

# Supporting Your Thesis

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Teaching Resources

Propose a change

*Synthesizing your general claims with specific evidence is a way of providing support for your claims.*

## KEY POINTS

- Every claim in your thesis must be backed up by two things: evidence and logical analysis of that evidence.
- Unsupported, generalized claims make a paper appear thin and uninformed, while a paper willing to support its claims with evidence looks thoughtful and well-researched.
- The author must provide evidence to support sub-points of the argument. There needs to be a rational, objective (or resembling-objective) component to this persuasion, but also a persuasive tone or style. These make up the components of classical rhetoric.

## TERMS

- Logos  
A form of rhetoric in which the writer or speaker uses logic as the main argument.
- evidence  
Facts or observations presented in support of an assertion.
- thesis  
A statement supported by arguments.

## EXAMPLES

- General claim: The novel has a history of being popular with politically progressive groups. Evidence: Eugene Debbs described the novel as leading him "out of darkness and into the light" of socialism. Logical analysis: Eugene Debbs, the famous union leader and former Socialist candidate for President of the United States, described the novel as leading him "out of the darkness and into the light" of socialism, demonstrating the extent to which the novel has a history of being popular with politically progressive groups and individuals.

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Your thesis will condense a series of claims into one or two sentences. To prove your thesis, you will need to articulate these claims and convince the reader that these claims are true. Consequently, the majority of your paper will be dedicated to presenting and analyzing evidence that supports your claims, making it clear to the reader how the evidence relates to the claims.

By the time you start writing, you should already have conducted research and assembled your evidence. You should also know which pieces of evidence you want to use to back up each claim. What you have probably not finished working out is how you want to analyze those pieces of evidence. The first draft is the time to focus on doing that.

You cannot just present a piece of evidence and assume that your work is done. After working extensively on your argument, it may seem obvious to you how the evidence proves your claim. Your reader, however, has not done the same preparatory work you have. It's likely that he or she will not automatically understand the point you take your evidence to prove. Consequently, it is up to you to explain to the reader how a piece of evidence supports your claim.

When analyzing your evidence, be as thorough and clear as possible. You may be familiar with the rhetorical strategy of logos, or step-by-step rational argument. It will probably be helpful to adopt that as a model and conduct your analysis through progressive points, each one of which builds off the previous one. Even if it seems like you are oversimplifying things, it is better to give your audience too much analysis than too little. Make sure every step is included, and that the description of your evidence's purpose is clear. You do not want any part of your process to be ambiguous for your reader, or they may stop understanding or agreeing with your argument.

When supporting your thesis, it is important that you establish and maintain your credibility. This means that both your evidence and reasoning must be reliable and high quality. You may have great evidence, but if your reasoning is sloppy or flawed, you can render that evidence meaningless to the reader. Similarly, you may write a great analysis of bad evidence, but that analysis will not count towards your argument because it is based on something unreliable. To avoid these problems, take the time to confirm the trustworthiness of your evidence and to make sure that your analysis is thorough. Also, be careful to remain objective—avoid biased language and stick to arguments that are based on logic rather than on emotion.

