

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
Rubric Category	Organization
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Score 1
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a, W1b, W1c
Argument Type	All arguments

A Claim From Scratch

Students generate more interesting claims by examining evidence and brainstorming different perspectives and ideas.

Understanding the Expectations

When you are thinking about generating a claim, either an overall thesis for your essay or a subclaim for a paragraph, you may be tempted to work on writing a claim first and then going to look for evidence to support it. However, one of the secrets of great writing is understanding that the order that you put things in for a final draft is not necessarily the order you write them in. That means that, while a thesis might come at the beginning of an essay and a subclaim might come at the beginning of a paragraph, these claims might not be the best things to write first. Since a claim has to argue something that a reasonable person could disagree with, it can help to explore evidence and ideas to develop a truly insightful perspective before writing or finalizing a claim.

Write the Easiest Part First

One way to approach writing an essay or a paragraph is to write the easiest part first, even if it's not the beginning part. In essay writing, that often means writing

at least one paragraph before trying to write very much of the introduction, or maybe writing down thoughts about quotations before trying to write the topic sentence for a paragraph. If you ever find yourself stuck on one part of an essay or paragraph, just put it to the side and try to write another part. In particular, finding some great evidence and writing about it for a while can help you clarify your thinking and make it easier for you to write stronger, more specific claims.

Using Evidence to Generate a Claim

So, if you're not finding enough success by trying to write a claim and then going to hunt for evidence to support it (or even if you are and just want to expand your toolbox of writing approaches), try pulling together some interesting evidence and seeing what claims occur to you as you write, think, and reflect. And remember, in order to be a useful claim, a statement has to argue something that a reasonable person could disagree with, not something pretty much clear to anybody who read the text.

Playing the "Claim from Scratch" Game

1. Review your notes and any drafts of the essay you may already have started. In particular, look for interesting pieces of evidence, like quotations that might say something interesting about a character, a major event in the plot, or a technique the writer is using. Even a quotation of a moment that is confusing to you can be a great piece of evidence to use.
2. Use your notebook or create a digital document to work in. Copy four of your most interesting, promising, or confusing pieces of evidence into it. Choose one of the following options and use it to write about each of the quotations. You can choose more than one if you think it would be helpful.
 - a. Explain how one piece of evidence relates to another.
 - b. Explain how a piece of evidence relates to a theme or idea you discussed in class.
 - c. Explain how the piece of evidence tells you something interesting about a character.
 - d. Explain how the piece of evidence serves as an interesting example of a technique the author is using.
 - e. Explain how the piece of evidence can tell your reader something they wouldn't already know from just reading the text the first time.

3. Now you should have at least four quotations with statements under them. By yourself or with a partner, rank your statements from most interesting to least interesting. That means you should put the quotation with most interesting, least obvious statement first and then rank them downwards from there.
4. Choose the statement you ranked as most interesting and revise it into as much of a claim as you can. Try to make sure it says something that not everybody would agree with or something that we wouldn't know just from reading the text.
5. Now, review the claim you wrote and return to your notes—or straight to the text itself—and find three more quotations that might relate to it. This time, instead of just writing some interesting thoughts (which is always a good idea), really focus on writing something surprising, interesting, or controversial. Make sure you're not just repeating the basic meaning of the quotation, and make sure you're really telling your reader something they don't already know.
6. While not every claim you tried to write in this exercise will be perfect, at least a couple of the seven ideas you wrote should have some potential to work with. Consider ranking all of your quotations and statements again to decide which is the most surprising, interesting, insightful, or controversial.

Writing It Up

If you are early in the writing process, take your most interesting claim and write a body paragraph in which you analyze two of the pieces of evidence you chose. If you are working with a full draft, choose your least interesting, most obvious claim and use the material you generated to rewrite it based on a more interesting claim.