

# SO . . . WHAT ARE YOU SAYING HERE?

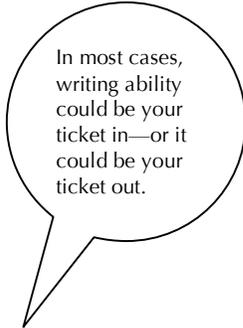
QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE CLAIMS



## GET TO THE POINT:

A “claim” (also known as a “thesis statement” or “argument”) is the central idea of your paragraph or essay and should appear in the first sentence.

Effective Claims are:



U.S. NATIONAL COMMISSION  
ON WRITING'S SURVEY OF 120  
MAJOR CORPORATIONS.

1. **Assertive**
2. **Specific**
3. **Provable**

At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on upgrading businesses to clean technologies, researching renewable energy sources, and planting more trees in order to control or eliminate pollution.



## AVOID GENERALIZATIONS, CLICHÉS, QUESTIONS, OR “STATING THE OBVIOUS”:

Wishy-washy openings are the hallmark of an under-confident writer.



*Pollution is bad for the environment.*



*Homelessness is a problem.*



*Should the Federal Reserve reduce the federal funds rate?*



*The future looks bright for companies developing vaccines.*



## WHAT MAKES ONE CLAIM MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE OTHER?

Ask yourself these three simple questions—when you can say yes to all, you have an effective claim:

1. Have you asserted a position about a topic?
2. Is your assertion as specific as possible?
3. Can you prove your assertion with evidence?

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QUICK TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE CLAIMS

Let's put the three questions to the test:

CLAIM # 1:	CLAIM # 2:
Pollution is bad for the environment.	At least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on upgrading businesses to clean technologies, researching renewable energy sources, and planting more trees in order to control or eliminate pollution.
 <b>1. Assertive → Have I asserted a position about a topic?</b>	
No. There's nothing assertive about stating the obvious.	Yes. I'm asserting three ideas about how to best reduce pollution and a financial solution for its costs.
 <b>2. Specific → Is my assertion as specific as possible?</b>	
No. It's vague.	Yes. I specify not only the amount of money, but also how that money could best be used.
 <b>3. Provable → Can you prove your assertion with evidence?</b>	
Yes, but where would I start? There are so many kinds of pollution and so much evidence about its effects. I'm overwhelmed.	Yes. I can find supporting evidence to show that upgrading businesses to clean technologies, researching renewable energy sources, and planting more trees are the best ways to reduce/control pollution.

# OH, YEAH? PROVE IT.

USING EVIDENCE TO DEFEND, STRENGTHEN, AND PROVE YOUR CLAIM

All of the evidence in your paragraph or essay will relate directly to the claim, thereby defending, strengthening, and proving the claim.



## THREE TYPES OF EVIDENCE TO DEFEND, STRENGTHEN, AND PROVE YOUR CLAIM

The goal is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.

THE OWL AT  
PURDUE

1. Testimonies or Statements from Established or Trustworthy Authorities
2. Statistical Information (studies, analysis, scientific experiments, investigation, or research)
3. Examples
  - a. Anecdotal (a story about a person or organization)
  - b. Analogical or Hypothetical (a comparison to a more easily understood situation)

### EXAMPLE CLAIM:

OUR OWN MORALITY IS NOT INNATE; RATHER, IT IS A PRODUCT OF THE COMMUNITY OR COMMUNITIES IN WHICH WE WERE BORN, RAISED, AND EDUCATED.

The following examples of types of evidence are taken from the essay "Morality as a Community Affair," by Amitai Etzioni:

## 1. Testimonies or Statements from Established or Trustworthy Authorities

We are each other's keepers. As Common Cause founder, John Gardner\*, writes: "Families and communities are the ground-level generators and preservers of values and ethics systems. No society can remain vital or even survive without a reasonable base of shared values. . . . There are generated chiefly in the family, schools, church, and other intimate settings in which people deal with another face to face."

*\*John William Gardner, (October 8, 1912–February 16, 2002), was President of the Carnegie Corporation and Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson.*

# OH, YEAH? PROVE IT.

USING EVIDENCE TO DEFEND, STRENGTHEN, AND PROVE YOUR CLAIM

## 2. Statistical Information (studies, analysis, scientific experiments, investigation, or research)

Sociologist M. P. Baumgartner found that in an American suburb he studied in the 1980s, people who observed minor violations of conduct often simply ignored them rather than express their displeasure. If the violations were somewhat serious, people tended to ostracize the offenders without explanation.

## 3. Examples

### a. Anecdotal (a story about a person or organization)

I lived for a year on the Stanford University campus. Not far from the house I rented was a four-way stop sign. Each morning I observed a fairly heavy flow of traffic at the intersection. Still, the cars carefully waited their turns to move ahead, as they were expected to. The driver rarely moved out of turn, and in those cases when they did, the offenders often had out-of-state license plates. The main reason for the good conduct: practically everyone in the community knew who was behind the wheel. If someone rushed through, he or she could expect to be the subject of some mild ribbing at the faculty club, supermarket, or local movie theater (such as “You must have been in an awful rush this morning”).

