

The Basic Elements of a Research Paper

When writing a research paper in Science, History or English class it is always important to use consistent language. The purpose of a research paper is to increase your knowledge about a certain topic using books, internet, and databases as resources to obtain this new knowledge. To do this there are three components to every good research / argument paper: a solid claim (thesis/hypothesis), valid evidence, and well-explained warrants and connector statements.

The following is a brief explanation of each of these components (information adapted from the Freshman Argument Unit).

1. Claim (Thesis/Hypothesis): a strong claim is a debatable statement, or opinion that can be supported with evidence. The statement should provide the reader with the purpose of your paper and be directed to a certain audience in mind. It answers the question, “What can you prove?”

For example:

- A basic fact ($2 + 2 = 4$) is not a claim. This statement can not be debated.
- Chicago is the best city for young people. This is a debatable statement because the writer needs to provide evidence to prove why this statement would be true. This statement is not true by definition.

Example of a claim statement taken from section 1.4 (“Conducting Research”) in the Sixth Edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Gibaldi).

Students who wish to write successful research papers must know as much as possible about the modern academic library – its central information system, reference works, online catalog of holdings, full-text databases, and other resources and services – and must be knowledgeable about finding useful internet sources (50).

Why is this a good claim?

What does the writer have to prove to the reader about research papers?

2. Valid Evidence: this includes facts and statistics from reliable sources, expert testimony, direct quotes from text, paraphrased information, and specific details or clues. It answers the question, “How do you know?”

For example:

- A basic fact ($2 + 2 = 4$) needs no evidence to be proved.
- Chicago has many recreational and professional programs that young people can join to have fun and meet new people. This is a piece of evidence that may help prove that Chicago is the best city for young people.

3. Warrant or Connector: this is often the most difficult part of research or argument writing. The warrant connects the evidence to the claim. It explains why the evidence supports the claim. It answers the question, “So What?”

For example:

- A basic fact ($2 + 2 = 4$) needs no explanation.
- The writer needs to explain the criteria for great cities. A great city offers many opportunities for people to meet in social and professional situations. Chicago has many recreational and professional programs that young people can join to have fun and meet new people.

Use of Transitions in Writing

The use of transitions in a paper indicates to the reader that a change in information is coming. The transitions can occur from one paragraph to the next (usually at end of the paragraph) or within a paragraph when a writer is connecting two pieces of evidence. Transitions help the writer in organizing information, as well as helping the reader to piece together the argument or relationship that is being created.

Popular Transitions

LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP	TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION
Similarity	also, in the same way, just as ... so too, likewise, similarly
Exception/Contrast	but, however, in spite of, on the one hand ... on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, notwithstanding, in contrast, on the contrary, still, yet
Sequence/Order	first, second, third, ... next, then, finally
Time	after, afterward, at last, before, currently, during, earlier, immediately, later, meanwhile, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then
Example	for example, for instance, namely, specifically, to illustrate
Emphasis	even, indeed, in fact, of course, truly
Place/Position	above, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus
Additional Support or Evidence	additionally, again, also, and, as well, besides, equally important, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, then
Conclusion/Summary	finally, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in the end, in the final analysis, on the whole, thus, to conclude, to summarize, in sum, in summary

Information adapted from “Transition Handouts.”

Maine West Research Manual 2006 (B. Hult, K. Marshall, K. Ryken)

Proper Use of Quotations - Quote Integration

The Right IDEA: The Four Steps to Quote Integration

1. **I** [Introduce quote- State who is writing/speaking & when]
2. **D** [Deliver- use quote & cite properly-"Quote"(Fitzgerald 26).]
3. **E** [Explain- use all your own words to paraphrase the quote]
4. **A** [Analyze- explain how the quote proves your claim & sub-claim.
(Tips: Analysis section must clearly explain how the evidence proves the claim/
sub-claim/ main sub-topic & use language from the claim/sub-claim in your
analysis)]

The following examples are from a research paper on the Vietnam War.

Claim: The Vietnam War was a violent and harsh war that left many soldiers burdened with physical, mental, and emotional pain.

1. Provide a context for each quotation.

Do not rely on quotations to tell the story for you. It is your responsibility to provide the reader with a context for the quotation. The context should set the basic scene of who, what, where, when, and why (but not all).

