

Incorporating Evidence

One method of achieving good marks in your assignments is to have a strong argument. A strong argument is one which is persuasive and is clearly presented. One of the most important elements of creating a persuasive argument is to use evidence.

Generally, you use evidence to:

- map the debate
- demonstrate where your argument fits into the debate.

More specifically, you can use evidence in different ways to:

- distinguish one point of view from another
- create a link between a cause and an effect
- refute someone else's argument
- substantiate your logic or claim
- compare one thing with another, from which your argument can be furthered.

How to work evidence into your writing

There are a number of ways to place evidence in your writing to strengthen your claims.

- Offer evidence that **agrees** with your position, and then add to it with ideas of your own.
- Present evidence that **contradicts** your position, and then argue against (refute) that evidence.
- Use sources **against** each other, as if they were experts on a panel discussing your position.
- Use paraphrasing/summarising/quotations to **support** your claim, not merely to state or restate it.

Activity: using evidence

Below is an example of evidence-based writing by a first-year health sciences student:

A large number of developing countries still allow the procurement of antibiotics over-the-counter, without any professional oversight. The likelihood that these antibiotics are being used correctly without the proper guidance of a medical professional is low (Hobson, 2012). Davies and Davies (2010) also suggest that many countries are receiving antibiotics that are already ineffective in western nations, contributing to the problem for these countries locally and for the wider global community. It should be noted though, that some developing countries are starting to more tightly regulate access, with Chile banning the sale of antibiotics without a prescription and India trying to create an accreditation system to assist in regulating the use of antibiotics (Chatterjee & Fleck, 2011). In the absence of appropriate regulation, further awareness of the problem and education on their correct usage may assist.

Transition words

Another author's view adds to discussion and is made prominent in text

Consider this:

1. Refer to the above list of 'how to work evidence into your writing' to identify how evidence is used.
2. Identify the phrases this student uses to transition from each use of evidence to the next.

Weak and strong uses of evidence

To use evidence effectively, you need to integrate it smoothly into your essay. Try this pattern:

1. State your claim.
2. Give your evidence, remembering to relate it to the claim.
3. Comment on the evidence to show how it supports the claim.

To see the differences between weak and strong uses of evidence, compare the following paragraphs.

Weak

Today, we are too self-centred. Most families no longer sit down to eat together, preferring instead to eat on the go while rushing to the next appointment (Gleick, 2011). Everything is about what we want.

This is weak evidence because it is not related to the claim. The writer does not explain the connection - the claim about self-centeredness is not explicitly linked to the evidence about families eating together.

The same evidence can be used to support the same claim, but with the addition of a clear connection between claim and evidence, and some analysis of the evidence cited.

The other limitation of this example is related to the use of academic language. The example below uses more formal language, for example it states 'Australians' instead of 'we', and uses linking words or phrases such as 'in fact' to indicate information will follow that strengthens the writer's claim.

Strong

Today, Australians appear to be self-centred. Families do not seem to matter as much as they once did, while other people and activities appear to take precedence. In fact, the evidence shows that most Australian families no longer eat together, preferring instead to eat on the go while rushing to the next appointment (Gleick, 2011). Sit-down meals have been a time to share and connect with others; however, that connection has become less valued, as families begin to prize individual activities over shared time promoting self-centeredness over group identity (Forest, 2013).

Links evidence to the claim

Highlights and links to evidence

This is a far better example. The evidence is more smoothly integrated into the text, the link between the claim and the evidence is strengthened, and the evidence itself is analysed to provide support for the claim. Moreover, two sources are used to provide evidence, which builds a stronger argument overall.

Consider this:

1. Why is using more than one source desirable when presenting an argument?
2. Do you think there should be a minimum number of sources?

Other helpsheets available

- Argument Maps
- Concept Maps
- Mind Maps
- Writing in an Academic Style
- What is Paraphrasing

Information in this helpsheet has been adapted from the following:

Australian National University (2010). Using evidence in your essay. Retrieved January 25, 2016 from <https://academickills.anu.edu.au/resources/handouts/using-evidence-your-essay>

Indiana University. (2011). Incorporating evidence into your essay. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/using_evidence.pdf