

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Scores 2 and 3
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a, W1b
Argument Type	All arguments

Clear Claims: Choosing and Writing Arguable Claims

Students evaluate and improve their claims to make them more arguable by examining evidence and writing conflicting claims.

Understanding the Expectations

When you make an argument, you make a claim or take a position. For a claim or position to be interesting and meaningful, it has to be revised and improved from your first attempt. Typically, the first version of your claim is not as insightful and persuasive as it could be if you revisit and revise it as you read, think, and write. A truly strong claim has to be *arguable*, so as you continue to develop it, keep your eye on that priority.

To be *arguable*, your claim has to try to prove something a reasonable person could disagree with. So while it has to have evidence to support it and to make it provable, it shouldn't just be a statement of fact that anybody who familiar with the topic would already agree with. At first, it might seem like an arguable claim would be a weak one, but if nobody would disagree with your claim, then what's the point of writing an argument to support your claim?

One way to ensure that your claim is *arguable* is to see if you can write a counterclaim that disagrees with it. If you are making a real claim, there should be at least one other potentially provable claim that conflicts with yours, meaning that both claims can't be true at the same time. For example, if you are writing about a character who becomes very angry when he loses his baseball, saying he becomes angry isn't *arguable*. But if you can make a provable claim about *why* he becomes angry (for example, *He is angry because of how much money the signed baseball was worth*), and somebody else could come up with a different reason that conflicts with yours (for example, *He is angry because the baseball he lost was tied to his favorite memories of his father*), you know your claim is arguable.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself as you try to decide if your claim is arguable:

- Would almost anybody who read this book agree with it?
- What other claims could somebody write that might conflict with mine?
- Of all the claims I am considering, which are the most arguable and which are more obvious?

There are several stages in the writing process in which you might want to judge how *arguable* your claim is. You might want to judge how arguable your claims are very early in your writing process so you can avoid wasting time writing about something that's already somewhat obvious. You can also judge how arguable a claim is in the middle of the writing process to ensure that you are using your evidence to deepen your claim. Even very late in the writing process, you might want to look at how *arguable* certain claims are in order to make sure that they are truly interesting and insightful.

Playing the "Arguable" Game

1. Jot down your claim and then below it write down other possible claims or positions. To come up with this list, look back in your notes or on any artifacts like paper charts or shared digital documents the class created that might contain alternate positions. It's OK if not all of your claims agree with each other or are consistent. In fact, it's great if they conflict, since you are going to be examining how claims might contradict each other as you assess how arguable they are.

2. Once you have your list of claims, 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 claims and evidence you have already incorporated.
3. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and make two columns.
4. Write or paste your potential claims in the left column, leaving a few lines between each claim.
5. Write or paste at least one piece of evidence that supports each claim (you can have more than one piece of evidence for some if your claims if you want).

Your notes should look something like this:

Claim #1 Evidence	
Claim #2 Evidence	
Claim #3 Evidence	
Claim #4 Evidence	

Now, choose or write a conflicting claim on the right hand side of your notes. If you have a partner or a group, you can exchange notes and write conflicting claims for each other. You might already have a conflicting claim somewhere in your list, or you might have to write a new one and find new evidence. If you can't write a conflicting claim, make a note to that effect and move on.

Now your notes should look something like this:

Claim #1 Evidence	Claim that conflicts with #1 Evidence
Claim #2 Evidence	Can't write a conflicting claim.
Claim #3 Evidence	Can't write a conflicting claim.
Claim #4 Evidence	Claim that conflicts with #4 Evidence

6. Now look at your claims again. If you were able to write a conflicting claim, that's a good sign that the claim is arguable. If you were not able to write a conflicting claim, consider why not. Is it because the claim isn't really arguable, even though it seemed to be at first? Or is there another reason?
7. Zero in on those claims that don't have a conflicting claim. What can you do to make them more arguable and interesting? Do they need to be more specific? Do you need to remove any unarguable parts and expand on the arguable aspects?
8. For your claims that are arguable, is there anything you learned from this exercise that allows you to improve them? Jot down a few notes about how you might make them more arguable in interesting.

Remember: this is just one way to check the potential strength of your claims. If you feel a claim is truly arguable, even though you weren't able to write a conflicting claim, simply make sure you can clearly explain why you think your claim is arguable.

Writing It Up

Now, review the claims you worked on during the game. If you are early in the writing process, consider writing a paragraph in which you choose an arguable claim and at least one piece of evidence that supports it. As you write, consider the ways you might analyze the evidence to discover ideas that might make the claim more arguable. If you are working on revising a completed draft, select

out the paragraph you feel has the weakest, least arguable claim. Then, revise it by either: rewriting your claim to make it more arguable and then rewriting your analysis to fit the new version of the claim; adding new evidence that lets you expand on the arguable parts of your claim (you may need to remove some of your existing evidence); or, if the paragraph's main claim isn't truly arguable, consider throwing out the paragraph entirely and choosing a better claim to write about.