- According to Steven S. Lloyd author of “U.S. Vietnam War Soldiers and Malaria,”

2. Deliver and cite the quote properly.

Make sure when using a specific quote from a text, copy the correct wording and punctuation.

- “An estimated 480,000 soldiers, according to estimates of the Department of Veteran’s Affairs (VA), suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.” (There is no need to put a parenthetical citation because the author and article name was given in the introduction of the quote).

3. Explain the quotation by putting the information into your own words.

Even though the writer has introduced and delivered the quote, the reader may still not have a clear sense of what is taking place in this given quote. Therefore, it is the writer's responsibility to paraphrase the information, to explain what this information means in relation to the claim (thesis/hypothesis).

(This part of quote integration will be different in English, History, and Science classes. In some incidences, the writer is paraphrasing information that is not known before the research process, so that information must be cited. However, if a writer is just summarizing the events in a literary text, the citation is not needed. Clarify the process that is necessary for your paper with your teacher during the writing process).

- Even though the war has been over for some thirty years, many soldiers are still traumatized, physically, mentally, and emotionally by what they saw and what they did while in Vietnam.

4. Analyze the significance of the quotation.

The most important part of using certain quotes from a text is analyzing why you chose that specific quote to help support your claim.

- Therefore, the harsh realities of the war are still evident as soldiers are still suffering from the effects of the war long after the war has ended. Vietnam Veterans are unable to reenter society when the emotional, mental, and physical trauma that was suffered in the war prohibits them from getting a job or raising a family. This has prompted the government to create many programs that Veterans can turn to for help.

This is how the paragraph will look when all the pieces are put together:

According to Steven S. Lloyd author of "U.S. Vietnam War Soldiers and Malaria," "An estimated 480,000 soldiers, according to estimates of the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA), suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder." Even though the war has been over for some thirty years, many soldiers are still traumatized, physically, mentally, and emotionally by what they saw and what they did while in Vietnam ("U.S. Vietnam War Soldiers and Malaria"). Unfortunately, the harsh realities of the war are still evident as soldiers are still suffering from the effects of the war long after the war has ended. Vietnam Veterans are unable to reenter society when the emotional, mental, and physical trauma that was suffered in the war prohibits them from getting a job or raising a family. This has prompted the government to create many programs that Veterans can turn to for help.

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sub-claim/ main sub-topic & use language from the claim/sub-claim in your
analysis)]

The following examples are from a literary analysis paper on *The Great Gatsby*.

1. Provide a context for each quotation.

Do not rely on quotations to tell your story for you. It is your responsibility to provide the reader with a context for the quotation. The context should set the basic scene of who, what, where, when, and why (but not all).

- While at the Plaza Hotel, Tom exposes Gatsby and his financial past. Tom remarks,

2. Deliver and cite quote properly.

Make sure when using a specific quote from a text, copy the correct wording and punctuation.

- “I found out what your “drug stores” were,’ He turned to us and spoke rapidly. ‘He and this Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side street drug stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter’”(Fitzgerald 141).

3. Explain the quotation by putting the information into your own words.

Even though the writer has introduced the quote and then delivered the quote, the reader may still not have a clear sense of what is taking place in this given quote. Therefore, it is the writer's responsibility to paraphrase the information, to explain what this information means in relation to the claim (thesis/hypothesis).

(This part of quote integration will be different in English, History, and Science classes. In some incidences, the writer is paraphrasing information that is not known before the research process, so that information must be cited. However, if a writer is just summarizing the events in a literary text, the quote is not needed. Clarify the process that is necessary for your paper with your teacher during the writing process).

- Tom confronts Gatsby and tells the group at the hotel that Gatsby made all of his money illegally. Gatsby and Wolfshiem are bootleggers.

4. Analyze the significance of the quotation.

The most important part of using certain quotes from a text is analyzing why you chose that specific quote to help support your claim.

- Clearly Gatsby tried to make money as quickly as possible. However, he attained his wealth illegally. His dream of giving Daisy everything she wanted leads to his status as a criminal. Gatsby's dream is now a nightmare because he has been exposed in front of the woman he loves as a corrupt business man.

