Chapter 16

WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE
EVIDENCE AND THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Selecting your evidence

- Evidence should match the time in which the argument takes place
- Consider what form of evidence will be most effective to your audience
- Your evidence needs to be appropriate to the disciple / medium in which it is being used
UNDERSTANDING THE REQUIREMENTS OF YOUR DISCIPLINE

- What sort of authorities do other writers in this field use? How do they establish their credentials?
- What kinds of data seem to be preferred as evidence?
- Are statistics used as evidence? How? How much weight do they carry?
How does the field use first- and second-hand experiences as evidence?

How is personal experience used as evidence?

How are quotations used as evidence?
TWO KINDS OF EVIDENCE

- First-hand evidence – research you have carried out or been closely involved with. Often requires you to collect and examine data.

- Second-hand evidence – comes from sources beyond yourself – books, articles, films, online sources, &c.
FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE: OBSERVATIONS

- Make sure it relates directly to your thesis
- Brainstorm about your intentions, but don’t be rigidly bound to your expectations
- Develop an appropriate method for collecting data
- Be aware that your methodology will affect the outcome
- Record the precise date, time & place of the observation
FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE: INTERVIEWS

- Determine the exact purpose of the interview
- Set up the interview well in advance
- Brainstorm and write down your questions
- Avoid leading questions, as well as yes/no questions
- Record the subject’s name & title and the date, time & place of the interview.
- Thank your interviewee(s)
FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE: SURVEYS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

- Write out your purpose in conducting the survey
- Brainstorm for potential questions and make sure each pertains specifically to your thesis
- Decide how many people you need to interview & how you will reach them
- Devise questions that yield short, specific answers
- Test the questions on guinea pigs
- If surveys are to be mailed to you, include a stamped, self-addressed envelope
- Proofread carefully
- Make sure your participants are representative
FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE: EXPERIMENTS

- In a scientific setting, they require controls and large data sets.
- In other settings, less formal experiments may be appropriate, but must be conducted carefully or you may lose credibility.
Personal Experience can affect your audience powerfully, but can backfire. Your audience may not consider your experience to be representative, and therefore dismiss your argument.
USING EVIDENCE EFFECTIVELY

- Think about what you count as evidence.
- Think about what counts as evidence to others.
QUESTIONS TO HELP REVIEW THE TYPES OF EVIDENCE ON WHICH YOU’RE BUILDING YOUR ARGUMENT:

- Do you rely on facts? Examples? First hand experience?
- Do you include testimony from experts? Which experts are valued most and why?
- Do you cite religious or philosophical texts?
- Do you use analogies and metaphors as evidence? How much do they count?
CONSIDERING AUDIENCES

- Think about the ways evidence relates to your audience.
- Is the evidence appropriate to this particular group?
- Does it acknowledge their concerns.
CONSIDERING AUDIENCES

- Present yourself as reliable & credible (ethos) but be sure to take your audience into account.

- **Timeliness** is important to audiences – the more up-to-date your sources, the better.
If you can find only 1 or 2 pieces of evidence, or only 1 or 2 reasons to back up your argument, your argument is probably too weak.

How much evidence you need also depends on the kind of evidence you use and the argument you’re making.
ARRANGING YOUR EVIDENCE

- Place your strongest pieces of evidence in prominent places within the structure of your argument.
- Key places include: the beginning of paragraphs, the end of the introduction, or as you build to a powerful conclusion.