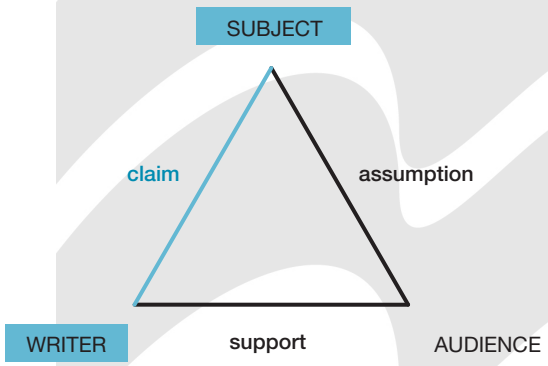
Claims

CHAPTER 6

What are you trying to prove? Your claim, or proposition, represents your answer to this question. A **claim** is the statement that a writer makes about a subject and thus is most closely aligned with the writer-subject leg of the communications triangle.



Your **main claim** is a conclusion you reach when you are trying to decide what to say about a subject. You are by now familiar with the concept of a **thesis** statement, or the single statement that summarizes the main claim of your essay and may also indicate the organization of the piece. The thesis of an argument that you read or write must be arguable, and there may be other claims in an argumentative essay that also need to be supported. They may appear as the topic sentences of some of the body paragraphs in the essay, but they won't necessarily be so easy to identify in a single statement. Therefore, it is important to understand what a claim is so you can locate and evaluate it in arguments you read, and so you can clearly state it in the arguments you write.

Claims can be classified as claims of fact, claims of value, and claims of policy, although at times there is a fine line between one type of claim and another.

Claim of fact	States that a condition exists, has existed, or will exist, based on factual evidence.	■ *Excess sun exposure causes skin cancer.* ■ *Environmental policies have slowed the depletion of the Earth's ozone layer.*
Claim of value	States that something is desirable or undesirable based on moral or aesthetic principles.	■ *The most relaxing vacations are spent on the beach.* ■ *Bathing suits have gotten too skimpy.*
Claim of policy	States that a specific course of action should be implemented.	■ *Sunscreen products should be more closely regulated.* ■ *Stricter emissions policies are needed for trucks.*

Claims of Fact

A fact is, for the most part, not a matter for argument but rather an undisputed truth. A claim of fact *asserts* that something is true—that a condition has existed, exists, or will exist. An argument based on a claim of fact tries to convince the reader that the claim is true, using the support of factual information such as statistics, examples, and testimony. (See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion of support.)

Why, you may wonder, would a claim of fact need to be proven, if we all agree on facts? There are several reasons.

Different Interpretations. Facts, while indisputable at their most basic level, may not always be interpreted the same way. Different interpretations lead to different points of view on a subject. Scientists, for example, may look at the same data yet disagree about whether the data indicate a warming of the planet.

Claim: Based on the available evidence, the earth has been undeniably growing warmer for the past fifty years.

Claim: The earth's temperatures have remained flat for the past twenty years.

Causal Relationships. A claim of fact may assert a causal relationship based on facts. For example, some researchers may claim that soda consumption is responsible for the rise in the nation's obesity rates, while others may blame the higher obesity rates on Americans' increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Just as different interpretations of facts can lead to different perspectives, a different understanding of cause can lead to a different claim.

Claim: Soda and other sugary drinks are the leading cause of obesity in the United States.

Claim: Americans are overweight because they eat too much and exercise too little.

Predictions. A prediction uses known facts to make a claim about the future. Based on available evidence, an analyst may predict that holding teachers accountable for their students' standardized test scores will improve our educational system. This prediction may be disputed by others, who assert that the available evidence indicates the opposite outcome is likely. A prediction can be tested in the future to determine its validity. But even in the future, the results will be subject to interpretation and potential disputes about cause.

Claim: An increased emphasis on standardized testing will lead to higher graduation rates among high school students.

Claim: Too much emphasis on standardized testing will decrease student and teacher morale, leading to higher dropout rates among high school students.

New Data. Scientists and scholars in all fields are constantly working not only to interpret existing data, but also to uncover new data. Such new data may change our understanding of history, physics, or biology and cause us to reevaluate our conclusions. In the health field in particular, researchers regularly uncover new information that may complicate or contradict earlier findings. When new data emerge in a field, the public may require some convincing to accept a new theory over the prevailing viewpoint, such as when the Environmental Protection Agency listed secondhand smoke as a major carcinogen in 1992.

