

WRITING EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

Writing evidence-based claims is a little different from writing stories or just writing about something. You need to **follow a few steps** as you write.

1. ESTABLISH THE CONTEXT

Your readers must know **where your claim is coming from** and **why it's relevant**.

Depending on the scope of your piece and claim, the context differs.

If your whole piece is one claim or if you're introducing the first major claim of your piece, the entire context must be established:

In "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Raymond Carver develops...

Purposes of evidence-based writing vary. In some cases, naming the book and author might be enough to establish the relevance of your claim. In other cases, you might want to supply additional information:

In order to develop themes in fiction, authors will often use motifs. In "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," Raymond Carver develops...

If your claim is part of a larger piece with multiple claims, then the context might be simpler:

To create this effect, Carver... or In paragraph 5, Carver...

2. STATE YOUR CLAIM CLEARLY

How you state your claim is important; it must **precisely and comprehensively express your analysis**.

Figuring out how to state claims is a **process**; writers revise them continually as they write their supporting evidence. Here's a claim about the theme in Carver's story:

A theme of the short story, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," by Raymond Carver, could be summarized as: the nature of love is elusive and complex, and defies verbalization.

When writing claims, it is often useful to describe parts of the claim before providing the supporting evidence. In this case, the writer might want to briefly identify and describe the various techniques Carver uses to build this theme:

A theme of the short story, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," by Raymond Carver, could be summarized as: the nature of love is elusive and complex, and defies verbalization. Carver employs certain literary devices to help reinforce this theme, in particular, the motif of unrealized intentions, as well as the invocation of a complex mood through the utilization of certain images.

The explanation in the second sentence about Carver's techniques is relevant to the claim. It also begins connecting the claim to ideas that will be used as evidence.

Remember, you should continually return to and re-phrase your claim as you write the supporting evidence to make sure you are capturing exactly what you want to say. Writing out the evidence always helps you figure out what you really think.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Many claims contain multiple aspects that require different evidence that can be expressed in separate paragraphs. This claim can be **broken down into two parts**:

CARVER'S USE OF A MOTIF
and **CARVER'S USE OF MOOD.**

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE (CONT'D)

This paragraph supports the claim with evidence by describing **CARVER'S USE OF A MOTIF**:

Many times in the story, a character declares an intention (or there is implicit intention) of taking an action, and the action goes unrealized. This repetition of intended action/unrealized action supports the theme of the story that the nature of love is elusive—one can try to define it, but it will always defy definition. The most frequent example of this motif is the continual announcement of the plan to go out to dinner and the dramatic unfulfillment of that intention as the story's close finds all the characters sitting, unmoving in darkness. The occurrences of this particular instantiation of this motif become more frequent at the end of the story, helping to build towards a climax or, rather, anticlimax, and helping to drive home the theme. Mel says, "Let's finish this fucking gin. There's about enough left here for one shooter all around. Then let's go eat. Let's go to the new place," and "Maybe we'll just go eat. How does that sound?" (183-185); yet shortly after, Nick observes, "I could hear the human noise we sat there making, not one of us moving, not even when the room went dark" (185).

The second paragraph analyzes **CARVER'S USE OF MOOD**:

In addition to using motif, Carver also uses mood to further the story's theme. Carver maintains a complex tone throughout the story, and perhaps even ratchets it up at the end with explicit reference to depression, which helps underline the exhaustion Mel feels in his attempt to comprehend and explain the concept of love, as well as the larger thematic point that attempting such comprehension and explanation inevitably will result in failure and exhaustion:

"He's depressed," Terri said, "Mel, why don't you take a pill?"

Mel shook his head. "I've taken everything there is."

"We all need a pill now and then," I said.

"Some people are born needing them," Terri said. (page 184)

The menace and violence that has been part of the mood is retained through to the end, as Mel, soon after he finishes his story about the elderly couple's love for each other, reveals that every day he wishes death upon his ex-wife, Marjorie: "She's allergic to bees," Mel said. "If I'm not praying she'll get married again, I'm praying she'll get herself stung by a swarm of fucking bees" (184). However, the mood is not solely one of menace and violence; humor, even if a bit dark, is also still part of the mood and plays a role in the violence, as Mel rather comically simulates bees attacking Marjorie: "Bzzzzzzz," Mel said, turning his fingers into bees and buzzing them at Terri's throat" (184).

Notice how the phrase, "In addition to using motif, Carver also uses mood ..." furthers the discussion the use of techniques. **Transitional phrases** like this one aid the organization by showing how the ideas relate to each other or are further developed.

4. PARAPHRASE AND QUOTE

Written evidence from texts can be paraphrased or quoted. It's up to the writer to decide which works better for each piece of evidence. Paraphrasing is **putting the author's words into your own**. This works well when the author originally expresses the idea you want to include across many sentences. You might write it more briefly.

The third sentence of paragraph 1 paraphrases their repeated plan:

The most frequent example of this motif is the continual announcement of the plan to go out to dinner...

Some evidence is better quoted than paraphrased. If an author has found the quickest way to phrase the idea or the words are especially strong, you might want to **use the author's words**.

The last sentence in paragraph 2 quotes Carver exactly:

...as Mel rather comically simulates bees attacking Marjorie: "Bzzzzzzz," Mel said, turning his fingers into bees and buzzing them at Terri's throat" (184).

5. REFERENCE YOUR EVIDENCE

Whether you paraphrase or quote the author's words, you must include **the exact location where the ideas come from**. Direct quotes are written in quotation marks. How writers include the reference can vary depending on the piece and the original text. Here the writer puts the page numbers from the original text in parentheses at the end of the sentence.