

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 the 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 his speech, "A Just and Lasting Peace," President Obama argues...

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:

President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace prize amidst some controversy. In his acceptance speech, he argues...

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

According to President Obama,... or In paragraph 5, Obama argues...

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 President Obama's view of the relationship between war and peace:

In his speech, "A Just and Lasting Peace," President Obama argues that while violence can be controlled and society is progressively more peaceful, the world faces new threats that inevitably require war to control violence and preserve the peace.

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 highlight the paradoxical nature of President Obama's view in a second sentence:

President Obama argues that while violence can be controlled and society is progressively more peaceful, the world faces new threats that inevitably require war to control violence and preserve the peace. Obama's realistic view of human society involves a paradoxical understanding of human violence.

The second sentence suggests how the writer will organize the textual evidence to explain the claim.

Remember, you should continually return 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

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

Obama's ideas that **HUMAN VIOLENCE IS BOTH FUNDAMENTAL AND CONTROLLABLE** and that **WAR IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE PEACE**.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE (CONT'D)

Here are two paragraphs that support the claim with evidence organized into these two parts.

HUMAN VIOLENCE IS BOTH FUNDAMENTAL AND CONTROLLABLE:

Despite the fact that “war, in one form or another, appeared with the first man,” societies set up laws that “sought to control violence within groups.” (27-27, 31). For many years these laws were not highly regarded, but after the destruction of WWII and threat of nuclear war, “it became clear to victor and vanquished alike that the world needed institutions to prevent another World War” (45-47). Even though violence continued, these institutions permitted the advancement of “the ideals of liberty, self-determination, equality and the rule of law” (55-56).

WAR IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE PEACE:

Progress has been made to achieve peace; however, Obama stresses that “we must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes” (70-71). While Obama respects the actions of Gandhi and King, he argues that conflict is necessary because “a non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies” (81-82). Institutions and treaties worked to an extent, but Obama asserts it was the military that “promoted peace and prosperity from Germany to Korea, and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans” (86-87, 90-92). As these actions secured a better future for children, they prove that “the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace” (96).

Notice the word, “however,” in the first sentence of the second paragraph. **Transitional phrases** like this one aid the organization by showing how the ideas relate to each other.

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 line from paragraph 3 paraphrases Obama’s view of respect for King and Gandhi instead of quoting all the places he mentions them.

While Obama respects the actions of Gandhi and King...

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 line from paragraph 3 quotes Obama exactly, incorporating his powerful phrase.

As these actions secured a better future for children, they prove that “the instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace” (96).

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