

Keystone Exams: English Composition

Glossary to the Assessment Anchor & Eligible Content

The Keystone Glossary includes terms and definitions associated with the Keystone Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content. The terms and definitions included in the glossary are intended to assist Pennsylvania educators in better understanding the Keystone Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content. The glossary does not define all possible terms included on an actual Keystone Exam, and it is not intended to define terms for use in classroom instruction for a particular grade level or course.



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Active Voice	The subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb. e.g., The <i>man</i> kicked the can.
Adjective Clause	A clause that modifies a noun or pronoun and is often introduced by a relative pronoun (i.e., that, which, who, whom, whose). e.g., My aunt, <i>who left her bag in the taxi</i> , missed her flight.
Adverb Clause	A clause that functions as an adverb in a sentence. e.g., I saw a bear <i>when I was hiking</i> .
Antecedent	The word or phrase to which a pronoun refers. e.g., The <i>students</i> gave their best performance.
Appositive	A word or phrase close to the noun it is modifying. e.g., My neighbor, <i>Mr. Roberts</i> , is very quiet.
Argument/Position	The position or claim the writer establishes. Arguments must be supported with valid evidence and reasoning and balanced by the inclusion of counterarguments that illustrate opposing viewpoints.
Audience	The intended readers of a piece of writing.
Body	The internal paragraphs within a piece of writing.

Cause/Effect	An organizational structure in which the writer analyzes both the reasons leading to and the results of an action, event, or trend.
Claim	The opinion statement in a piece of persuasive writing. (See Argument/Position.)
Clarity	A quality of writing indicative of appropriate word choice and sentence structure that yields written text that is clear and concise.
Clause	<p>A group of words that contains a subject and predicate. An independent clause can stand as a sentence. e.g., <i>The meeting was cancelled.</i></p> <p>A dependent, or subordinate, clause must be attached to an independent clause in order to form a sentence. e.g., <i>The meeting was cancelled because snow was accumulating at an inch per hour.</i></p>
Cohesiveness	A quality of writing indicative of a logical flow of an argument and its correlating ideas and details throughout a piece of writing.
Commonly Confused Words	Words that are used mistakenly because of similarity in spelling, pronunciation, or context of usage (e.g., accept/except, imply/infer).
Compare/Contrast	An organizational structure in which the writer places together characters, situations, objects, or ideas to show common and/or differing features.

Conclusion	The final paragraph of a piece of writing that provides a sense of completeness for the reader as well as a re-emphasis of main points/ideas. The conclusion should not serve as a simple summary but should leave the reader with a clear impression of what has been discussed.
Conjunction	<p>A connecting word.</p> <p>Coordinating conjunctions (i.e., and, but, so, for, nor, or, yet) connect two equal grammatical structures. e.g., I swept the floor, <i>and</i> Emma loaded the dishwasher.</p> <p>Subordinating conjunctions (e.g., <i>after</i>, <i>because</i>, <i>although</i>) emphasize the importance of one grammatical structure over the other. e.g., I swept the floor <i>after</i> Emma loaded the dishwasher.</p>
Content/Meaning	The essence and substance—information, ideas, insights, and beliefs—that constitute the body of a written text.
Controlling Idea/Main Idea	The writer’s central thought and chief topic of a piece of writing.
Conventions of Language	Grammar, mechanics (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, and spelling), and language usage.
Counterargument	An argument that is in opposition to the claim/position provided in a piece of persuasive writing. It is a means to provide a balance between the claim/position and its opposing views and adds credibility to the writing by allowing a broader range of viewpoints.

