

Types of Evidence

Types of Evidence: Every claim, both major and minor, in an argument needs to be backed up with some form of evidence. This may seem daunting at first, until you realize that there are many types of evidence. Below is a list of types of evidence, with examples.

- 1) **Quotes from a text** – *this will be the most familiar type for many of you. Quotes can be from experts, they can be statistics, or they can be examples that corroborate your own claims. However, always be sure to explain to the reader how the quote supports your claim. Remember the acronym “I.C.E.” for Introduce, Cite, and Explain, and you should be using quotes effectively.*

Example: Professional sports are more than a simple game, played for the pleasure of fans and athletes alike. As Wilfrid Sheed explains in his article, “Why Sports Matter,”[introduce] “Sports teach, it is their nature” (498) [cite]. **In other words, Sheed believes that** sports have the ability to influence their spectators and participants long after the final buzzer goes off [explanation]. (NB: Review the templates on They Say/I Say pp. 683-685 for different ways to frame your introduction and explanation of a quote)

- 2) **Paraphrases from a text** – *similar to quotes from a text, this is where you use the ideas of others to support your own claim, without explicitly mentioning the source in the essay. You must acknowledge where your ideas come from, even if you don’t wish to directly quote the author.*

Example: Although as a character, Walter White may seem innovative, the outlaw hero has existed on screens both big and small for decades [claim]. Indeed, Robert B. Ray argues in “The Thematic Paradigm” that the long tradition of mobster and western films themselves were influenced by older trends in literature (378) [evidence].

- 3) **Definitions** – *Providing readers with your own definition of key terms can ensure that your audience will understand the scope, context, and utility of those particular terms in your particular argument. Sometimes, definitions need to be supported with a source, but most of the time it’s sufficient to provide readers with your own definition.*

Example: Within reason, universities should be responsible for the economic well-being of their student-athletes [claim]. Although some might consider tuition and room and board as economic well-being, I define the term more narrowly: anything outside of educational or living expenses that still cost money. Entertainment and transportation are both good examples [evidence].

(Note: definitions generally require outside support when the word in question is a specific, specialized, or technical term that the average reader might not know. So, while you can

probably define ethics without help, defining something like Kantian or Aristotelian ethics might require an outside source)

- 4) **Analogies** – *these are comparisons between two subjects, based on a shared characteristic. This type of evidence is especially useful for trying to defend the logic/unstated assumption of your enthymeme, but can be used to defend other claims and subclaims.*

Example thesis: Space exploration should not be paid for with public funds because it provides no benefits to the average American citizen.

Unstated Assumption: If something provides no benefit to the average citizen, then it should not be paid for with public funds.

Evidence: If you're at dinner with a group of friends and you only drink water while the rest of them order expensive steak and lobster, is it fair for them to ask you to pitch in when the bill arrives? So why does NASA think it's fair to ask us to pitch in for their expensive shuttles and satellites? (*Ask yourself, what is like the argument or claim you're making?*)

- 5) **Hypothetical situations** – *Invented, but credible scenarios that help explain your logic and defend your claims.*

Example claim: Watching fictional, immoral characters on TV can make a real person evil.

Hypothetical scenario: Imagine a young man who spends all his free time watching TV.

This person has few, if any friends, and being out among real people gives him terrible anxiety. Worse, people often make fun of him for being a misfit, for not adhering to social expectations. So, TV characters become his friends, and in particular, he is drawn to the character Walter White, from *Breaking Bad*. Like this young man, Walt is emasculated, powerless, an outcast in his own family. Worse, just like this young man, fate has conspired against Walt, threatening to destroy him. The young man spends hours with Walt, watching and re-watching the character overcome problems, problems that seem similar to those that plague the young man. And how does Walt do it? With intimidation, lies, and above all else, violence. Violence makes Walt strong, helps him overcome his enemies – enemies like the ones that harass and bully the young man in his real life. Eventually, the young man is convinced that Walt is on to something – he's the hero of the show, after all – and so he goes out and buys a gun. Walter White, this young man decides, has taught him exactly how to solve his problem: *violently*. While this scenario may not have happened in real life, plenty of recent, tragic headlines suggest it is only a matter of time.

- (*Note: successful hypotheticals must be realistic and believable to have an impact on audiences. This often takes details, and a clear sense of the connection between your claim and the invented scenario*).

- 6) **Personal experience** – *Sometimes, experiences and events from our own lives make us credible authorities in a subject, and thus are appropriate to use as evidence. However, it's always necessary to a) explain how the personal experience relates back to the claim, and b) why such an experience is likely to have occurred to others. Be wary also of letting a personal experience be the only type of evidence you provide – it's often the weakest form of defense for a claim.*

Example claim: Men do not respect female sports journalists.

Evidence: My younger sister grew up watching football beside my dad and me. By the time she was 16, she could name every Super Bowl champion in chronological order, she knew the average passer rating of every quarterback in the AFC, and she explained to me one Sunday, in great detail, the difference between a soft zone and man coverage defense. I'm still not sure I understand it. However, when she told her school newspaper advisor that she wanted to cover the high school football team that year, he just laughed at her and said she would be better suited to the gossip section. After all, she didn't play football, and all girls loved to gossip, didn't they? Sadly, other women, like my sister, who want to be taken seriously as sportswriters often face these sexist and regressive attitudes from men in positions of power. At best, they're relegated to the sidelines. At worst, they're told to be silent.