# AXES: Writing Papers That Make Sense

## Or How To Cut Sentences That Do Not Belong In Your Paper

**Coherency and Unity:** For your paper to make sense (or be coherent) to a reader, your writing must stay "on topic;" and all of your paragraphs must support your thesis statement. In other words, your assertions—which are sometimes called topic sentences or claims—must be unified with your thesis. The AXES model is a tool that you can use to write paragraphs that stay on topic and not wander off into incoherency. Each AXES paragraph maintains its unity by containing 1) an **Assertion** that relates to your thesis, 2) an **eXample** that offers support for your Assertion, and 3) an **Explanation** that proves your eXample and backs up your Assertion. An AXES paragraph then closes with 4) why the paragraph is **Significant** to your overall argument. The AXES format looks like this:

### **A**ssertion: An assertion is your claim for the paragraph.

Assertions are statements that contain a specific argument, claim, or position which links your arguments to each other and your thesis. Assertions are confident and concrete. Think of an assertion as a thesis statement for the paragraph. An essay without enough assertions will seem like a list of unrelated facts—such assertionless essays lack unity, and your reader cannot follow your train of thought. Also, assertions must also be backed up with evidence, or else the assertions will seem unbelievable. Therefore, an assertion must be followed with an **eXample**.

### e**X**amples: An example is a quote or passage from the readings that supports your assertion.

Examples answer the question of "What evidence is there to support my assertion?" The more specific your examples are, the more precise your analysis will be—*that is why it's a good idea to critically read the text before you write your paper*. If you do not have any examples, your reader will constantly wonder where and how you derived your assertions; and consequently, your reader may not accept your argument. An example, however, seldom speaks for itself; you need to **Explain** your examples.

### **E**xplanation: The explanation reveals how the example supports the assertion.

You must explain how your example relates to your assertion, and the explanation should be clear and specific. The explanation tells your reader how the example proves the assertion. Without any explanations, your reader is never clear as to how you see the evidence, and your reader is forced to second guess your intentions. Beware, however, that if you simply state, support and prove your assertions, your reader may respond with indifference unless you point out why your assertion is **Significant**.

### **S**ignificance (or the "So What"): The significance reveals how or why the paragraph supports the paper's thesis.

If you can't explain the significance of how the assertion and example relate to the paper's thesis, the paragraph doesn't belong in the paper (or you have to revise the assertion). Ask yourself these basic questions to determine your assertion's significance:

* Why is the assertion important to my argument?
* How does the passage or scene under scrutiny relate to the piece as a whole?
* What is important about the text and how does it challenge or confirm my own beliefs?
* So what do you want your reader to learn from this paragraph?

**Remember to stay focused on the text (and the evidence) that you are analyzing.**

**Here is a short essay interpreted through the AXES paragraph format. (The abbreviations show which sentences/elements of the paragraph correspond to AXES categories):**

**(A)** Contrary to what the Mayor's Office has said, safety was never the primary consideration for installing traffic light cameras in San Diego. **(X)** In fact, none of the devices were placed at any of San Diego's *top-ten most dangerous intersections.* **(E)** Instead, the documents tell us how the camera operators consciously sought out mistimed intersections as locations for new red light cameras. **(E)** Yellow signal times at intersections turn out to be directly related to "red light running." Simply put, when the yellow light is short, more people enter on red. **(S)** Inadequate yellow time causes a condition where individuals approaching an intersection are unable either to come to a safe stop or to proceed safely before the light turns red.

**(A)** Though dangerous, this condition also turns out to be very profitable. **(X)** Each time someone ends up in an intersection on red in San Diego, *the city collects $271.* And *$70* of that fine is paid as bounty to the city's private contractor. **(E)** Combine hefty fines with mistimed signals and you've found the formula for making big money. **(X)** A single camera brought the city *$6.8 million in just 18 months.* **(X)** Consider the intersection of Mission Bay Drive and Grand Avenue in San Diego. With a yellow time of 3 seconds, this busy intersection produced about 2,300 violations every month because the yellow light duration is one half of a second shorter than a yellow light should be. **(S)** Apparently, the city cares little about driver safety when one of its busiest traffic camera intersections maintains a too-short yellow-light period to produce over 2,000 dangerous violations per month. In actuality, the city is using the safety hazards at such intersections to make money, thus valuing financial profit over citizenry.