### b. Analogical or Hypothetical (a comparison to a more easily understood situation)

During a conference on bone-marrow transplants, a psychiatrist argued that it was not proper to ask one sibling for a bone-marrow donation for another sibling, despite the fact that making such a donation does not entail any particular risk. His reason was that the sibling who refused might feel guilty, especially if as a result the brother or sister died. On the contrary, a Communitarian would argue that siblings should be asked in no uncertain terms to come the rescue. If they refuse, they *should* feel guilty.

# GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER

## THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PERSUASIVE PARAGRAPHS



**A PARAGRAPH IS A COLLECTION OF RELATED SENTENCES DEALING WITH A SINGLE TOPIC.**

-THE OWL AT PURDUE WRITING LABS

### A quick formula for structuring persuasive paragraphs:

EFFECTIVE CLAIM  
+ EXPLANATION  
+ EVIDENCE  
+ APPLICATION OF EVIDENCE TO CLAIM  
= PROVEN CLAIM

Business writing is often about persuading others – persuading them to buy, to invest, to be patient, or simply to have confidence in a product or service.

SUSAN DE LA VERGNE,  
PERSUASIVE BUSINESS  
WRITING

### Let's walk through what a 4- to 5-sentence paragraph might look like:

**1. Your first sentence must contain your claim: the central idea of your paragraph.**

You must be able to prove your claim.

**2. Your second sentence should fully *explain* your claim.**

Define terms, use a concrete description, and add details to make sure your reader fully understands your claim.

**3. Your third sentence should contain evidence.**

Provide additional evidence, logic, or reasoning that proves your claim. Remember to cite your sources.

**4. Your fourth sentence should explain *how* your evidence proves your claim.**

Evidence must be accompanied by an explanation of why or how the data supports the claim.

**5. If the paragraph stands alone (is not part of a larger essay), conclude by returning to your claim.**



**NOT ALL PARAGRAPHS ARE 4 OR 5 SENTENCES LONG. THE IMPORTANT THING TO NOTE ABOUT THIS STRUCTURE IS THAT ALL PERSUASIVE PARAGRAPHS:**

- start with a claim
- explain the claim
- provide evidence
- explain to the reader how or why the claim has been proven

# GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER

## THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PERSUASIVE PARAGRAPHS



### LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT A SIMPLE, YET EFFECTIVE SIX-SENTENCE PARAGRAPH:

→ **The opening sentence asserts a specific claim:**

In an effort to reduce labor costs, employers are hiring guest workers without first proving a shortage of domestic workers.

→ **The second sentence explains the claim:**

Industries, like manufacturing and hospitality, illegally escort available American workers out the back door while welcoming low-wage guest workers in the front.

→ **The third sentence provides testimonial evidence from an authoritative source to defend the claim.**

David Griffith, an anthropologist who has studied guest-worker programs for thirty years, says, "To low-wage seasonal industries, a shortage of labor is a lack of surplus labor. . . . They like a surplus because it keeps wages down."

→ **The fourth sentence interprets the evidence and relates it to the claim.**

What Griffith calls "surplus labor" means simply extra bodies—guest workers who are willing and able to work for less—ensuring that someone will always be available to work below market wages.

→ **The fifth sentence brings in additional testimonial evidence to strengthen the claim.**

Jill Foutz, a manager at an Ohio landscaping company, explains why she prefers guest workers: "They're hardworking, they're dependable and they will work for less."

→ **The sixth and final sentence analyzes the evidence, explaining exactly how both defend, strengthen, and prove the claim.**

Foutz' statement does not imply a shortage of American workers, but rather a *preference* for the qualities of guest workers: their work ethic and their willingness to accept payment below market wages.

**At no point did the writer veer off onto a new topic. The paragraph stays focused and specific in order to fully support the initial claim.**

# GET YOUR ACT TOGETHER

## THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PERSUASIVE PARAGRAPHS

### ***A BIT ABOUT SENTENCE ORGANIZATION AND REDUNDANCY***

Sentence organization is about the relationship between ideas. Be on the lookout for redundant sentences that could be better arranged into one, meaningful sentence.

Example 1:



I went to the store. I bought bread at the store. The bread was whole wheat. I like whole grains.



***What is the relationship between these ideas?***



I bought whole wheat bread at the store because I like whole grains.

Example 2:



Reading gives knowledge. One gets knowledge about other cultures. One will know about history and current events. One gains knowledge about human nature.



***Instead, try:***



By reading about other cultures, history, and current events, we gain insight into human nature.

FOWLER, H.R. "THE LITTLE, BROWN HANDBOOK"