This is how the paragraph will look when all the pieces are put together:

While at the Plaza Hotel, Tom exposes Gatsby and his financial past. Tom remarks, "I found out what your "drug stores" were," He turned to us and spoke rapidly. "He and this Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side street drug stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter"(Fitzgerald 141). Tom confronts Gatsby and tells the group at the hotel that Gatsby made all of his money illegally. Gatsby and Wolfshiem are bootleggers. Clearly Gatsby tried to make money as quickly as possible; however, he attained his wealth illegally. His dream of giving Daisy everything she wanted leads to his status as a criminal. Gatsby's dream is now a nightmare because he has been exposed in front of the woman he loves as a corrupt businessman.

Using Two or More Pieces of Evidence in a Paragraph

Intro Paragraph – Attention Grabber /brief overview of sub-claims/ main sub-topics

Paragraph 2

Sub-claim / Sub-topic -

- Introduce- quote or paraphrased information / Deliver- use quote & cite properly / Explain- use all your own words to paraphrase the quote (cite properly if necessary) / Analyze- explain how the quote proves your claim & sub-claim/ main sub-topic.

Separate the two pieces of evidence with your own analysis of the information you are researching by connecting the two points (**use of transitions**).

- Introduce- quote or paraphrase information / Deliver- use quote & cite properly / Explain- use all your own words to paraphrase the quote (cite properly if necessary) / Analyze- explain how the quote proves your claim & sub-claim/ main sub-topic.

Concluding sentence –

Paragraph 3 (Continue for each paragraph to follow in the outline)

Sub-claim -

- Introduce quote or paraphrase information / Deliver- use quote & cite properly / Explain- use all your own words to paraphrase the quote (cite properly if necessary) / Analyze- explain how the quote proves your sub-claim/ sub-topic.

Separate the two pieces of evidence with your own analysis of the information you are researching by connecting the two points (**use of transitions**).

- Introduce quote or paraphrase information / Deliver- use quote & cite properly / Explain- use all your own words to paraphrase the quote (cite properly if necessary) / Analyze- explain how the quote proves your sub-claim/sub-topic.

Concluding sentence –

As is the case with most research papers, the number of sentences may vary depending on the extent of the analysis.

An American Who Has Fulfilled the American Dream
[An outline]

I. Introduction – Who is your American?

- A. Attention Getter:
- B. Preview of Sub-claims / Major Sub-topics:
- C. Claim / Thesis / Hypothesis:

II. Biographical information

- A. Birth, Family, education, career, talents, accomplishments, contributions, inventions, etc.
- B. Evidence from your notecards (specific quotations or paraphrased information)
- C. Warrant provide the explanation as to how the evidence informs the reader that this person is a great American

III. First sub-claim / Major sub-topic – first criteria that your American has achieved the American Dream.

- A. Explanation of first criteria of American Dream
- B. Evidence you will include to show this – direct quotation from research, paraphrased information, examples from the person's life
- C. Parenthetical citations (how will you cite this information in the body of your paper?)
- D. Warrant – provide the explanation as to why the piece of evidence proves your claim.

- IV. Sub-claim / Major Sub-topic – Second criteria that your American has achieved the American Dream.**
- A. Explanation of second criteria of American Dream
 - B. Evidence you will include to show this – direct quotation from research, paraphrased information, examples from the person’s life
 - C. Parenthetical citations (how will you cite this information in the body of your paper?)
 - D. Warrant: provide the explanation as to why the piece of evidence proves your claim.
- V. Sub-claim / Major sub-topic – Third criteria that your American has achieved the American Dream.**
- A. Explanation of third criteria of American Dream
 - B. Evidence you will include to show this – direct quotation from research, paraphrased information, examples from the person’s life
 - C. Parenthetical citations (how will you cite this information in the body of your paper?)
 - D. Warrant – provide the explanation as to why the piece of evidence proves your claim.

- VI. Sub-claim / Major sub-topic – Fourth criteria that your American has achieved the American Dream.**
- A. Explanation of fourth criteria of American Dream
 - B. Evidence you will include to show this – direct quotation from research, paraphrased information, examples from the person’s life
 - C. Parenthetical citations (how will you cite this information in the body of your paper?):
 - D. Warrant: provide the explanation as to why the piece of evidence proves your claim.

VIII. Conclusion

(Example Outline above reprinted from English III Research Unit)

