

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 2
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1b
Argument Type	Primarily literary

Providing Evidence: Moving From Weak to Strong

Students evaluate the evidence they are using in order to ensure that it is strong and textual, rather than being based on assumptions or runaway interpretations.

Understanding the Expectations

Writing a really interesting argument about a piece of literature can be a bit tricky. On the one hand, you want to say something original that will really inform or surprise your reader, but on the other hand, you need to make sure that everything you are trying to claim is backed up with clear evidence and a steady argument. That means your claims need to be supported by evidence from the text, not your own opinions or assumptions.

In certain kinds of arguments, stories from the writer's life or general ideas about the topic might be appropriate, but in literary arguments, strong evidence needs to come from the text you are reading. The most common kind of strong literary evidence is a quotation directly from the text, but literary evidence can also take the form of a paraphrase of a key passage or a brief summary of an important event.

Once you have evaluated your evidence and decided that it comes from the text, you also have to make sure that your comments on that evidence—your warrants and other analysis—are truly connected to your evidence and not just based on more assumptions. Your comments have to be based on what the text is really saying, not on what you assume or what you can twist the evidence to say. If you are solving a puzzle, you need to find the piece that truly fits instead of forcing one in the empty spot.

As you are thinking and writing, you might generate some material that doesn't work as good evidence or analysis. While these statements can be an important part of helping you develop your thinking, you don't want to leave them in your final draft. Sometimes writers create statements like these because they are part of good thinking and are definitely related to the text or claim, but they are not good evidence or analysis because they are not strongly based on the text you are analyzing.

Here are some common mistakes with evidence a writer might make as they think and write:

- Speculating. You can't prove a claim if it is about something that didn't happen.
 - » Example: If Jack was a nicer person, he would not have hit Steve.
- Giving advice. Characters cannot change their behavior because they are fictional, so there's no point in telling them what to do.
 - » Example: Jack should control his temper if he wants to be a good friend.
- Personal opinions. While your essay is definitely based on your opinions, they can't be just opinions. They have to be based on what you're really seeing in the story.
 - » Example: People who get too serious about sports are annoying.
- Making general statements about life. Your evidence needs to be drawn from the text you are studying.
 - » Example: People always want to be loved.
- Runaway interpretation. Just because your analysis is related to some words in the quotation doesn't mean the text as a whole really supports it.
 - » Example: When Jack says, "I can't believe Steve won the race" (92), he is saying that he doesn't believe anything Steve says because Steve is a cheat and a liar.

Even though these kinds of statements aren't appropriate for a strong final draft, they can represent a helpful stage in your thinking, and you often can revise them into stronger statements if you can connect them to well-chosen evidence and revise them to fit the evidence more carefully.

Playing the “Strong and Weak Evidence” Game

1. If you are working on a full draft of a paper, jot down your main claim and then below it write down some of the sub-claims from your body paragraphs. If you are earlier in the writing process and haven't yet decided what claim you will write about, list 2-4 you are considering. To come up with this list (short or long), look back in your notes or on any artifacts like paper charts or shared digital documents the class created.
2. Once you have your list of claims, gather together a list of the possible evidence that would go along with any of these claims. This evidence might be specific quotes or particular moments from the text described in your own words. 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 claims and evidence you have already incorporated. Always remember that you can review the text for more ideas by looking for items you may have marked or annotated during the reading.
3. Create two columns in your digital document or notebook. Label the left one “Strong Evidence” and the right one “Weak Evidence or Interpretation.”
4. In the left column, put at least three pieces of strong evidence from the text, like quotations, paraphrases of key passages, or brief summaries of important events.

Your notes should look something like this:

Strong Evidence	Weak Evidence or Interpretation
"At practice, Jack saw Steve give up and stop running. Jack smiled, knowing he was working harder than Steve ever did" (61).	
Because Jack practiced so much, he feels totally confident that he will win (81-82).	
"Jack walked up to Steve and punched him in the jaw. 'I hate you, Steve,' said Jack" (93).	

5. In the right column, write a statement that would not be good evidence or analysis. If you are looking for ideas of what weak evidence might look like, you can use the examples above of speculating, giving advice, making general statements, or runaway interpretations. Have some fun writing some bad evidence and interpretation!

Now your notes should look something like this:

Strong Evidence	Weak Evidence or Interpretation
"At practice, Jack saw Steve give up and stop running. Jack smiled, knowing he was working harder than Steve ever did" (61).	I don't like people who are too serious about sports. (personal opinion)
Because Jack practiced so much, he feels totally confident that he will win (81-82).	People who practice deserve to win. (general statement)
"Jack walked up to Steve and punched him in the jaw. 'I hate you, Steve,' said Jack" (93).	Jack is a violent person who deserves to be locked up because he will definitely kill somebody someday. (runaway interpretation)

6. Now that you're getting a better sense of the difference between strong evidence and weak statements, sort some of the statements in your work so far, either from your notes (if you are early in the writing process) or from a draft if you are farther along. Mark strong evidence so you can use it (or keep it in your draft) and weak evidence so you can keep it out of your writing (or revise it out of your draft).

Writing It Up

If you are early in the writing process, create some notes with strong evidence, even if you have to go back to the text for good quotations. If you have some evidence you believe is strong, try writing some thoughts about it that don't fall into the common traps you learned about during the game. If you are working on revising a completed draft, select out some spots where you've fallen into some of the common traps or have otherwise chosen weak evidence or written a weak piece of analysis. Then, revise it by either: rewriting your analysis to be more textual or by choosing a better piece of evidence and rewriting your analysis accordingly.