

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Scores 2 and 3
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 6-8 / Score 3
Grade/Score	Grades 9-12 / Scores 2 and 3
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a, W1b
Argument Type	All (literary and nonliterary)

# How Do I Know My Evidence is Relevant?

*Students use starter phrases to examine and explain different ways a piece of evidence might support or deepen an argument.*

## Understanding the Expectations

When you make an argument, you make a claim or take a position. In order to make that claim persuasive and interesting to your reader, you need to back it up with relevant evidence—not just random quotes that sound impressive. For evidence to be relevant, it has to do three things: fit with your claim, help you persuade a reader that your claim is true, and help you make your claim more specific and insightful. Without relevant evidence, your claim is just an opinion that is neither very interesting or very likely to persuade a reader who does not already agree with it.

*Evidence can take many forms. If you're responding to a piece of literature, evidence could be one of the following:*

- A quotation that tells you something interesting about a character.

- A quotation that serves as a good example of a literary technique, like foreshadowing or a simile.
- A quotation that helps you say something unobvious about the theme of a story.
- A specific example from the story that helps you illustrate your point.

*If you're writing an opinion piece, like an op-ed or a persuasive letter, evidence could be one of these:*

- Facts, like statistics or other reliable pieces of information.
- A quotation from an expert who has education or experience in the topic.
- A quotation that's very interesting or insightful, even if the person who said it isn't an expert.
- A little story—also known as an anecdote—which helps illustrate what you're trying to say.

When you are looking for evidence that can help support your claim, you need to do more than find something that simply relates to your claim. You need to select evidence that supports your own specific claim, not the rest of the claims out there. For example, if you are writing an essay that claims we should increase legal protections for endangered elephants, not every fact about elephants is relevant. If an adult elephant is about 12 feet tall, that probably isn't relevant unless you can explain how it supports your claim. However, if you can find a fact about how elephants are decreasing in number or a quotation from an expert about how to protect them, those pieces of evidence are much more relevant.

There are several stages in the writing process in which you might want to judge the relevance of a piece of evidence. You might judge it as you are reading to gather new information so you know what to write down in your notes and what isn't worth bothering with. You might judge a piece of evidence when you are writing, as you decide whether to include it or not or whether you want to use it to create a counterclaim. Or, you might judge it during the revision process in order to decide if you need to take it out, explain it better, or identify gaps where you might need more evidence.

*Here are some questions you can ask yourself as you seek to evaluate your evidence:*

- Does this evidence help me make my point more specific or persuasive?
- What does this evidence add that is different from my other evidence?
- Can I write a warrant for this evidence? (Can I explain how it supports my claim?)
- If the writing is research-based, is my evidence authoritative? (Did somebody who has expertise in the topic write the article it came from?)

## Playing the “Evidence Check” Game

1. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and write down your claim. If you already have a well-developed thesis for your essay, you can work with just one claim, but if you are early in the writing process, it can help to play this game with multiple claims. Leave space to write (5-10 lines) under each option.
2. Once you have your list, gather together your evidence. If you already have notes, shared digital documents, or paper charts, you can review them. If you are working on a draft of an essay, you can highlight or otherwise gather the evidence you have already incorporated.
3. There are three basic ways to “play” Evidence Check, and each of these ways is marked by certain phrases. Here are the three ways to play:
  - The Evidence Supports the Claim:
    - » Identify the claim you in your writing you believe the evidence will support.
    - » Complete the “Support” starter phrase: “This piece of evidence supports the claim because...” with the reason the evidence supports the claim.
  - The Evidence Contradicts the Claim:
    - » Identify the claim in your writing you believe the evidence will contradict.
    - » Complete the “Contradict” phrase: “Even though I still support my claim, this piece of evidence goes against it because...” by explaining how the evidence contradicts your claim.

- » Now decide if you need to adjust your claim or if you need to leave this piece of evidence out. If it's good evidence, adjusting your claim is probably a smarter move as a writer. If it's weak evidence, you should be able to explain what makes it weak, which can help you write a good counterclaim.
- The Evidence Helps Refine the Claim:
  - » To refine a claim is to make it more specific and persuasive, so start by identifying the claim in your writing you believe the evidence applies to.
  - » Complete the "Refine" starter phrase: "Because of this piece of evidence, I should change my claim to say..." by explaining how you are adjusting your claim to better fit the facts.
  - » Now look for other claims in your writing that might need to be adjusted based on the changes you made so far.

Note: these starter phrases are meant to help you clarify your thinking. It would be clunky to include any of them in a final draft, so **once you feel you have explained your thinking well, be sure to delete the starter phrases** and check to make sure your thoughts still make sense.

These are all variations on the same technique: you are constantly evaluating your evidence throughout the writing process in order to ensure that it really helps prove your point. You can adjust which evidence you include, explain your evidence more carefully, or adjust your point depending on what you discover through the process of playing around with your evidence.

## Writing It Up

Now, review the evidence you have selected and the phrases you have written over the course of playing the game. If you are early in the writing process, consider writing a paragraph in which you carefully introduce a claim and explain how your evidence supports it. If you are working on revising a completed draft, select out one paragraph and revise it by either: changing the evidence you're using; writing a clearer, more specific warrant for your evidence; or rewriting the paragraph's claim so it more specifically and persuasively fits the evidence you chose.