

# 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 "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson uses...

**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:

One of the defining factors of poetry is its efficient use of imagery and symbolism to communicate a message to the reader. In her poem "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson uses...

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

To create this effect, Dickinson... or In stanza 3, Dickinson...

## 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 how Dickinson uses imagery in order to symbolize the theme of the poem:

In "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson uses symbolic imagery to describe her journey from life to death.

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 how Dickinson specifically uses symbolism to discuss the experience of death:

In "Because I could not stop for Death," Emily Dickinson uses symbolic imagery to describe her journey from life to death. By relating the journey to a leisurely carriage ride while observing passing scenes, she describes the experience as calm rather than tumultuous.

The details about how Dickinson uses symbolism in the second sentence are relevant to the claim. They also begin 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: a **DESCRIPTION OF DICKINSON'S USE OF SYMBOLIC IMAGERY**, and an **ANALYSIS OF WHAT AFFECT IT HAS ON THE MEANING OF THE POEM**.

Here is a paragraph that supports the claim with evidence by describing Dickinson's use of symbolism to describe her voyage to Death:

In "Because I could not stop for Death," Dickinson uses symbolism to help describe the passage from life to death and eternity. Already in line 3, the reader encounters the word "carriage," which suggests the author is embarking on some sort of journey with Death and Immortality. In stanza 3, Dickinson recalls passing three distinct scenes. In the first, the passengers pass a "school, where children strove At recess, in the ring." In the second, they see a field of grain, and in the third they pass the setting sun. These three episodes indicate to the reader the passing from youth - children at school - to middle age growth - the grain - the death - the sun fades out. In these four lines, Dickinson gives the reader clues that she is talking about a voyage to eternity.

The second paragraph analyzes how Dickinson's imagery can be used to interpret how she felt about the concept of death and the afterlife:

Dickinson continues to use strong symbolism in the following stanza when she says how she felt cold on account of the cool "dews." This feeling further suggests that she has now passed from the living to the dead world as she feels colder. Indeed, in the next stanza the reader sees the references to a grave. The last two lines of stanza 4 show that the narrator is rather unprepared for this new, colder reality, as she is only wearing light clothing. This might symbolize that either Death is not as civil as she thought and did not warn her of the coldness of the afterlife, or that she is preparing for a rather comfortable time in eternity with the companion Immortality. After all, they only "paused before a house that seemed A swelling in the ground" hinting that they made only a short visit to the grave (lines 17-18).

Notice how the phrase, "Dickinson continues to use strong symbolism in the following stanza when she says how she felt cold on account of the cool 'dews,'" advances the discussion on symbolism from first paragraph. 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 fifth sentence from paragraph 1 paraphrases what Dickinson writes. The ideas are hers, but the exact way of writing is not:

In the second, they see a field of grain, and in the third they pass the setting sun.

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 fourth sentence in paragraph 1 quotes Dickinson exactly:

In the first, the passengers pass a "school, where children strove At recess, in the ring."

### 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 either states the lines or stanzas directly or puts the line numbers from the original text in parentheses at the end of the sentence.