Claim: Although it was once generally believed that cigarette smoke was harmful only to the smoker, researchers now conclude that secondhand smoke poses serious health hazards for nonsmokers as well.

Not all claims are so neatly stated or make such unambiguous assertions. Because we recognize that there are exceptions to most generalizations, we often qualify our claims with words such as *generally*, *usually*, *probably*, and *as a rule*. It would not be true to state flatly, for example, *College graduates earn more than high school graduates.* This statement is generally true, but we know that some high school graduates who are electricians or city bus drivers or sanitation workers earn more than college graduates who are schoolteachers or nurses or social workers. In making such a claim, therefore, the writer should qualify it with a word that limits the claim—a **qualifier**. However, watch out for words that overstate your claim. Words like *always*, *every*, *all*, and *never* allow for no exceptions.

Remember: Labeling a statement a claim of fact does not make it true. The label simply means that it is worded as though it were a true statement. It is up to the writer to provide support to prove that the statement is indeed true.

ARGUMENT ESSENTIALS

Claims of Fact

- Claims of fact assert that a condition has existed, exists, or will exist.
- Claims of fact are supported by factual information such as statistics, examples, and testimony.
- Claims of fact may take one of several forms:
  - A statement in favor of a particular interpretation of data
  - A suggestion of a causal relationship
  - A prediction
  - A case for the acceptance of new evidence
- Claims of fact may be limited by qualifiers such as *generally* and *probably*.

RESEARCH SKILL Using Databases

Once you have in mind a general subject to research, what is the first step you should take as you move toward deciding what to say about it or what main claim or thesis to argue?

If your response is to go to Google, you may be right. In your daily life, if you need to look up some factual information, you can find it quickly on Google or another similar search engine. But for most assignments for your classes, the answer is no, and you will need specific types of high-quality, reliable sources.

For one thing, remember that Google finds any reference to your search term and doesn't discriminate based on quality. Anyone can post on the internet, so there is no control over accuracy. You will also be inundated with far more sources than you could ever look at.

If you had checked Google for information about Aristotle when this book went to press, you would have found these numbers:

"Aristotle" — 23,800,000 results
"Aristotle" and "argument" — 70,000 results
"Aristotle's argument" — 530,000 results
"Aristotle" and "rhetoric" — 603,000 results
"Aristotle's rhetoric" — 164,000 results

Wikipedia will be near the top of the list for many subjects, but you shouldn't plan to use Wikipedia as a source for college work. It lacks the authority your professors will expect because most have multiple authors, and the content is not always checked for accuracy.

Where, then, should you start? At the library, by prowling the shelves? Don't rule out electronic sources. Instead, find out what databases your school has access to and which of those databases are most appropriate for your research.

For example, a good general database for academic subjects is Academic OneFile. There, a search for information about Aristotle yields these results:

"Aristotle" — 1,158 results (subject search); 13,906 results (keyword search)
"Aristotle" and "argument" — 0 results (subject); 214 results (keyword)
"Aristotle" and "rhetoric" — 9 results (subject); 219 results (keyword)

As you can see, by the end of this search you are reaching a manageable number of sources to explore. With these smaller numbers of results, a quick look at the titles will eliminate some and let you know which ones are worth investigating.

You will learn more about finding sources in Chapter 12.

READING ARGUMENT

Seeing a Claim of Fact

The following essay has been annotated to highlight claims of fact.

Spinster, Old Maid or Self-Partnered: Why Words for Single Women Have Changed through Time

AMY FROIDE

In a recent interview with *Vogue*, actress Emma Watson opened up about being a single 30-year-old woman. Instead of calling herself single, however, she used the word "self-partnered."

Froide opens with a brief, contemporary event, then leads into a brief response that establishes her authority.

I've studied and written about the history of single women, and this is the first time I am aware of "self-partnered" being used. We'll see if it catches on, but if it does, it will join the ever-growing list of words used to describe single women of a certain age.

Women who were once called spinsters eventually started being called old maids. In 17th-century New England, there were also words like "thornback"—a sea skate covered with thorny spines—used to describe single women older than 25.

Attitudes toward single women have repeatedly shifted—and part of that attitude shift is reflected in the names given to unwed women.

Froide's thesis, a claim of fact

The Rise of the "Singlewoman"

5 Before the 17th century, women who weren't married were called maids, virgins, or "puella," the Latin word for "girl." These words emphasized youth and chastity, and they presumed that women would only be single for a small portion of their life—a period of "pre-marriage."

Froide lists examples of early terms for single women to highlight the assumption that singleness was a temporary state.

