

Using Evidence to Build Arguments

Instructor Guide

Using evidence to build a persuasive argument is, more often than not, a brand new concept for first-year students. For many of these students, high school writing required that they summarize and present other people's arguments or facts, rather than make and support their own argument. If you plan to assign a research project in your class, this guide and the worksheet can be very useful as a first step that will help them define a topic/argument and plan their research. This instructor guide and related exercises and worksheet are designed to help instructors teach their students how to build an argument. It includes identifying the issues, building a search strategy to look for evidence, finding evidence and evaluating it. The guide and included notes help instructors frame the discussion within the classroom, but should not be handed out to students. If you would like the libraries to tailor the accompanying worksheet to your course content, please contact a UGS librarian.

Explanation you can use in the classroom:

Note: *Either choose and model a course-related topic or use this one.*

- 1. Why use evidence?** Using evidence is a persuasive way to convey your opinion or illustrate your point. Evidence often appears in the form of statistics, facts or research studies and conclusions. Using this type of evidence in addition to stating an opinion will bolster your argument.
- 2. Understand the topic:** Before you can make an argument or form an opinion, you need to know about your topic. Background information, which provides facts, an overview and history of your topic, including any controversies surrounding it, is very helpful for grounding yourself in your topic before forming an opinion. If your topic is too broad, background information can help you narrow it down, as well.

Example: Wal-Mart is a socially irresponsible company.

- Find background information about Wal-Mart and learn its history and controversies surrounding it. You will be able to then identify some reasons you would argue that it is socially irresponsible, such as poor labor practices and environmental destruction.

Note: *Search the toolkit for background information guides and tutorials or contact the UGS Librarians for a tailored research guide.*

- 3. Consider the types of evidence you need:** Once you've determined your argument and reasoning behind it, think about what evidence you need to support your argument. For example, if you want to argue that Wal-Mart is socially irresponsible because it has poor labor practices, you will want to find articles describing those labor practices, summaries of law suits, and statistics about Wal-Mart pay for male versus female employees.

Note: *It is important for your students to also understand that they will have to find their evidence in numerous places and synthesize it themselves. So they may find the statistics one place and a research study someplace else. In addition, it is important for them to understand that the evidence they use might not even directly discuss their topic. For example, if they want to argue*

that Wal-Mart is bad for the environment, a research study about the effects of large parking lots on water quality that doesn't mention Wal-Mart would still be a piece of evidence.

4. **Find the evidence:** Once you have determined the type of evidence you need, decide where the best place would be to find it and what the best terms would be to bring back relevant sources:

Note: Show your students how to brainstorm search terms and use them to search library databases for articles, the Library Catalog for books and/or the web. Search the toolkit for tutorials and guides or ask the Libraries to create a tailored research guide for your course.

5. **Evaluate the evidence:** Now that you've found evidence, you will want to evaluate it to make sure you trust it. Consider the source, the expertise of the creator/author, any bias, accuracy and currency.

Note: Talk to your students about the need to evaluate the evidence they find and how to do so. Keep in mind that many freshmen have never seen a scholarly journal and don't know what peer-review is. The toolkit contains guides and exercises to help students understand what a scholarly source is and how it may be useful, as well as tools to help them evaluate web sites and materials they find in the libraries (magazines, journals, books).

Classroom Exercises

Hands-on Classroom

1. Explain to your students the concepts of finding and using evidence to build arguments (found above and on the worksheet below)
2. Ask your students to complete the first three questions on the worksheet for their own topics.
3. Ask for a few volunteers to go over their worksheets as a class and then work together to answer the questions about who would collect this evidence and where it would be published.
4. Have students work in groups to help each other complete where the evidence would be published.
5. Use your own topic (or the Wal-Mart topic) to show your students how to brainstorm search terms, choose and search a database, the Library Catalog and/or another resource.
6. Choose one piece of evidence and evaluate it as a discussion led by you.
7. Using their own computers, ask your students to complete the last two questions on the worksheet (finding and evaluating a piece of evidence). If you have the time, have a few students discuss what they found.

