

# 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 relevant**.

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 established:

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois argues...

**Purposes** of evidence-based writing vary. In some cases, naming the book and author might be enough to establish the relevance of your claim. In other cases, you might want to supply additional information:

In the early 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois came up with important ways for understanding early African American history. In his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, he argues...

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

According to Du Bois,...                      or                      In paragraph 5, Du Bois argues...

## 2. STATE YOUR CLAIM CLEARLY

How you state your claim is important; it must **precisely and comprehensively express your analysis**. Figuring out how to state claims is a **process**; writers revise them continually as they write their supporting evidence. Here's a claim about Du Bois' concept of "the contradiction of double aims" in paragraph 5 of *The Souls of Black Folk*:

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois argues that, in the time immediately following Emancipation, awareness of two very different populations weakened the work of black artisans, intellectuals, and artists.

When writing claims, it is often useful to describe parts of the claim before providing the supporting evidence. In this case, the writer might want to briefly identify and describe the two populations in a second sentence:

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois argues that, in the time immediately following Emancipation, awareness of two very different populations weakened the work of black artisans, intellectuals, and artists. They were aware of both a very developed white population and a generally uneducated and poor black population.

The details about the two populations in the second sentence are relevant to the claim. They also begin connecting the claim to ideas that will be used as evidence.

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

A description of the **POPULATIONS** and a description of the **EFFECTS OF THE AWARENESS**.

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

A description of the POPULATIONS :

What was needed by their own people—"a poverty-stricken horde"—was to white people, simple and basic—a "twice-told tale" (63, 68). Furthermore, white people misunderstood and even despised black ideals and beauty (69-72). On the other hand, black intellectuals and artists did not share the experience of the white population. White experience was "Greek to (their) own flesh and blood" and white standards were not those of their own people (69, 65-66).

A description of the EFFECTS OF THE AWARENESS:

As such, black artists and intellectuals were caught in between, facing "two unreconciled ideals" (73). This position "wrought sad havoc" with their "courage and faith and deeds" (74). At the very least, they were confused and unproductive. At the worst, they were tempted "toward quackery and demagogy" (65). Diffused and fraudulent, they did not live up to their own potential or to the "criticism of the other world" (65-66). Often, they ended up "ashamed of themselves" (76).

Notice the phrase, "As such," 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 paragraph 2 paraphrases the evidence from Du Bois' text. The ideas are his, but the exact way of writing is not.

Furthermore, white people misunderstood and even despised black ideals and beauty (69-72).

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 first line from paragraph 2 quotes Du Bois exactly, incorporating two of his powerful phrases.

What was needed by their own people—"a poverty-stricken horde"—was to white people, simple and basic—"a twice-told tale" (63, 68).

### 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.