

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 6-12 / Scores 3 and 4
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a
Argument Type	Primarily literary

Clear Claims: Making a Claim More Insightful

Students evaluate and revise claims to make them more insightful by reviewing evidence and asking effective “how” and “why” questions.

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 incisive as it could be if you revisit and revise it as you read, think, and write. In order for a claim to be truly strong and interesting, and in order for it to be worth writing about in a paper, it has to be unobvious.

To be insightful or unobvious, a claim needs to argue for something that most people wouldn't immediately understand or agree with after reading the story or looking at a list of evidence. One way to be unobvious is to create a claim that

puts the evidence together in a unique way in order to reveal something that was hiding beneath the surface. Another way is to make sure your claim argues for a point of view that at least some thoughtful people would disagree with.

So when you're working on making your claim more insightful and unobvious (or you're judging those things in order to decide if you want to throw a claim out and start over), you can first ask yourself if your claim is something most good readers would already see by reading the text themselves. For example, if you are analyzing a story where a bad guy keeps trying to harm the heroine, everybody would already understand that the bad guy is the villain. There's no point in making a claim that the bad guy is a villain, since everybody would already know that as soon as they read the story. You would need to look at the evidence and analyze it carefully so you can discover a deeper layer about the characters or the themes of the story.

Alternatively, you can ask yourself if the claim is something most thoughtful readers would already agree with. The claim above that the bad guy is the villain of the story is not just obvious to anybody who reads the text, but it's also something that a reasonable person would already agree with.

So to refine a claim to help it become truly unobvious, you're looking to put a creative spin on the text by creating a claim that takes a surprising or unexpected angle on the issues, and you're looking to dig more deeply into the story. If you realize that your claim is a bit obvious, try asking some "why" or "how" questions and reviewing your evidence for answers. For example, if you claimed that the bad guy is a villain (too obvious), try asking questions like these:

- Why does he want to harm the heroine?
- What does he expect to get if he wins?
- Why does he want it so badly?
- How does his past influence his decisions?
- What good emotions is he trying to experience more of through his actions?
- What bad emotions is he trying to avoid or decrease through his actions?

Really good “why” and “how” questions can allow you to go back through your evidence and find a deeper, more insightful claim, both for your essay’s big, overall claim and for the smaller claims you make in each paragraph.

Playing the “Unobvious Claims” Game

1. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and find at least three claims or subclaims that you want to focus on improving by making them more specific more insightful and less obvious. Leave space (5-10 lines) to write under each option.
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. Write at least one piece of evidence under each of your claims, since evidence is your biggest tool or asset in making a claim more insightful and less obvious.
3. There are two basic ways to “play” Specifying Claims:
 - #1: Would a reader already know this?
 - » Choose a claim and think about all of your classmates. How many of them do you think would already understand it without any further explanation or evidence?
 - » Underneath your claim, write down one of the following options, depending on how many classmates you think would already understand it:
 - ♦ everybody
 - ♦ almost everybody
 - ♦ about half the class
 - ♦ a few people
 - ♦ almost nobody
 - » If you think half of the class or more would already understand it, you probably need to work on making it more insightful and unobvious. If so, ask yourself these two questions:
 - ♦ Is there a part of the sentence that is particularly obvious that I can eliminate or revise?
 - ♦ What “why” or “how” questions can I ask to help me revise this claim to be more interesting and insightful?

- » If you have time, choose another claim and repeat the process. Alternatively, try playing the game with question #2.
- #2 Would most reasonable people already agree with this?
 - » Choose a claim and think about all of your classmates. How many of them do you think would already agree with your claim without any further explanation or evidence?
 - » Underneath your claim, write down one of the following options, depending on how many classmates you think would already agree with it:
 - ♦ everybody
 - ♦ almost everybody
 - ♦ about half the class
 - ♦ a few people
 - ♦ almost nobody
 - » If you think half of the class or more would already agree with it, you probably need to work on making it more insightful and arguable. If so, ask yourself these two questions:
 - ♦ Is there a part of the sentence that is particularly obvious that I can eliminate or revise?
 - ♦ What “why” or “how” questions can I ask to help me revise this claim to be more insightful and arguable?
 - » If you have time, choose another claim and repeat the process.

Both of these versions of the game are simply variations on the same technique: you are trying to ensure that your evidence and warrant are worth writing because your claim is interesting enough that it needs explanation and support. If everybody would already understand and agree with a claim right up front, it's not really a claim at all and there's no reason to continue on to provide evidence or a warrant.

Writing It Up

Now, review the improved claims you created during the game. If you are early in the writing process, consider writing a paragraph in which you use one of your newly specified claims. As you write that paragraph and analyze your evidence,

keep an eye out for opportunities to refine your claim even further. It is very common to discover new perspectives when analyzing evidence, so be sure to use what you learn during the writing process to refine your claims even further to be more insightful. If you are working on revising a completed draft, select out one paragraph and revise it by including the new and improved version of a claim and looking for opportunities to refine other parts of the paragraph to be more insightful as well. Even if you are revising a completed essay, you should hopefully discover new perspectives that will allow you to rewrite claims, warrants, and analysis to be more insightful and less obvious.