

Integrating Evidence into Your Writing

This handout is designed to help students effectively use evidence in their writing. *Properly integrating appropriate evidence is an important step in making your claims more convincing to the reader.* This could mean effectively answering your research question in a research paper, or persuading the reader to agree with your thesis statement in an essay.

Evidence at a glance

What *is* evidence? Evidence is information that supports your claims. Just as a lawyer must provide evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt the guilt of the accused, writers must provide evidence in the form of *ideas* that convince the reader to agree with their claims about a given topic.

What does evidence *look like*? Evidence may appear as direct quotations, paraphrased ideas (other authors' ideas re-phrased into your own words), statistics, and other information gathered from external sources, such as tables, charts, and photos. The types of evidence you use may also depend on your field of study. For instance, statistical (also called *empirical*) evidence may be appropriate for a science paper, but less so for an English literature paper. In turn, a poetry quotation may not be appropriate evidence for a science paper.

Where do I *find* evidence? Credible evidence (evidence which is trustworthy and plausible) comes from credible sources. For instance, a peer-reviewed academic journal—whereby research papers submitted for publication are scrutinized and critiqued by topic experts with PhDs before they are published—is a much more credible source of expert-level information than popular media written for the general public (for example, glossy magazines). Also, if you refer to websites for evidence, *do so with caution* because there are very few, if any, quality control measures to ensure the credibility of web-published information. In summary, *choose your evidence sources carefully and with a critical eye.*

Always select the most recent evidence, especially in fields of study in *which knowledge advances rapidly* (for example, national economy statistics may be updated annually or even monthly). Broadly speaking, recent research is typically regarded as that which has been published within the last five years, but this definition does not suggest you should always ignore older evidence—especially if it represents the *most recent* evidence on your topic. Older evidence is acceptable in many contexts. For instance, many scholars may use decades old

“milestone research” as evidence, because it is still considered the gold standard for its particular field of study.

How/when should I incorporate evidence?

- Offer evidence that *supports* (agrees with) your argument.
- You may also offer evidence that *conflicts* with your position (counter-evidence), and then *argue against it* to further strengthen your own position. Revealing weaknesses in the logic of counter-evidence is a powerful method for justifying your stance and shows the reader that you have methodically thought about your argument. Offering counter-evidence also shows the reader that you have avoided “cherry picking” your evidence. Cherry picking means purposefully only choosing evidence that supports your claims and ignoring information that is relevant to the broader debate, and as such, warrants acknowledgement even though it may contradict your argument.
- Use examples of competing evidence against each other to simulate a debate.
- Use quotations to *support* your ideas, but not simply to state or restate your claim. Quotations are ideas expressed word-for-word as they appear in the original text enclosed in quotation marks (“like this”) and should *complement* your own thoughts.

Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: Citing Your Sources

Whether you have used a direct quotation, a paraphrased idea, a photo, or another form of evidence, you must *cite* your source. **Citing is the act of documenting whose work the idea came from.** Doing so not only gives credit to the person(s) who conceived the idea, but it also helps the reader distinguish where your own ideas end in your paper and someone else’s ideas begin. A *parenthetical in-text citation* for paraphrased information contains the author’s last name, and usually the *year* in which the idea was published, for instance (Crain 2010). Some formatting rules also require a page number for paraphrased ideas, although a page number is usually required only for a direct quotation, for instance (Crain 2010, 23). Be sure to check a *style guide* for proper citation style and other formatting issues, and follow the rules of that particular style consistently throughout your paper.

A style guide is a reference book that provides the standardized formatting rules of formal writing, including punctuation, grammar, style, titles and headings, the bibliography, and so on. There are many style guides to choose from, although some of the more popular style guides used in academia include:

- *The Chicago Manual of Style*. A popular choice among the social sciences.
- *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. It is also popular among the social sciences.
- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. It is used in psychology, nursing, education, and First Nations studies.

How to Properly Incorporate Evidence Into Your Paper

Effectively using evidence is not just about properly documenting your evidence, but also where and how you incorporate evidence into your writing, and how you explain its significance to your argument.

To effectively show the reader how evidence supports your claims, use a well-organized paragraph structure in combination with language signals. Language signals such as “for example,” “therefore,” and “in contrast,” for instance, help make connections and transitions between ideas more clear to the reader. See the Academic Success Centre’s “Language Signals” handout for a list of suggested language signals and their uses.

