1. Specific reference to a tension: Between Wallace’s original, apparent thesis about the rhetorical efficacy of Garner’s sanitized and impersonal English and his choice to employ a distinctly unsanitized version of English.

“But while Wallace claims that Garner is a “genius” (57), he deliberately departs from Garner’s anonymous writing style. In fact, Wallace flaunts his authorial voice, and by the end of the essay the reader is well acquainted with the author.”

1. Description of how that tension affects the reader and/or meaning in the text: Leads readers to question the style and efficacy of Wallace’s own prose when he writes directly opposite to his actual advice.

“This show-and-tell attitude is in complete opposition to Garner’s more anonymous

strategy, which can lead the reader to believe that if Garner is a genius, then Wallace must be a nincompoop for projecting himself onto his argument.”

1. Identification of an interpretive problem (often posed as a question):

“This begs the question: if Wallace so admires Garner’s impersonal approach, why does he appeal to his reader with such different rhetoric?”

1. Presentation of evidence that such an interpretive problem exists (often points to an underlying pattern): Points out repeated nonstandard facets of Wallace’s own writing within his own writing, such as non-English words, swaps between childish and professorial voices.

“Childish speech (such as the “plus” in “plus also the “uncomfortable’ part” and the “sort of” in “it was sort of our family’s version of ‘100 Bottles . . . Wall’”) sits alongside obscure foreign imports such as à clef and Sprachgefül (41).”

1. Explicit or implicit reference to the author’s overarching project: Near the end, the author makes clear what Wallace’s ultimate goal is, which is to convey an argument about the efficacy of non-Standard English as well.

“David Foster Wallace lets his words speak for themselves. Even in an essay praising the merits of Standard English, he manages to display the versatility and flexibility of the English language without uttering a word on the subject.”

1. Reconciliation of the tension: Wallace uses non-Standard English in a convincing manner in order to show that impersonal prose is not a prerequisite for rhetorical effect.

“His specifically non-Standard choice of words proves that other forms of English can be just as persuasive as Standard English.”

1. A strong (arguable, supportable) claim: The point that Wallace is making about non-Standard English is actually in line with his wider claims about the use of English in general, which is that it has use in communication and persuasion.

“The fact that individual words define (and support) Wallace’s position vis-à-vis the English language is undeniable proof in favor of Wallace’s fundamental thesis: that words do have power, that language does matter, and that English usage is in fact a political issue.”

1. A clear sense of what is motivating the student author to explore this tension (ie. why the tension matters): The student perceives language as something with great power to persuade, and thus a social and political issue.

“Anything this powerful is by definition a social concern, and so what does or does not go into the dictionary is an issue of the utmost social, political, and democratic importance.”