

How to incorporate evidence

Academic writing must be supported by evidence such as data, facts, quotations, arguments, statistics, research, and theories.

This evidence will:

- ◇ add substance to your own ideas
- ◇ allow the reader to see what has informed your thinking and how your ideas fit in with, and differ from, others' in your field
- ◇ demonstrate your understanding of the general concepts and theories on the topic
- ◇ show you have researched widely, and know about specialist/niche areas of interest.

There are several methods that you can use to incorporate other people's work into your own written work. These are:

- ◇ paraphrasing
- ◇ summarizing
- ◇ synthesizing
- ◇ quoting.

How to paraphrase others' work

Paraphrasing is using your own words to express someone else's ideas. When paraphrasing, make sure that you:

- ◆ identify a relevant theme or point, depending on your purpose
- ◆ write the point in your own words
- ◆ focus on the meaning of an idea or argument
- ◆ include a reference to the original author.

How to summarize others' work

- ◆ Summarizing is providing a condensed version of someone else's key points. When summarizing other people's work, make sure that you:
 - ◆ identify the relevant points of the idea or argument, depending on your purpose
 - ◆ write a shortened version, in your own words, to show your understanding
 - ◆ include an in-text citation and reference to the original author.

How to synthesize others' work

Synthesizing involves combining different information and ideas to develop your own argument. When synthesizing others' work, make sure that you:

- ◆ Group sources into relevant categories, for example, authors with similar viewpoints or research that reveals the same results
- ◆ Write about these in your own words. Do not discuss each author separately; you must identify the overall points you want to make
- ◆ Include references to all the original authors.

How to quote from others' work

Quoting is where you copy an author's text word for word, place quotation marks around the words and add a citation at the end of the quote. When quoting others' work, make sure that you:

- ◆ copy the quote exactly from the original, as the author has written it, taking care to include quotation marks
- ◆ show where you have made any changes to the text
- ◆ include an in-text citation and reference to the original author.

Use clear and concise language

Academic writing is concise, clear, formal and active. It does not need to be complex or use long sentences and obscure vocabulary.

Be concise

In formal academic writing it is important to be concise. This helps your reader to understand the points you are making.

Here are some tips to help you:

- ◆ Only include one main idea per sentence.
- ◆ Keep your sentences to a reasonable length (generally not more than 25 words). Long sentences can be difficult to follow and this may distract from your point.
- ◆ Avoid repetition.
- ◆ Use formal language
- ◆ In academic writing you are expected to use formal language.:
- ◆ Avoid using colloquialisms or slang terms such as 'sort of' or 'basically'. Instead you could use 'somewhat' or 'fundamentally'.
- ◆ Write words out in full rather than shortening them. For example, instead of writing “don't” or “isn't” you would be expected to write “do not” or “is not”

Use a blend of active and passive verbs

Most verbs can be used in either an active or passive form. It is usually appropriate to use a mixture of passive and active forms within academic writing. Always check with your department to see what form of writing would be most appropriate for your subject area.

The **active voice** places the subject of the sentence in charge of the action.

- ◆ For example: “The research assistant designed the survey.” Here the research assistant (the subject) designed (the verb) the survey (the object).
- ◆ It is usually more direct and easier to read than the passive voice.
- ◆ However, sometimes you may want to emphasize what is happening rather than who is doing it. To do this you can use the passive voice.

The **passive voice** places the subject at the end, or may leave it out completely.

- ◆ For example: “The survey was designed by the research assistant.” Here the survey (the object) was designed (the verb) by the research assistant (the subject).
- ◆ The passive voice is more formal than the active voice. It is often used in academic writing as it is seen as more impersonal and therefore more objective. However, it is not always easy to read and it may add unnecessary words.

Choose the correct tense and voice

Only use first person voice in reflective writing

Academic arguments are not usually presented in the first person (using I), but use more objective language, logic and reasoning to persuade (rather than emotional or personal perspectives).

This may not apply, however, if you are asked to write a reflective report based on your own thoughts and experiences.

Use past tense to speak about your method

If you are writing about an experiment you carried out or a method you used then use the past tense. For example: "Our experiment showed wide variations in results where the variable was altered even slightly."

Use present tense to conclude or discuss established knowledge:

- ◆ When you are reporting on the findings or research of others then you should use the present tense.
- ◆ When you are writing about your conclusions or what you have found then use the present tense.
- ◆ If you are writing about figures that you have presented in a table or chart then use the present tense.

Build your argument

Your argument is how you express your viewpoint and answer the question you have been set, using evidence.

Your argument can help you plan the structure of your work and guide you to find the evidence you need to support it.

Make sure that your argument runs throughout your writing and that everything you include is relevant to it. Try to sum up your argument in a few words before you start writing and keep checking that it remains the focus as you research and write your work.

Structure your argument:

- ◇ Guide your reader through your argument in a logical way. Think about what questions your reader might have. If you can answer these questions through your argument, it will seem more convincing.
- ◇ Present both sides of the debate, along with your thoughts, linking together the different elements.
- ◇ You can then work towards a conclusion by weighing the evidence and showing how certain ideas are accepted and others are rejected. Your conclusion should make clear where you stand.

Develop your argument:

- ◆ Develop your argument by considering the evidence and drawing your own conclusion.
- ◆ If you are considering a range of opinions, try to group them together under different headings.
- ◆ Look at the strengths and weaknesses of the different sets of evidence and present these clearly and in a critical way. This will help to show you understand what you have read.
- ◆ Take the evidence into account in developing your own argument and make clear what your viewpoint is. Perhaps your argument has strengths and weaknesses as well – it is fine to acknowledge these.

Include your own voice in your writing:

- ◆ Your voice will emerge through your discussion, interpretation, and evaluation of the sources.

A sample of academic writing (a scientific research):

<http://www.ijapas.org/index.php/ijapas/issue/view/9>