Instructor Only Station

1. Explain to your students the concepts of finding and using evidence to build arguments (found above and on the worksheet below)
2. As a class, model the first 3 steps of the process with your own topic or the Wal-Mart topic.
3. Ask your students to complete the first 3 questions on the worksheet at home when they can access background information online.
4. At the next class meeting, ask for a few volunteers to go over their worksheets as a class and learn from each other.
5. Model the questions of who would collect this evidence and where it would be published then ask your students to work together to do this for their own topics.
6. Use your own topic (or the Wal-Mart topic) to show your students how to brainstorm search terms, choose and search a database, the Library Catalog and/or another resource.
7. Choose one piece of evidence and evaluate it as a discussion led by you.

8. Ask your students to complete the last two questions on the worksheet (finding and evaluating a piece of evidence) at home. You can ask them to turn it in at the next class meeting or have a few volunteers discuss what they did at the next class meeting.

No Technology in the Classroom

1. Explain to your students the concepts of finding and using evidence to build arguments (found above and on the worksheet below)
2. Ask your students to complete the first three questions on the worksheet for their own topics.
3. Ask for a few volunteers to go over their worksheets as a class and then work together to answer the questions about who would collect this evidence and where it would be published.
4. Have students work in groups to help each other complete where the evidence would be published.
5. Use your own topic (or the Wal-Mart topic) to show your students how to brainstorm search terms. Have a piece of evidence already chosen and explain to them where you found it and evaluate it as a class.
6. Ask your students to complete the last two questions on the worksheet (finding and evaluating a piece of evidence) at home. At the next class meeting, you can ask them to turn it in and/or choose a few volunteers to discuss what they found as a class.

Take-Home Assignment

Ask them to complete the worksheet (below) in advance of a research paper. It might be very useful for them to complete and turn in as part of a paper topic proposal.

Using Evidence to Build Arguments – Worksheet

Why use evidence?

Using evidence is a persuasive way to convey your opinion or illustrate your point. Evidence usually appears in the form of statistics, facts, or research studies and conclusions. Using this in addition to stating an opinion will bolster arguments by basing them on facts or hard evidence. This approach is best used after you've explored your topic using Background Information and decided on a paper topic. Using the following example, we'll walk through to process of where and why you could find evidence to support your idea.

Step 1: Define your Argument

Sample topic: Wal-Mart is a socially irresponsible company.

Using background information, identify some of the controversies surrounding Wal-Mart (or what reasoning you would use to claim that it's socially irresponsible). Some might be:

- a. poor labor practices
 - b. destruction of small businesses
 - c. harmful to the environment
- a. To illustrate Wal-Mart's poor labor practices using evidence, try to find:
 - statistics on the income gap between male and female Wal-Mart employees.
 - summaries of law proceedings of class-action lawsuits.
 - b. To illustrate how Wal-Mart destroys small businesses, try to find:
 - statistics of the number of area businesses that closed around or after the Wal-Mart store entered the community.
 - articles on community outcries from local business owners.
 - polls on how community members feel about Wal-Mart
 - c. To illustrate how Wal-Mart harms the environment, try to find:
 - a study about how paved parking lots contribute to water pollution. Because parking accompanies these massive stores, this is bound to disrupt the local environment.

★ **Write down your topic:**

Example: Wal-Mart is a socially irresponsible company.

★ **Based on your background information search, what arguments or claims will you make?**

Example: Wal-Mart destroys local businesses, treats their employees unfairly, and harms the

environment.

Step 2: Create a Search Strategy

Before beginning to search for evidence to build your arguments, consider what **types of evidence** you want to find and then develop a search strategy to find it.

★ **What pieces of evidence would support your argument/claims?**

Examples: statistics on the income gap between male and female Wal-Mart employees; articles on community outcries from local business owners; polls on how community members feel about Wal-Mart; study about how paved parking lots contribute to water pollution

★ **Who would create or collect this evidence?**

Example: researchers in the field of sociology, labor studies, or environmental studies; state and national environmental agencies, community activists or local newspaper journalists, local governments

★ **Where is it published?**

Examples: statistics about the income gap could be found on government websites; studies of environmental destruction could be found in education journals, articles on community outcry could be found in local newspapers or on local government websites.

Step 3: Find and Evaluate your Evidence

★ **Find one piece of evidence and record the citation here:**

- ★ **Evaluate the piece of evidence. Why do you trust it? How does it support your argument?**