Evidence: Supporting the Thesis

In English 50, one of the student learning outcomes is to “use evidence effectively, with advanced-intermediate skill, to support a thesis.” Without evidence, even the best of thesis statements will fail. After all, an attorney can claim that the defendant is guilty, but if there’s no evidence, there’s no guilty verdict! The jury’s out on your thesis until you prove it.

So what kind of evidence is admissible in an essay? It depends on the topic, but here are a few common types of evidence:

A. **Examples:** These can be drawn from outside sources, personal experience, or observation. Hypothetical examples can be great, if they are believable. Introduce these honestly: “Imagine a student...” or “Let’s say that...” or “What if...?”

B. **Facts and Statistics:** Facts are verifiable and universally accepted. Statistics are interpretations of data, not indisputable facts. How the data was gathered and how the findings are presented—these affect the reliability of statistics.

C. **Expert Opinion:** This refers to the thoughtful, well-informed opinion of people who are experts *in the appropriate field.* A physical therapist, then, would be an expert in preventing and repairing injury, but not necessarily on, say, psychological disorders. Experts are often quoted as support.

D. **Textual Evidence:** Quotations can also be used in an analysis of a text to make a claim *about that text,* rather than because you think your readers will accept the writer’s authority. For instance, if you claim an author contradicts herself, you would quote two places from the text to demonstrate that contradiction.

*Having evidence is not enough. It needs to be good evidence. Here are the basics of evaluating evidence:*

- Do you have *enough* evidence?
- Is your evidence detailed, specific and concrete, rather than vague, general, and abstract?
- Is your supporting evidence logical? To test this, use the ABC test from *St. Martin’s Guide to Writing* by Rise Axelrod & Charles Cooper:
  - **Appropriate:** Is this relevant to the point you’re trying to prove?
  - **Believable:** Can your readers
  - **Consistent & Complete:** Are there any contradictions? Are there any gaping holes in your argument? That is, did you forget some important aspect of the topic that would be obvious to many readers?

*Continued...*
Write a paragraph in which you support one of the following thesis statements. Underline your topic sentence (this should be an idea that supports your thesis), and then provide at least 2 kinds of evidence from the list above!

1) Compare & Contrast Thesis: For busy people, cats are more ideal pets than dogs. (OR, For people with children, dogs are more ideal pets than cats. OR, your own variation.)

2) Cause & Effect Thesis: Biofuels have (or have not) caused a rise in global food prices.

3) Argumentation Thesis: The death penalty should be abolished. (OR, The death penalty should not be abolished.)

Then meet with a WRC instructor or tutor and ask the following questions:

1) Do I provide sufficient, specific, and concrete detail?

2) Is the evidence relevant (i.e. appropriate)?

3) Is the evidence believable?

4) Is the evidence consistent or are there any contradictions? Is the evidence complete, or are there any issues that really should be addressed?

5) Write down ways that your paragraph could be improved:

Attach a confirmation sheet or get a signature below:

Instructor/Tutor Signature

Date