Dangling Modifier	A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that is not clearly attached to the word or phrase it is modifying. e.g., <i>At the age of two</i> , my father took me to the circus. We were surprised to see a deer <i>driving down the road</i> .
Edit	A part of the revision process in which the writer corrects grammar, mechanics, and word usage in text to improve the writing in presentation and intent.
Exposition/Expository	A form of writing that explains, defines, instructs, or clarifies information.
Focus	What the writer establishes as the central point of interest; a quality of writing where all main ideas, details, and examples support and unify the topic.
Fragment	A group of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with punctuation but is not a complete sentence because it is missing either a subject or predicate and/or does not express a complete thought. e.g., <i>When the baby sneezed and coughed</i> .
Gerund	The <i>-ing</i> form of a verb that is used as a noun. e.g., <i>Running</i> is my favorite form of exercise.
Grammar	The system of rules that provides definition and structure to a given language.
Infinitive	The word <i>to</i> plus the base form of a verb. e.g., <i>To write</i> well, one must work hard.

Informative	A form of writing that is synonymous with expository or explanatory writing; its purpose is to inform.
Introduction	The opening of a piece of writing that is integral to what follows. The introduction grabs the reader's attention, establishes the main idea or thesis of the writing, and explains how the topic is going to be developed.
Irregular Verb	A verb that does not use <i>-ed</i> to form the past tense. e.g., <i>be</i> → <i>was</i> <i>know</i> → <i>knew</i>
Irrelevant Details	Details—word, phrases, sentences, or information—that are not vital or illustrative to a piece of writing.
Misplaced Modifier	A modifier that is not placed correctly in the sentence. e.g., Please return this book to Mrs. Caldwell's desk, <i>which she lent me</i> .
Modal Auxiliary Verb	A helping verb (e.g., <i>can</i> , <i>could</i> , <i>may</i> , <i>might</i>) that indicates ability, intention, or probability.
Modifier	Adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses that describe/modify other words in the sentence. A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail. (See Dangling Modifier, Misplaced Modifier.)
Organizational Strategies	Methods of organization (e.g., chronological, compare/contrast, problem/solution) that establish topic and purpose, provide support for topic and purpose, address counterclaims, or reiterate main points.

Organizational Structure	A plan or framework that the writer uses to organize text.
Parallel Structure	Putting sentence elements or ideas in similar grammatical form. e.g., The best parts about summer are <i>swimming</i> , <i>biking</i> , and <i>sleeping</i> .
Participle	A verb form that functions as a noun (see Gerund), an adjective, or an adverb. Participles can end in <i>-ing</i> (e.g., the <i>crying</i> baby) or <i>-ed</i> (e.g., an <i>educated</i> person). They can also form past perfect tense (e.g., The movie <i>had started</i> by the time we arrived), present perfect tense (e.g., Hurry up; the movie <i>has started</i>), and future perfect tense (e.g., Hurry up; the movie <i>will have started</i> by the time you get here).
Passive Voice	The subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb. e.g., The man <i>was struck by</i> lightning.
Persuasion	A form of writing that focuses on convincing the reader of stated beliefs or opinions. Strong persuasive writing includes clearly stated positions or opinions, convincing evidence, and anticipated concerns and counterarguments.
Persuasive Strategies	Intentional writing strategies that may be used to influence an audience. These methods may include appeals to emotions, ethics, and logic.
Phrase	A group of words that does not contain a subject and/or a predicate. e.g., The restaurant <i>that recently opened</i> has received positive reviews.
Precise Language	Specific language and vocabulary that clearly communicate the writer's ideas to the reader.

Predicate	The part of a sentence that contains the verb and all of its modifiers.
Prepositional Phrase	A phrase that consists of a preposition (e.g., <i>of, with, by, over, next</i>) and its object. e.g., The man <i>with the red hat</i> is my best friend. I want to sit <i>by you</i> during the concert.
Process Analysis	Writing that explains how something is done or how something operates; the explanation separates the topic into steps or parts to accommodate the analysis.
Problem/Solution	An organizational writing strategy/structure that the writer uses to present a problem and possible solutions to it.
Pronoun Case	The function of a pronoun within a sentence. Pronouns change case to form possessives (e.g., <i>my, his, our</i>) or to serve as subjects (e.g., <i>I, he, we</i>) or objects (e.g., <i>me, him, us</i>).
Purpose	The writer's established intent to inform/teach, to entertain, or to persuade/convince.
Redundancy	The overuse of certain words, phrases, or details within a piece of writing. This may also refer to repeated statements of already-established ideas.
Relevant Detail	A word, phrase, sentence, or detail that is vital and illustrative to a piece of writing. Relevant details support controlling ideas; provide evidence, examples, and reasons; and generally enrich a piece of writing.

