

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii	Part 3 Exploring your evidence	41
Introduction	viii	10 Finding your depth: skim-reading strategies	42
Part 1 Why good evidence matters	1	11 Squeezing out the juice: summarising your skim-reading	54
1 What do we mean by 'evidence'?	2	12 Active notemaking	59
2 But what's the right answer?	6	13 Stepping stones: finding your way to (and through) more material	64
3 What are my lecturers looking for?	9	Part 4 Using your evidence	68
4 Using Wikipedia and other factual sources	13	14 Putting the pieces together	69
Part 2 Choosing your evidence	15	15 Dealing with conflicting evidence	74
5 Finding your focus	16	16 Building the 'spine' of your argument	78
6 Information 'flavours'	19	17 Signposting your evidence	82
7 Where to start	23		
8 Collecting your evidence: a four-step plan	27		
9 Taking it further	38		

Part 5 Evidence in everyday life 85

18	Reading between the lines – uncovering bias in everyday information	86
19	Social biases and structural inequality	91
20	Dealing with misinformation and fake news	94
	Conclusion	98
	References	100
	Index	101

1

What do we mean by 'evidence'?

The example below shows how evidence can be presented to help people recognise their assumptions and gain a deeper understanding of a complex topic.

In the first paragraph, the writer describes a commonly held belief and explains why it seems so convincing. In the second paragraph, they bring forward unusual and compelling evidence that compels the reader to think again about the assumption that 'seeing is believing'.

For most people, the evidence of our own eyes is highly compelling and determines what we believe and how we behave. Eyewitness testimony carries high credibility in court, and visual information is often considered to take precedence over input from other senses, such as hearing or touch.

*Introductory paragraph
outlining commonly held
views and assumptions*

2

WHERE'S YOUR EVIDENCE?

However, the ‘Monkey Business Illusion’ study (<http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/videos.html> [accessed 30 October 2019]) suggests that people often fail to see significant or unusual phenomena, even when they are right in front of their eyes. Researchers found that half the participants in their study did not notice a person wearing a gorilla suit walk through the middle of a basketball game on which they were concentrating (Most *et al.*, 2001).

Evidence that challenges the popularly held view

Some of the evidence you’ll use in your academic work may be derived from original observation and testing, like Dr Snow’s research on cholera or the ‘Monkey Business’ psychology study. Original research includes activities such as conducting interviews or surveys, experimenting with cultures in a lab, or studying conditions on a field trip. More often, however, when you write assignments at university you’ll be relying on research carried out by others and reported in journal articles or books.

What makes evidence convincing?

When you draw on research done by other people and use it to support your own point of view, it’s crucial that the research carries conviction – your whole argument, however well constructed, is only as strong as the *weakest* part of your evidence.

Your lecturers will be looking for evidence that is:

Relevant	Each source you cite must have something useful to say about the topic that deepens the reader's understanding.
Authoritative	The author needs to be qualified in some way to make meaningful statements about the topic (see the box below).
Timely	There is no hard-and-fast rule about how recent your references must be. Some decades-old studies are still cited because they made major breakthroughs that remain relevant today. However, you should be up to date with recent trends in how your topic is being studied and what is known about it.
Rigorous	How the evidence you use was collected and analysed also matters. Research must be based on a well-designed study to ensure that the researchers don't make false claims about what the data mean.

These four points together help to establish the **validity** of a work – and that in turn gives it **credibility**. In other words, valid evidence will make your argument stronger and more convincing.

What does authority look like?

What makes a writer 'authoritative' – that is, qualified to say something meaningful about a topic – can be different in different circumstances. Consider these three examples:

An eminent sports scientist runs a large-scale quantitative study on how athletes recover from injury. Here, the authority arises from how the scientist designed the study, the sophistication of how the data are manipulated statistically, and to a smaller extent the experience and reputation of the author.

A qualitative researcher in the social sciences interviews athletes to find out how they feel about recovering from injury. In this case the authority lies in what the athletes themselves say: although they are not professional researchers, they are the experts on their own lives and feelings.

A student who goes on placement in a sports clinic writes a reflective essay about how they developed a therapeutic relationship with their clients. In this example, the authority lies in the integrity with which the student writes about their experience of a professional clinical situation and how well they feel they handled it.

Not all 'experts' are academics!

Index

- abstract, 36, 43, 44–5, 52
- academic integrity, 62
- academic phrasebank, 84
- advanced search, 31
- agendas, 87, 92, 97
- algorithms, 92
- anti-vaccine movement, 90
- apartheid, 91
- arguable questions, 6–7, 11, 15, 74
- authority, 4–5, 7, 14, 19, 56, 98
- bias, 86–7, 88, 91–2, 94, 97, 98
- bibliographies, 64
- cholera, 1, 3
- ‘cited by’ tool, 65
- clickbait, 96
- Colbert, Stephen, 87
- common knowledge, 13–14
- conclusion (part of a work), 43, 47, 49–50, 52
- confirmation bias, 95–6
- credibility, 4
- databases, 25, 31, 39, 65
- ‘deck of cards’ technique, 79–80
- factual sources, 13
- filter bubbles, 92–3, 96
- fraudulent data, 88–90
- Google, 26
- Google Scholar, 26, 31, 65
- headings (part of a work), 49–50, 52
- hypotheses, 14
- inference, 12
- informed opinion, 11
- interpretation, 12
- introduction (part of a work), 43, 45–6, 49–50, 52
- jargon, 66
- libraries, 23, 25, 26, 31, 39
- ‘Monkey Business’ illusion, 3
- Noble, Dr Safiya Umoja, 92
- paraphrasing, 60, 62
- Pariser, Eli, 92
- plagiarism avoidance, 62, 63
- proof, 11–12
- propaganda, 96
- reading lists, 23–4
- reference lists, 64, 65

reference management
 software, 39
reference works,
 13–14
relevance, 4, 7, 14, 56,
 98
retraction, 89–90
rigour, 4, 7, 14, 56,
 98

search engines, 26, 31,
 91–2, 93
Snow, Dr John, 1, 3
social biases, 91–2, 98
summarising, 41
synonyms, 28, 30, 32

technology, bias in, 91–2, 96–7
threshold concepts, 67

timeliness, 4, 7, 14, 56, 98
‘truthiness’, 87

validity, 4–5, 11–12, 67, 83,
 85

Wakefield, Andrew, 90
white supremacy, 91
Wikipedia, 13–14, 18