therefore
- as a consequence of
- consequently
- as a result
- in sum
- it follows, then
- in brief

