



Using Evidence

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The MWC is a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative serving Northwest Vista College students, faculty, and the community through tutoring in writing skills, critical thinking, and building writing pedagogy. Effective writing is a cornerstone of education.

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A central part of writing is supporting your claim or argument. This practice often requires more than opinion; a strong claim requires EVIDENCE.

Well-chosen facts:

- help provide substance, meaning, and structure to your argument
- allow you to show your reader your reasoning or thought process and
- showcase your ability to choose and integrate the best supporting evidence for your claim – a true skill.

****Your instructor may have different preferences or instructions in their essay prompts.
Always follow your specific assignment instructions****

The best use of evidence follows a number of practices.

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Practice 1: Stay on Target

Make sure the evidence directly supports the statement or argument

Your evidence needs to have a clear connection to your argument or claim. Just because a piece of evidence is interesting does not mean it directly supports your thesis point.

For example, if you are arguing one article is stronger than another because it has clearer data, you would not use a source or evidence that underscores the importance of strong analysis.

While strong analysis is important, that evidence does not directly support your point about data. You would best support your point by finding a source that details the importance of strong and clear data.

If you are analyzing the differing levels of effects of the Revolutionary War on the Early American economy, you should not include evidence about Early American culture that does not directly explain economic changes. While culture is important, and culture and economy are arguably connected, your argument is specifically regarding the War and the economy **only**.

Practice 2: Choose Wisely

Use the most appropriate and strongest evidence you can

Once you have decided your evidence directly supports your argument, make sure it is the strongest and most appropriate choice from your source(s).

Generally, the point in your source will be strong because there are several instances of evidence supporting it – select the strongest and clearest evidence choice(s) to include in your own argument of that point.

This choice can be made by separating and comparing the different selections of evidence to the point they are supporting. Determine which selection of evidence is the most direct, the most convincing, and the most meaningful.

Your evidence in part exists to give competence and meaning to your argument. Therefore, the evidence that most successfully does this is the evidence you should use.

Practice 3: Tell Me the Odds

Use specific evidence, and explain it clearly

Whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize, you do not “talk around” your evidence, you **present** your evidence.

Once you have chosen the strongest and most meaningful evidence, you must present it clearly and explain its place in your argument.

For example, if you are using data to prove a point, be as specific as you think is needed to best support your point. Do not simply state that the data is important; **show and explain how** it is important. This can be using the exact numbers from the data, or clearly describing the data characteristics, like “the study showed a two-fold increase,” or “the study showed a 200% increase.”

Explain this evidence’s significance to your argument by **clearly and directly** making the connection to your claim, like “this result shows that [thesis] is correct because the key factor in the increase was [point].” You then expand on your analysis (more on this in the next section).

Specific evidence is better than general evidence as it avoids stereotypes, generalities, and typically is the type of evidence needed to support a strong and interesting point.

If a thesis, argument, or claim is meant to be specific and arguable then the evidence used to support it needs to be specific to the claim.

Point 4: Don’t Overdress

Make sure the evidence is supportive, not dominant

Your analysis should typically far outweigh your evidence. With the exception of strictly-data reports, the large majority of your work should be **your work**. Additionally, each section of evidence and analysis should be related back to your thesis.

You should consider whether you need to explain the origin, expertise, relevance, and importance of your evidence.

Consider whether you should define terms, strengths, or weaknesses.

You will need to explain the intent and meaning of your evidence to your argument.

Do not assume your evidence alone proves your point. You need to introduce, present, and analyze your evidence; then you connect it back to your point and overall thesis.

This requirement is often why instructors restrict how often you may quote in your paper. Direct quotes seem the easiest way to include evidence, but in fact you risk not integrating the evidence and resorting to simply inserting the quote into the paper.

When you summarize or paraphrase, you should take care to clearly delineate between those and your own analysis. This can be done through clear assessment of the evidence, explanation, and connecting back to your point, as well as correct citation.

Note: connecting your evidence back to your point is more than “this proves that [argument].” You must explain why and to what extent.

Point 5: Great, Kid, Don't get Cocky

Always cite your sources. Always.

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There are two major reasons to cite your sources:

- to give your sources credit, and
- to give yourself credit

Not citing your sources has two major results:

- you plagiarize (you can fail the class, be suspended, or expelled), and
- your own work and analysis is not clearly defined

You cite every time you use another source. Whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize, you must cite your source.

Typically, you will need to cite **in-text** and create a **references list**.

In-text means the citation occurs literally in the text of your paper. Some examples are:

- ...the diameter increased by ten percent” (Overton, 1996).
- ...resulted in the cultural shift we see today (Craig, p. 21).

There are many different formatting and citation styles that have different requirements. Your instructor will decide which style they want you to use.