

Basics

Writers use evidence and examples to support their *claims* – the things they say are true. For example, a writer might claim that Leonardo da Vinci was the most important person that has ever lived. She must then support the claim by giving evidence or examples to say why the claim is true. Without evidence or examples, a claim or argument is not strong.

The academic context

Evidence and examples are a common feature of academic texts. You must learn to identify them and assess how well they support a claim or argument. In time, you will learn to provide evidence and give examples in your own written compositions.

Key features

- A paragraph usually begins with a topic sentence. The topic sentence makes a claim:

The most common cause of stress is financial problems.

- The writer might then support their claim using evidence. Evidence is information or facts that directly support the claim. It often involves numbers or statistics:

In a recent survey of 10,000 people, 70% said they worry about money and 85% said they are in debt.

- The writer might also support the claim with examples. Examples make a claim more specific by referring to real people, things or events:

Nowadays, it is difficult to buy enough food, and many people fear being evicted from their homes.

- Here are the sentences all together in a typical paragraph (topic sentence, evidence, examples):

The most common cause of stress is financial problems. In a recent survey of 10,000 people, 70% said they worry about money and 85% said they are in debt. Nowadays, it is difficult to buy enough food, and many people fear being evicted from their homes.

Challenges / difficulties

Simply identifying evidence and examples is usually not very difficult. It is more difficult to find the relevant evidence and examples you need to answer a specific question, because the words used in the question will often not be the same as the words in the text. This is a challenge that you will often face in academic work, e.g. when you are set an essay question.

How can I develop this skill?

Practise reading academic texts in which the writer expresses an opinion. Highlight the sentences that provide evidence and examples.

Learning outcome

If you can recognize and assess evidence and examples, you will be able to read academic texts much more easily. In time, your written English will improve as a result.

Theory to practice

1 Read the extract and the notes alongside.

These days, too many people measure success and achievement by wealth. They think people are only successful if they have a big house and a fast car. It is a sad situation.

In a recent study, more than half of all young people said that money is the most important factor when you are applying for a job. Forty-eight per cent said that it is important to be richer than your friends.

People watch TV and read magazines, and they want to be like film stars or famous footballers. They assume everyone else wants that, too. **Most people can name hundreds of actors or pop stars, but only one or two successful scientists or architects.**

In the survey, most people agreed that teachers and nurses do an important job, but did not agree that they are successful. Lawyers and engineers make more money, so people think they have done better in life.

The world will be better when people realize that real success and achievement means being happy and doing things that help others.

The writer begins by making a claim and giving a general opinion.

Then she must support her opinion – she must provide evidence. In this paragraph, she gives some statistics that make her claim stronger.

Here, the writer gives some examples of people measuring success by wealth.

In this paragraph, the writer provides further evidence and examples. She wants to make the reader agree with her opinion.

2 When you answer questions about a text, you often have to find relevant evidence or examples. Often, the questions don't use exactly the same words as the text. Look at the questions and the explanations.

- 11** The writer says that people know more entertainers than scientists or architects.
True or false?

The statement is true. You can find the answer in the **highlighted example** in the text in Exercise 1.

- 17** According to the writer, people don't respect teachers and nurses.
True or false?

The statement is false. You can find the answer in the **highlighted evidence** in the text in Exercise 1.

Ways to get more practice

Work with a partner. Read only the claim that a writer makes (cover the rest of the paragraph). Together, talk about what evidence or examples you think the writer will provide. Then read to check your ideas.