

DISCOVERING & MAKING A CLAIM

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Writing Center

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This document represents the goals and approaches we encourage in SAIC's Writing Center.
We use it as a holistic guide for training tutors and for entering conversations with individual students.

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WHAT'S THE POINT?

Making a claim is a core element of many writing genres because it encapsulates the writer's unique perspective.

Our life experiences, curiosities, style, values, and passions all define our distinct points of view, and in turn, how we make meaning. A claim captures this confluence of the deeply personal and the outside world—those moments when we connect, as individuals, with the complexities of the people, art, environments, and systems around us.

We write in order to deepen insights for ourselves and in order to share them. Especially as artists, our original discoveries and attuned observations are a big part of what we are equipped to offer others.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A CLAIM?

In general, a claim needs to do more than just state an opinion.

It should lead to **analysis** as well as engaged consideration of the **wider significance** of your stance on the topic/materials/work you are investigating/making.

You can ask yourself these questions:



How can I not only say but show the various elements at play here through examples?

In which ways does what I am saying matter, and to whom?

Is what I am saying moving beyond mere summary of the material?

By responding to these questions, you are proposing and advocating for **your contributions** to the topic.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY WAY INTO A CLAIM?

- 1 Brainstorming
- 2 Finding Your Point of View
- 3 Collecting Evidence
- 4 Practicing Critical Thinking

All writing begins by first attempting to **expand your perspective** as much as possible (zooming out) before **pinpointing** areas to then pursue in depth (zooming in). This is a process of boldly allowing ideas into your investigation and **embracing rather than dismissing** even the wildest or most experimental ones. Only once you have collected a large pool of dissimilar ideas can you see which ones fit together and which ones stand out with the most power and clarity.

More than anything, brainstorming requires **time**: time to absorb the material and time to examine your thoughts.

In the process of brainstorming, you might consider:

Taking Notes Carrying around a notebook, keeping a journal, or jotting down observations in your Notes app...these are great ways to keep track of interactions that spark ideas and to get in the habit of regular writing. No thought is too small to be worth writing down.

Finding Patterns & Connections Do you notice the same words, colors, shapes, themes, etc. cropping up again and again? Keep a tally, star them in the margins, take a screenshot. Chances are, the patterns mean something.

Asking Questions Openly expressing your curiosities and confusions can lead to some of the most interesting insights, conversations, and writing fodder.

Annotating The margins of texts are a space for making them your own—"!!!"s, "???"s, stars, questions, connections, reminders, etc. are all great ways to connect in personal ways with what you are reading.

Next, claims combine evidence, critical thinking, and your own point of view.

Tutors at the Writing Center can offer careful listening as you explore the following questions, share what stands out to them, and point out directions in which you can expand your thoughts.

What are your **gut reactions** to the material at hand? What do you **feel** as you are approaching it? As you are in the **process** of reading, looking at, listening to, or making it? As you **step away** from it?



What **questions** does the work provoke? What delight, problem, or issue comes to you with the most force? At which points do you feel the most **excitement or friction**?



What do **your own background** and personal **experiences** bring to your understanding?

Evidence in writing will look different depending on the **discipline**, but it often takes the form of the following:

direct quotations (from books, articles, interviews, lyrics, etc.)

paraphrases and brief summaries

data and other research

real-life examples

thought experiments

your own observations (especially when analyzing artworks)

Does your evidence confirm your **gut reactions**? Complicate them?

Are your various pieces of evidence different enough to allow you to consider **multiple possibilities** and make nuanced interpretations?

Adapted from Paul, Richard, and Linda Elder. The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concept and Tools. 8th ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

You can consider these means of engaging closely with your material:

SUBTEXT **The implicit meaning of a text—the underlying message that is not explicitly stated or shown**

Why might the artist intentionally create subtext in their work rather than expressing their messages outright?

Is the artist unintentionally creating subtext in the work? Might they have blind spots they are not themselves aware of?

How is subtext being created? For example, is the artist pointing us in subtle ways to the information we should pay attention to? Or are they using subtle messaging to create suspense leading up to a big reveal?

DEPTH **Probing your subject beyond obvious or predictable takeaways**

Are there inconsistencies, contradictory themes, or biases?

How are the the major themes/tendencies, style of writing or drawing, or the imagery working? How are they serving or detracting from the piece?

What do you think the artist's own goals are for the piece? Are they succeeding on their own terms? On yours? Is there tension or agreement between your different considerations?

Critical Thinking

ACCURACY

The verifiability of your information or facts

How reliable are your sources?

Have you gathered enough information? Have you considered multiple angles?

LOGIC

Coming to a conclusion based on reasoned justifications of a belief

Do all of your thoughts make sense in combination?

Does your flow or organization of ideas raise any contradictions?

FAIRNESS

Being willing to examine your own biases or preconceptions and engage your topic with an open mind

Have you taken into account the perspectives of those with backgrounds different from your own?

Have you researched the historical context that the work is engaging?

Have you fully considered the rights, interests, and needs of others, especially those you might be addressing in your writing?

Critical Thinking

RELEVANCE

Prioritizing information that is logically meaningful to your topic or argument

Is each piece of evidence connected to others in an important way? Is there anything that feels like it does not relate?

Does each point you are making have bearing on the wider issue?

PRECISION / SPECIFICITY

Using words that offer concrete and detailed information rather than words and descriptions that are overly general, abstract, and vague

Is what you are saying relatively easy to picture and understand?

Are you breaking broad impressions down into their more vivid, sensory details?

Are you including the highest-quality information in your descriptions (for example using names, times, places, numbers, or other metrics)?

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AT SAIC?

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to claim-making, and claims will look different depending on the discipline (or interdisciplinarity) being engaged.

In **literary analysis**, a claim (also known as a “thesis”) is the controlling idea of an essay. In an academic essay, the thesis statement is usually one or two sentences, and it expresses the argument that the body of the paper will go on to prove. In being a fresh take that is debatable, interpretive, and specific, it reveals the writer’s unique way of reading or understanding.

Personal essay claims use narrative, evocative description, and compelling literary voice to write about yourself or someone else in very specific terms. They usually address a situation that blends the local and the global, the personal and the universal.

In **film analysis**, a claim can take the form of rich, detailed description that proposes an idea about how the filmmakers might want their viewers to see or understand something.

In **art history formal analysis**, a claim considers the various design elements of a work and originally articulates how they all come together in order to convey meaning. A stylistic art history analysis considers the formal characteristics of an artist’s oeuvre as a whole, in order to distinguish it from other works in their career timeline, other works in a larger artistic movement, etc.

Journalism claims are typically less persuasive in order to maintain objectivity. A claim in journalism often takes the form of a “lede,” in which crucial information and central conflicts are conveyed with specificity and brevity.

History claims often analyze, synthesize, and interpret the historical record. They do so by explaining how the author will interpret the significance of a historical topic (not solely explaining the topic itself).

Philosophy claims often evaluate and/or compare other philosophical claims. The objective might be to explain these claims, offer an argument in support or in objection of them, discuss their consequences, or determine whether they are consistent with some other stance.

A **scientific** claim is a suggested answer to a scientific question supported by evidence in the form of empirical observations or experiments.

Anthropological writing usually falls into two categories: **critical essays** and **ethnographies**. Claims in critical essays often evaluate how successfully a particular anthropological theory explains or interprets an ethnographic or archeological example. Claims in ethnographies, on the other hand, often summarize the researcher’s firsthand fieldwork findings, thereby introducing a detailed portrait of a group of people or anthropological phenomenon.

Happy writing! We’re here if you need us.