But by the 17th century, new terms, such as "spinster" and "singlewoman," emerged.

What changed? The numbers of unwed women—or women who simply never married—started to grow.

A key causal reason supporting Froide's claim: The terms changed when more women remained single.

In the 1960s, demographer John Hajnal identified the "Northwestern European Marriage Pattern," in which people in northwestern European countries such as England started marrying late—in their 30s and even 40s. A significant proportion of the populace didn't marry at all. In this region of Europe, it was the norm for married couples to start a new household when they married, which required accumulating a certain amount of wealth. Like

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Amy Froide is a professor of history at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, with a focus on early modern British and women's history and specifically economic, social, and financial history. Her essay was published online at *The Conversation* on December 1, 2019.

today, young men and women worked and saved money before moving into a new home, a process that often delayed marriage. If marriage were delayed too long — or if people couldn't accumulate enough wealth — they might not marry at all.

In the case of *spinster*, the meaning of the term itself changed.

Now terms were needed for adult single women who might never marry. The term spinster transitioned from describing an occupation that employed many women — a spinner of wool — to a legal term for an independent, unmarried woman.

Single women made up, on average, 30 percent of the adult female population in early modern England. My own research on the town of Southampton found that in 1698, 34.2 percent of women over 18 were single, another 18.5 percent were widowed, and less than half, or 47.3 percent, were married. 10

Many of us assume that past societies were more traditional than our own, with marriage more common. But my work shows that in 17th-century England, at any given time, more women were unmarried than married. It was a normal part of the era's life and culture.

The Pejorative "Old Maid"

In the late 1690s, the term old maid became common. The expression emphasizes the paradox of being old and yet still virginal and unmarried. It wasn't the only term that was tried out; the era's literature also poked fun at "superannuated virgins." But because "old maid" trips off the tongue a little easier, it's the one that stuck.

The term *old maid* was critical, but so were the other terms of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The undertones of this new word were decidedly critical.

"A Satyr upon Old Maids," an anonymously written 1713 pamphlet, referred to never-married women as "odious," "impure," and repugnant. Another common trope was that old maids would be punished for not marrying by "leading apes in hell."

At what point did a young, single woman become an old maid? There was a definitive line: In the 17th century, it was a woman in her mid-20s. 15

An example from the time offers support for Froide's claim of fact in the previous paragraph.

For instance, the single poet Jane Barker wrote in her 1688 poem, "A Virgin Life," that she hoped she could remain "Fearless of twenty-five and all its train, / Of slights or scorns, or being called Old Maid."

These negative terms came about as the numbers of single women continued to climb and marriage rates dropped. In the 1690s and early 1700s,

English authorities became so worried about population decline that the government levied a Marriage Duty Tax, requiring bachelors, widowers, and some single women of means to pay what amounted to a fine for not being married.

Still Uneasy about Being Single

Today in the U.S., the median first age at marriage for women is 28. For men, it's 30.

What we're experiencing now isn't a historical first; instead, we've essentially returned to a marriage pattern that was common 300 years ago. From the 18th century up until the mid-20th century, the average age at first marriage dropped to a low of age 20 for women and age 22 for men. Then it began to rise again.

20 There's a reason *Vogue* was asking Watson about her single status as she approached 30. To many, age 30 is a milestone for women — the moment when, if they haven't already, they're supposed to go from being footloose and fancy-free to thinking about marriage, a family, and a mortgage.

Even if you're a wealthy and famous woman, you can't escape this cultural expectation. Male celebrities don't seem to be questioned about being single and 30.

While no one would call Watson a spinster or old maid today, she nonetheless feels compelled to create a new term for her status: "self-partnered." In what some have dubbed the "age of self-care," perhaps this term is no surprise. It seems to say, I'm focused on myself and my own goals and needs. I don't need to focus on another person, whether it's a partner or a child.

If the old terms are outdated, there is still a need for something to call women of 30 or older who are single.

To me, though, it's ironic that the term "self-partnered" seems to elevate coupledom. Spinster, singlewoman, or singleton: None of those terms openly refers to an absent partner. But self-partnered evokes a missing better half.

Froide's conclusion introduces a new line of thought that suggests that "singleness" is still not culturally accepted.

It says something about our culture and gender expectations that despite her status and power, a woman like Watson still feels uncomfortable simply calling herself single.

Even for the rich and famous, the simple term *single* does not seem to be adequate.

Practice: Claim of Fact

Review the print advertisement below, and answer the questions that follow.