Revise	The process by which the writer revisits his or her work and makes changes in content and/or organization. The writer may remove irrelevant or redundant text, expand text to include additional content, or elaborate on existing text.
Run-On Sentence	Two or more complete sentences without correct punctuation or conjunctions to separate them. e.g., The two boys rode their bikes to the park they planned to swim all afternoon.
Sentence Structure	The grammatical arrangement of words in sentences. A complete sentence must contain a subject and a predicate and express a complete thought. The structure of a sentence may be simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex.
Sentence Types	<p><i>A simple sentence</i> consists of one independent clause and no subordinate clauses. e.g., Kathy likes to dance.</p> <p><i>A compound sentence</i> consists of two or more independent clauses and no subordinate clauses. e.g., Kathy likes to dance, and Brian likes to sing.</p> <p><i>A complex sentence</i> consists of one or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. e.g., Although Kathy likes to dance and Brian likes to sing, neither has tried out for the school play.</p> <p><i>A compound-complex sentence</i> consists of at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause. e.g., Kathy and Brian, who enjoy dancing and singing, have not tried out for the school play; we should encourage them to audition.</p>
Sentence Variety	The presence of multiple sentence structures in a text (i.e., simple, compound, complex, compound-complex) and/or various sentence beginnings that can enhance rhythm or add emphasis to a piece of writing.
Style	The writer's choices regarding language, sentence structure, voice, and tone in order to communicate with the reader.

Stylistic Techniques	The ways in which the writer may employ multiple elements of writing to distinguish and strengthen a piece of writing. These include variations in sentence structure, word choice, tone, usage, and point of view.
Syntax	The pattern or structure of word order in sentences, clauses, and phrases.
Subject-Verb Agreement	A grammatical rule in which the subject of a sentence must agree with its verb in both number and tense. e.g., The <i>women</i> at the ticket booth <i>buy</i> their tickets. The <i>woman</i> at the ticket booth <i>buys</i> her ticket.
Task	The assigned writing. Factors that affect the writer’s task are purpose, audience, and organizational structure.
Thesis	The basic argument or main idea advanced by a writer.
Tone	The writer’s established attitude toward the audience, the subject, or the work itself.
Topic Sentence	A sentence that describes the main/controlling idea that will be developed within a particular paragraph.
Transitional Words/Expressions	Words that provide cues by indicating the various relationships between sentences and between paragraphs (e.g., <i>in other words, for example, finally, as a result</i>).
Unity	A quality of writing where the various components of detail, sentence structure/type, word choice, transitions, tone, and style all work together to create a consistent, effective piece of writing.

Usage	The process that involves choosing and using the correct word in a piece of writing. Common errors in usage are found in comparisons (e.g., <i>older/oldest</i>), verbs (e.g., <i>lie/lay</i>), and expressions (e.g., <i>fewer/less</i>).
Verbal	A form of a verb that is used as an adjective, adverb, or noun. (See Gerund, Infinitive, Participle.)
Voice	The fluency, rhythm, and liveliness in a piece of writing that make it unique to the writer.
Word Choice	Not only choosing the correct word to use (e.g., <i>effect/affect</i>) but also choosing words thoughtfully to create tone and style that reveal the writer's voice.
Wordiness	When a writer uses more words than are necessary to express a point, detail, or explanation (e.g., <i>due to the fact that</i> rather than <i>because</i>).