Use this basic pattern as a guide to incorporate evidence into your paragraph:

- 1) State your claim, and define any terms that may not be known to your reader.
- 2) Provide evidence that supports your claim.
- 3) Comment on how the evidence supports your claim. This is where you clearly *explain the connection between your claim and the evidence* to the reader. Do not assume the reader automatically understands the connections between your ideas—you must *explain* them!

Example of evidence incorporated ineffectively (a weak paragraph)

The Haiti earthquake in January 2010 provided an opportunity for illegal behaviour to flourish. Many children were trafficked to the Dominican Republic (Crain 2010) and other countries throughout the world, and illegitimate charities were created. These activities were profitable for many people.

The above paragraph is weak because it leaves the reader wondering:

- What is trafficking?
- How is money made from trafficking children and who benefits?
- How is an illegitimate charity created and how does it make money?
- What evidence is there to support claims about the lucrative nature of these activities?

Example of more effective paragraphs

The Haiti earthquake in January 2010 provided an opportunity for illegal behaviour to flourish. For instance, the chaotic aftermath of the earthquake made it easier for human traffickers to kidnap children who were orphaned during the crisis and sell them to buyers in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere (Crain 2010). Human trafficking is defined as being “...deceived or taken against [one’s] will, bought, sold and transported into slavery for sexual exploitation, sweat shops, child brides, circuses, sacrificial worship, forced begging, sale of human organs, farm labour, [and/or] domestic servitude” (Stop the Traffick 2010, 1.). It cannot always be determined where or how trafficked children are used, however in West Africa, for example, many children are labourers on cocoa plantations, and in South East Asia children are often used for prostitution (Stop the Traffick 2010). Human trafficking can be lucrative for the both sellers and buyers because its victims are often kidnapped which costs the traffickers little (if any) money, and then sold to buyers who profit from traffickees’ enslaved labour.

Some people also financially benefited from the Haiti earthquake through the establishment of phony charities (Ministry of Public Safety 2010). A phony charity can be invented overnight by using a fabricated logo and illegitimate charitable status registration number. After the Haiti earthquake, various groups claiming to be charitable organizations collected money from generous people who trusted that their donations would directly benefit Haiti, when in fact their money landed in the pockets of crooks. Given the generosity of Canadians – collectively we donated over \$8.6 Billion in 2007 to charities and non-profit organizations (Canada Revenue Agency 2010) – establishing an illegitimate charity can be a lucrative business, especially when disaster strikes at home or abroad.

These paragraphs are stronger because:

- A definition of human trafficking is provided (always define your terms)
- The links between the claims and the evidence are clearly explained in terms of why the illegal activity is lucrative.
- Credible citations are provided for evidence.

How to Properly Incorporate Quotations as Evidence Into Your Paper

Quotations are someone else's *exact* words, and special attention must be given to how those words are integrated into your own writing. This not only means properly citing the quote, but also *blending* the quote into the sentence by using lead-in language so it flows with the words that surround it.

Example of a poorly integrated quote:

The 2009-2010 winter season in many countries throughout the world was unseasonably mild. "El Niño is an oscillation of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific having important consequences for weather around the globe." (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 2010, 1).

Now the same quote integrated smoothly:

The 2009-2010 winter season in many countries throughout the world was unseasonably mild due to a natural phenomenon called El Niño. As described by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) "El Niño is an oscillation of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific having important consequences for weather around the globe" (2010, 1). The warm water which gets redistributed during these oscillations in turn warms global air currents, resulting in warmer weather in some parts of the globe.

The second example is better because:

- The concept of El Niño is introduced early in the paragraph which prepares the reader for the quote that follows.
- The quote is blended/introduced using the lead-in phrase ("As described by...") rather than just being placed in the paragraph without any warning.
- The author also explains the significance of the information in the quote, in terms of the warmer weather described in the paragraph's topic sentence.
- Finally, a proper in-text citation including the year and page number is included. Note that because the author of the quote was already introduced early in the sentence, they need not be repeated in the citation at the end of the sentence.

Evidence Checklist

Consider the following as you polish your paper in the editing process:

- Have I provided enough/relevant evidence to convince the reader of my claims?
- Have I explained how the evidence supports my claims?
- Have I used lead-in language to smoothly integrate my evidence?
- Have I used innovative and current evidence, rather than simply stating obvious and/or outdated information?
- Have I cited the sources of the evidence?

This handout was adapted from *How to Use Evidence*, a pamphlet developed by Indiana University's Writing Tutorial Services (2004).

That pamphlet is available at www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets.shtml