Paper Because

DOMTAR PAPER

This advertisement has been omitted intentionally in this sample due to copyright restrictions. It is available in the print and e-book versions of this book.

Domtar Paper Company

Reading, Writing, and Discussion Questions

1. How is the claim qualified?
2. How does this ad use text and picture to reinforce each other?
3. How valid do you feel the text is? (Have you observed scenes like the one depicted in the ad, or perhaps been part of such a scene?)
4. How clear is the connection between what the ad says about social media and what is being advertised? What *is* being advertised?

Claims of Value

Unlike claims of fact, which state that something is true and can be validated by reference to the data, claims of value make a judgment. They express approval or disapproval. They attempt to prove that some action, belief, or condition is right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, worthwhile or undesirable.

Claim: Democracy is superior to any other form of government.

Claim: Killing animals for sport is wrong.

Claim: The Sam Rayburn Building in Washington is an aesthetic failure.

Some claims of value are simply expressions of taste, likes and dislikes, or preferences and prejudices. The Latin proverb *De gustibus non est disputandum* means that we cannot dispute taste. If you love the musical *Wicked*, there is no way for anyone to prove you wrong.

Many claims of value, however, can be defended or attacked on the basis of standards that measure the worth of an action, a belief, a performance, or an object. As far as possible, our personal likes and dislikes should be supported by reference to these standards. Value judgments occur in any area of human experience, but whatever the area, the analysis will be the same. We ask the arguer who is defending a claim of value: *What are the standards or criteria for deciding that this action, this belief, this performance, or this object is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, desirable or undesirable? Does the thing you are defending fulfill these criteria?*

There are two general areas in which people often disagree about matters of value: aesthetics and morality.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is the study of beauty and the fine arts. Controversies over works of art—the aesthetic value of books, paintings, sculpture, architecture, dance, drama, and movies—rage fiercely among experts and laypeople alike. They may disagree on the standards for judging or, even if they agree about standards, may disagree about how successfully the art object under discussion has met these standards. The Rogerian approach to conflict resolution can be particularly

useful in resolving disagreements over the standards for judging. Agreeing on those standards is the first step toward resolving the conflict and is a necessary step before seeking agreement on how well the standards have been met.

Consider a discussion about popular music. Hearing someone praise the singing of Manu Chao, a hugely popular European singer also playing to American crowds, you might ask why he is so highly regarded. You expect Chao's fans to say more than "I like him" or "He's great." You expect them to give reasons to support their claims. They might show you a short review from a respected newspaper that says, "Mr. Chao's gift is simplicity. His music owes a considerable amount to Bob Marley . . . but Mr. Chao has a nasal, regular-guy voice, and instead of the Wailers' brooding, bass-heavy undertow, Mr. Chao's band delivers a lighter bounce. His tunes have the singing directness of nursery rhymes."[1] Chao's fans accept these criteria for judging a singer's appeal.

You may not agree that simplicity, directness, and a regular-guy voice are the most important qualities in a popular singer. But the establishment of standards itself offers material for a discussion or an argument. You may argue about the relevance of the criteria, or you may agree with the criteria but argue about the success of the singer in meeting them. Perhaps you prefer complexity to simplicity. Or even if you choose simplicity, you may not think that Chao has exhibited this quality to good effect.

It is probably not surprising, then, that despite wide differences in taste, professional critics more often than not agree on criteria and whether an art object has met the criteria. For example, almost all movie critics agree that *Citizen Kane* and *Gone with the Wind* are superior films. They also agree that *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, a horror film, is terrible.

Morality

Value claims about morality express judgments about the rightness or wrongness of conduct or belief. Here disagreements are as wide and deep as in the arts—and more significant. The first two examples on page 175 reveal how controversial such claims can be. Although a writer and reader may share many values—among them a belief in democracy, a respect for learning, and a desire for peace—they may also disagree, even profoundly, about other values. The subject of divorce, for example, despite its prevalence in our society, can produce a conflict between people who have differing moral standards. Some people may insist on adherence to absolute standards, arguing that the values they hold are based on immutable religious precepts derived from God and biblical scripture. Since marriage is sacred, divorce is always wrong, they say, whether or not the conditions of society change. Other people may argue that values are relative, based on the changing needs of societies in different places and at different times. Since marriage is an institution created by human beings at a particular time in history to serve particular social needs, they may say,

[1] Jon Pareles, *New York Times*, July 10, 2001, B1.

it can also be dissolved when other social needs arise. The same conflicts between moral values might occur in discussions of abortion or suicide.

