

WRITING EVIDENCE-BASED CLAIMS

Writing evidence-based claims is a little different from writing stories or just writing about something. You need to **follow a few steps** as you write.

1. ESTABLISH THE CONTEXT

Your readers must know **where your claim is coming from** and **why it's important**.

Depending on the scope of your piece and the claim, the context differs. If your whole piece is one claim or if you're introducing the first major claim of your piece, the entire context must be given:

In his speech to Stanford graduates in 2005, Steve Jobs tells a story...

Purposes of evidence-based writing vary. In some cases, naming the article and author is enough to show why your claim is important. In other cases, you might want to give more information:

Steve Jobs led an inspirational life. In his speech to Stanford graduates in 2005, Steve Jobs tells a story...

If your claim is part of a larger piece with multiple claims, then the context might be simpler:

According to Jobs,... *or* In paragraph 5, Jobs claims...

2. STATE YOUR CLAIM CLEARLY

How you state your claim is important; it must **clearly and fully express your ideas**.

Figuring out how to state claims is a **process**. Writers revise them continually as they write their supporting evidence. Here's a claim about Jobs' speech:

In his speech to Stanford graduates in 2005, Steve Jobs tells a story "about death" because he wants the graduates to realize something he has learned from having cancer: that death is a necessary part of life, which should influence how people live.

Remember, you should continually return and re-phrase your claim as you write the supporting evidence to make sure you are capturing exactly what you want to say. Writing out the evidence always helps you figure out what you really think.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Most claims contain multiple parts that require different evidence and should be expressed in separate paragraphs. This claim can be **broken down into two parts**:

A description of how **HAVING CANCER CAUSED JOBS TO FACE DEATH**
and
how **JOBS THINKS DEATH SHOULD SHAPE HOW PEOPLE LIVE**.

3. ORGANIZE YOUR SUPPORTING EVIDENCE (CONT'D)

Here are two paragraphs that support the claim with evidence organized into these two parts.

A description of how HAVING CANCER CAUSED JOBS TO FACE DEATH:

In his speech to Stanford graduates in 2005, Steve Jobs tells a story “about death” because he wants the graduates to realize something he has learned from having cancer: that death is a necessary part of life, which should influence how people live. When Jobs was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, he was told that it was incurable and that he would not live long (107-108). Knowing he might die from cancer caused him to remember something he had thought since he was 17, that he should live every day as if it were his last (lines 95-7).

A description of the JOBS THINKS DEATH SHOULD SHAPE HOW PEOPLE LIVE:

In lines 120-1, Jobs introduces his message and tells the graduates that he can state his ideas “with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept.” In paragraph 21, he states several claims that explain how he now views death. He describes Death as “the single best invention of life” and “life’s change agent” because it “clears out the old to make way for the new” (124-125). Jobs’ story about his cancer explains something he has said earlier in paragraph 17: “Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life.” Steve Jobs is telling the graduates that they should live their lives in a meaningful way, because, like him, they never know when life might end.

Notice the phrase, “In lines 120-1, Jobs introduces his message” starting the second paragraph.

Transitional phrases like this one aid the organization by showing how the ideas relate to each other.

4. PARAPHRASE AND QUOTE

Written evidence from texts can be paraphrased or quoted. It’s up to the writer to decide which works better for each piece of evidence. Paraphrasing is **putting the author’s words into your own**. This works well when the author originally expresses the idea you want to include across many sentences. You might write it more briefly. The second line from the first paragraph paraphrases the evidence from Jobs’ text. The ideas are his, but the exact way of writing is not.

When Jobs was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, he was told that it was incurable and that he would not live long (107-108).

Some evidence is better quoted than paraphrased. If an author has found the quickest way to phrase the idea or the words are especially strong, you might want to **use the author’s words**. The third line from paragraph 2 quotes Jobs exactly, incorporating his powerful phrases.

He describes Death as “the single best invention of life” and “life’s change agent” because it “clears out the old to make way for the new” (124-125).

5. REFERENCE YOUR EVIDENCE

Whether you paraphrase or quote the author’s words, you must include **the exact location where the ideas come from**. Direct quotes are written in quotation marks. How writers include the reference can vary depending on the piece and the original text. Here the writer puts the line numbers from the original text in parentheses at the end of the sentence.