

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 "The Red Convertible," Louise Erdrich 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 dramatic irony in fiction, authors will often play with time in their narrative. In the short story "The Red Convertible," Louise Erdrich develops...

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

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

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 Erdrich's use of a particular style of narration achieves a specific effect in the story:

In "The Red Convertible," Louise Erdrich uses a first person narrator, Lyman, to recount a narrative with a poignant and ironic resolution.

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 specific technique Erdrich uses to achieve the ironic resolution:

In "The Red Convertible," Louise Erdrich uses a first person narrator, Lyman, to recount a narrative with a poignant and ironic resolution. To heighten the mystery of the story as it unfolds and to foreshadow the dramatic irony of its ending, Erdrich plays with time within her episodic narrative structure.

The explanation in the second sentence about how Erdrich creates foreshadowing and irony by playing with time 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**:

NARRATION AND PLAY WITH TIME and
CRYPTIC AND PUZZLING PHRASES/WORDS.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE (CONT'D)

This paragraph supports the claim with evidence by describing Erdrich's use of **NARRATION AND PLAY WITH TIME**:

The reader experiences the story of "The Red Convertible" through the eyes of Lyman, one of its chief characters and the brother of Henry Junior. Lyman recounts the narrative as a series of (sometimes disconnected) episodes - moving backward in time following the opening paragraph to tell a story that unfolds in a sequence of scenes: the buying of the car, the brothers' unexpected trip to Alaska, Henry's induction into the Marines and then return from Vietnam, Lyman's intentional destruction of the red convertible and Henry's subsequent restoration of the car, Bonita taking the photo of the two of them before their final drive, and the moments before and after Henry's drowning. While these incidents are mostly presented in chronological sequence, there are many leaps forward in time, and at three key points the narration actually shifts in its time frame. The first of these occurs in paragraph 1, when Lyman initially says, "We owned it together..." (past tense) and then, "Now Henry owns the whole car" (present tense). This shift mirrors one that introduces its final, climactic sequence of events, when Lyman first poetically describes Henry using the past tense: "His face was totally white and hard. Then it broke, like stones break all of a sudden when water boils up inside of them" then immediately shifts to present when Henry replies: "'I know it,' he says. 'I know it. I can't help it. It's no use.'" (paragraphs 49-50)

The second paragraph analyzes Erdrich's use of **CRYPTIC AND PUZZLING WORDS/PHRASES**:

Erdrich's manipulation of time in her first person narrative is underscored by her presentation, through Lyman's eyes and voice, of images and words which are at first cryptic and puzzling and finally chilling and ironic - creating a circular structure to both the narrative and its language. In paragraph 1, Lyman tells the reader, "We owned it together until his boots filled with water on a windy night and he bought out my share," a mysterious early detail in the story. At the story's climactic moment, Lyman then sparsely reports Henry's last words: "'My boots are filling,' he says. He says this in a normal voice, like he just noticed and he doesn't know what to think of it. Then he's gone. A branch comes by." (paragraphs 67-8). Moments later, Lyman sends the car into the river, with its headlights "reach[ing] in as they go down, searching..." He then ends the story with a final stark description: "It is all finally dark. And then there is only the water, the sound of it going and running and going and running and running," with the repetition of the word "running" ironically circling back to the final sentence of the narrative's first paragraph: "Lyman walks everywhere he goes" - the only time he refers to himself in the third person.

Notice how the phrase, "Erdrich's manipulation of time in her first person narrative," furthers the discussion on time and narrative 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 second sentence of paragraph 1 paraphrases each episode of the action:

"... tell a story that unfolds in a sequence of scenes: the buying of the car, the brothers' unexpected trip to Alaska, Henry's induction into the Marines and then return from Vietnam... Bonita taking the photo of the two of them before their final drive, and the moments before and after Henry's drowning."

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 second sentence in paragraph 2 quotes Erdrich exactly:

In paragraph 1, Lyman tells the reader, "We owned it together until his boots filled with water on a windy night and he bought out my share," a mysterious early detail in the story.

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 paragraph numbers from the original text in parentheses at the end of the sentence.