



Crafting Logical, Relevant Claims

There are several steps you can take to craft clear claims in your writing:

I. Answer several questions to clarify your claims:

1. For Questions of fact:
 - Does X exist?
 - Does X lead to Y?
 - How can we define X?
2. For Questions of policy:
 - What action should we take?
3. For questions of value:
 - What is X worth?

II. Define key words in claims.

1. Do not just assume your readers are coming to the work with the same understandings, educational background, and knowledge base as yourself. Make sure to be specific with the terms you're using in your claims.
 - E.g., "The United States should not have relationships with states which support terrorist activity." Several terms need to be defined/refined: "relationships" (diplomatic? Military? Economic?); "support" (give refuge to? Give aid to? Don't extradite member of?) "terrorist activity" (armed groups? Religious groups? How is this defined?)
2. Take time as you edit to circle words in your writing that might need more specificity and clarity. One key type of word to look for is the demonstrative pronoun (this, that, these, and those).
 - These terms should always be clearly connected to what ideas or thoughts they demonstrate from the previous sentence or thought.

III. Make use of the three types of basic evidence:

1. **Hard facts and statistics:** These should be current, should be reliable, should fairly represent the issue, should be sufficient to establish validity, should be presented in light of opposing evidence discovered, and be comparable sets of data (especially if statistics are being used).

2. **Expert opinion:** Authorities should be qualified and neutral.
3. **Examples** (including personal anecdote and case studies): These should be current, should be reliable, should fairly represent the issue, should be sufficient to establish validity, and should be presented in light of opposing evidence.

IV. Keep in mind the **five brands of logic** writers use to connect evidence to a claim (the “logos” in rhetorical analysis)

1. **Generalization:** This brand can be risky to use because it can fall into the logical fallacy of a hasty generalization (see the end of this resource). However, if you give 3 or so examples, you *may* be able to infer from those examples to a larger group. Best used with claims of fact and value.
 - Example: Claim: Plastic litter kills animals. Evidence: Birds, turtles, sea lions, etc. have died from plastic litter.
2. **Causation:** Using this form of logic, one argues that a set of events or facts caused some result or outcome. Best used with claims of fact or policy, it can easily establish a problem-solution structure to a text. Causation requires substantial proof or evidence, but it is one of the most compelling arguments one can make.
 - Example: Claim: Intensive, single-crop farming leads to severe insect problems. Evidence: Natural vegetative habitats have checks and balances on insect populations; single-crop farming destroys complex habitats.
3. **Sign:** With this brand of logic, two sets of facts or events are related or occur at the same time, but the writer does not claim causation.
 - Example: Claim: Sexuality in advertising is effective for viewers. Evidence: Psychological experiments into human sexual response.
4. **Analogy:** Here, an argument that two concepts or sets of concepts are related. There is no real proof in an analogy, but it can be convincing if well-handled. An analogy is an extended metaphor or comparison; it can become very shaky if applied down to minute details.
 - Example: Claim: A teacher facilitating learning in a classroom is like a conductor leading an orchestra.
5. **Parallel case:** Using this type of logic allows one to argue that one case resembles another, as in arguing that a legal precedent explains or clarifies another case.

V. Make use of **appeals to authority** (like the “ethos” in rhetorical analysis)

- Establish credentials for the authority cited (including yourself)
- Establish that the authority has first-hand, intense experience with the topic.
- Establish that the authority has been evaluated by experts/peers in the field.
- Prefer public records to private records.
- Prefer information/opinion based on clear widely-accepted procedure.
- Prefer information/opinion drawn from respectable sources; beware of dubious Web resources.

- Examine possible bias, especially sources of income. Rebut bias charges if possible.

VI. Consider appeals to **emotion** (the “**pathos**” when engaging in rhetorical analysis)

- Appeal to the needs of your audience
- Ask audience to share a value with you, and hence also your claim
- Use language which evokes emotion, especially using adjectives and verbs to convey feeling.
- Don’t overplay your hand.

VII. Offer the necessary **rebuttals**

Briefly summarize a few opposing claims or points-of-view, carefully controlling the way you express that claim. Redefine terms to your advantage, but give a fair synopsis of the opposite claim. Then offer reasons or evidence which undermines those opposing claims.

VIII. Adapt and use one of the following **general structures** to arguments

- **Induction**: arguing from specific facts to general claim. The scientific method of arguing.
- **Deduction**: making a claim and offering specific evidence to back up that claim. (Humanities, politics, law).
- The **problem-solution** structure:
 - I. The problem
 - Detailed description of the problem
 - Severity of the problem
 - Current solutions to the problem
 - Failure of the current solutions
 - II. The Solution
 - Detailed description of your solution
 - Solution is practical (will achieve desired effects, is affordable, is implementable)
 - Alternative solutions are less practical.

IX. Avoid all **logical fallacies** and **flawed logic** including:

- **Dubious definitions**: Definitions of key words in claims must be common-sensible or defined through an authoritative source.
- **Hasty (or faulty) generalization**: Generalizations based on insufficient evidence.
 - E.g., not enough samples in a poll.
- **Faulty cause and effect**: A) Two events which are claimed to be causally linked really are not. In Latin, "post hoc ergo propter hoc", "after this, therefore because of this," means that because one event follows another does NOT mean the earlier event caused the later event. B) A single cause is given, when in reality the causation is much more complicated. In other words, beware of oversimplifying when claiming causation.
 - E.g.: "The GM workers will strike over health insurance benefits."

- **Confusing correlation with causation:** Because two events are related through time, space, environment, etc. does not mean they are causally related.
- **Faulty analogy:** An analogy just doesn't properly connect or explain two sets of facts.
 - E.g., writing a paper is like climbing a set of stairs, a neat linear process.
- **Either/or:** Claiming that a situation or set of facts is either X or Y, with no middle ground, is fallacious because events/facts are almost always more complicated than that.
 - E.g.: "Either the U.S. must continue to be a real military presence in the world, or we should withdraw from the global arena."
- Personal attacks, or **ad hominem** fallacies: Attacking a person's character instead of his/her views and their validity.
 - E.g., "President Clinton has no authority to propose legislation concerning women because he has treated his own wife with shocking disrespect."
- **Begging the question:** By skipping over a premise, or using a loaded term without definition, a writer can force a superficial and unquestioning reader to agree with his/her viewpoint.
 - E.g.: "All patriotic Americans will support the President in national security issues."

This resource adapted from The Allyn & Bacon Handbook, 1999, pp. 143-164

We have additional resources on logical fallacies, crafting an argument, developing a thesis statement and claim, and more on our website. You can find these sources and more here:

<https://www.iwu.edu/writing-center/student-resources/>