

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Scores 2, 3, and 4
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1b
Argument Type	Primarily literary

Displaying Your Understanding of the Whole Issue

Students review the evidence for their claims in order to ensure that the claims demonstrate strong understanding of the issue or text as a whole.

Understanding the Expectations

When you write an argument, you sometimes may discover that, in pursuit of your goals, you have overlooked ideas and evidence that either contradict your claims (which isn't ideal) or could help you but got overlooked in your brainstorming and writing process (which is a missed opportunity). This is a normal part of the writing and thinking process, but it's important to find ways to check for these issues at several points in your writing process so that your final draft represents a strong understanding of the whole issue and whole text that you're writing about.

For example, you don't want to zero in on just one of the story's major events if it means you are ignoring other major events that could help you improve it. Unless you have a very good reason for writing about a very small portion of a text, it's typically more effective to include material from a wide range of scenes and about more than one character.

Another kind of evidence you don't want to ignore is evidence that contradicts, undermines, or somehow goes against your claims. It might seem frustrating or even dangerous to consider or include evidence that might contradict your claim, but if you can get over your fear, you can turn that evidence into an asset. If your claim ignores something important, it's not going to be truly persuasive and it's not going to reflect that you understand the issue or text as a whole. That's the really dangerous outcome! Instead of fearing contradictory evidence, embrace it. Change your claim to fit the evidence you find, rather than forcing the evidence to fit your claim by ignoring some pieces and forcing others to say something they don't mean. Even though it might seem scary at first, it's ultimately a lot easier to follow the evidence where it leads than to force it to fit a predetermined path.

Here are some questions to ask yourself during the writing process:

- What are the page numbers of the quotations I put in my notes while I was gathering evidence? Are they all from the same part of the story, or do I have quotations from all of the major sections of the story?
- What are the major events in the story that might apply to my claim? You can make a list of those events to make sure you don't leave anything crucial out as you brainstorm and write.
- Do my notes and my thinking center around one major event? What other events in the story should I make sure to pay attention to as I brainstorm and write?
- Do my notes and my thinking center around one major character? What other characters should I make sure to pay attention to as I brainstorm and write.
- Am I ignoring evidence that might contradict my claims? How can I use that evidence to refine my claims instead of ignoring it?

Here are some questions to ask yourself during the revision process:

- What are the page numbers of the quotations I actually used in my essay? Are they all from the same part of the story, or do I have quotations from most or all of the major sections of the story?
- Do my main claims all center around one major event or character? Do I have a good reason for that focus or should I bolster my argument by including evidence and claims relating to other events and characters?
- Where might I have forced the evidence to fit my claims instead of refining my claims in response to the evidence? What changes can I make to my draft so it doesn't ignore evidence or warp it to fit?

In order to truly demonstrate your understanding of a text and of the issues about which you are writing, you need to make sure you haven't overlooked important evidence, and you need to follow the evidence where it leads you. It's no good to have a claim that sounds interesting if you had to ignore important pieces of the puzzle or jam others to fit where they really don't.

Playing the “Evidence Hunt” Game

1. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and list at least one claim that you want to focus on improving by making it more specific. 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.
2. 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 two basic ways to “play” Evidence Hunt:
 - **Missing Pieces**
 - » Look over your evidence and list the page number for each piece out in front of you. If you are early in the writing process, you can do this with the evidence in your notes. If you are working on a draft, you can do it with the quotations you actually included.

- » Do some math! Are there any big gaps in the numbers or do you have some material from a wide range of the book? For example, if the book is 200 pages and you have quotations from pages 2, 3, 75, and 189, you have a big gap between 3 and 75 and an even bigger one between 75 and 189.
 - » Choose the biggest gap and hunt down a quotation that can support or deepen one of your claims. You may have to change a claim or write a new claim, but that's not a problem at all. If you have a partner or group, you can help each other out by working on one person's gap at a time. With more than one pair of eyes, you'll find a good quotation in no time.
 - » Add the new quotation (and claim, if you had to write a new one) to your notes, and add the page number to your list of page numbers.
 - » Repeat the process a couple more times if you have time, but finding even one additional quotation cuts your biggest gap into two smaller pieces!
- **Follow the Evidence**
 - » Look over the evidence you have in your notes and find the quotation that most contradicts or goes against your claim in some way. It doesn't have to 100% prove the opposite of what you are claiming, but it should conflict in some way.
 - » If you can't find one in your notes, head back to the text and go hunting. If you have a partner or group to work with, you can really help each other out here by trying to find evidence that contradicts one of your partner's claims.
 - » Review the contradictory evidence and write a sentence that explains how it undermines or goes against your point. If you're working with a partner, you can write about how the new evidence contradicts your partner's point.
 - » Now, reconsider your claim and rewrite it in a way that fits the new evidence. If the new evidence convinced you that your claim was entirely wrong, you may have to write a brand new claim. That's OK: it's a normal part of the writing and thinking process to discover that you're wrong and to fix your thinking.
 - » More often, though, you'll discover that you can refine and deepen your claim to include the new, contradictory evidence. Now you have a

more interesting, insightful point to make! For example, if you thought that Jack hit Steve because Steve beat him in the race, but you find a piece of evidence that Jack was already jealous of Steve for something else, you can write a more interesting claim.

- » A little note: if you can't find anything that goes against your claim or contradicts it in any way, there is a chance that it's not really a claim but more of an observation or statement of fact. In order for a statement to be a claim, it has to be something that a sensible person could disagree with. Otherwise, you're just stating facts or observations. Try choosing another claim that is more of an argument and less of a statement of fact.

Both of these versions of the game are variations on the same technique: you are trying to ensure that you have not overlooked any key evidence that might bolster or contradict your claims, and you are using that evidence fairly and effectively to ensure that your claim reflects a comprehensive understanding of the text and of the issues you are discussing in your writing.

Writing It Up

Now, review the new evidence you have discovered and the claims you have revised or written from scratch. If you are early in the writing process, consider writing a paragraph in which you carefully introduce one of your new and improved claims and explain how your evidence supports and deepens it. It would be particularly effective to write about the contradictory evidence you discovered while it's fresh in your mind. If you are working on revising a completed draft, consider one of these options: if you have a cluster of quotations all around the same event or set of pages, try replacing one of them with a quotation you found during your hunt in another part of the text; alternatively, if you found evidence that contradicted one of your claims and you rewrote your claim during the game, you should go revise that paragraph to include the new version of your claim and your new evidence.