Nevertheless, even where people agree about standards for measuring behavior, a majority preference is not enough to confer moral value. If in a certain neighborhood a majority of heterosexual men decide to harass a few gay men and lesbians, that consensus does not make their action right. In formulating value claims, arguers should be prepared to ask and answer questions about the way in which their value claims, as well as those of others, have been determined. Lionel Ruby, an American philosopher, sums it up in these words: "The law of rationality tells us that we ought to justify our beliefs by evidence and reasons, instead of asserting them dogmatically."[2]

ARGUMENT ESSENTIALS

Claims of Value

- Claims of value make a judgment.
- Claims of value should be supported by reference to standards that measure the worth of an action, belief, performance, or object.
- Claims of value most often are about aesthetics or morality.

READING ARGUMENT

Seeing a Claim of Value

The following essay has been annotated to highlight claims of value.

The NFL's Protest Crisis

SAMUEL CHI

This reading selection has been omitted intentionally in this sample due to copyright restrictions. It is available in the print and e-book versions of this book.

A catchy opening

Establishing what the crisis is *not* to more firmly focus on what it *is*: the national anthem

Notes the scope of the issue: The crisis may turn out to be the response of the NFL's customers.

Samuel Chi (1969–2017) was a sports journalist, a college football analyst, proprietor of BCSGuru.com, senior editor at *RealClearPolitics*, and managing editor at *RealClearSports*. Only months before his death from pancreatic cancer, he started a new career at Breitbart news. Samuel Chi, "The NFL's Protest Crisis," *CNN*, September 16, 2016. Copyright © 2016 by Turner Broadcasting Systems, Inc. All rights reserved. Used under license.

[2] Lionel Ruby, *The Art of Making Sense* (New York: Lippincott, 1968), 271.

Contrast with things that *are* deemed inappropriate

5

Contrast with how the NBA responds to the national anthem

Chi's disapproval is clear in his use of the word "limply." He is making a value judgment.

Chi establishes that he understands why Kaepernick has done what Chi disapproves of. He also provides another instance of Kaepernick's ignoring the rules.

If Congress does not have a law against Kaepernick's type of disrespect, the league can have rules.

10

Claim: By not enforcing rules, Goodell has made the matter worse.

Chi's clearest statement of the problem

Chi's claim of value: This is "simply bad business."

Practice: Claim of Value

Movie reviews by definition support claims of value. Analyze the following review, focusing on its claim and support for that claim.

Black Panther

ODIE HENDERSON

This reading selection has been omitted intentionally in this sample due to copyright restrictions. It is available in the print and e-book versions of this book.

Odie Henderson has two blogs, *Big Media Vandalism* and *Tales of Odienary Madness*, and also has contributed to *Slate*'s blog *The House Next Door* since 2006. He writes for MovieMezzanine, Movies without Pity, *Salon*, and RogerEbert .com, where this review was posted on February 15, 2018.

Reading, Writing, and Discussion Questions

1. What single sentence best sums up Odie Henderson's claim of value?
2. What sorts of evidence does Henderson offer in support of his claim?
3. What are some of the specific details that you find most convincing?
4. What was Henderson's organizational plan for the essay?
5. Do you feel that Henderson makes a convincing case for his thesis? Is your opinion related to your having seen the movie or not? Explain.

Claims of Policy

Claims of policy argue that certain conditions should exist. As the name suggests, they advocate adoption of policies or courses of action because problems have arisen that call for solution. Almost always, *should* or *ought to* or *must* is expressed or implied in the claim.

Claim: Voluntary prayer should be permitted in public schools.

Claim: A dress code ought to be introduced for all public high schools.

Claim: A law should permit sixteen-year-olds and parents to "divorce" each other in cases of extreme incompatibility.

Claim: Mandatory jail terms must be imposed for drunk driving violations.

Claim-of-policy arguments often begin by attempting to convince the audience that a problem exists. This will require a factual claim that offers data proving that present conditions are unsatisfactory. Claims of value may also be necessary to support the claim of fact. The policy itself is usually introduced after the problem is established; the policy is presented as a viable solution to the problem.

Consider this policy claim: *The time required for an undergraduate degree should be extended to five years.* Immediate agreement with this policy among student readers would certainly not be universal. Some students would not recognize a problem. They would say, "The college curriculum we have now is fine. There's no need for a change. Besides, we don't want to spend more time in school." First, then, the arguer would have to persuade a skeptical audience that there is a problem — that four years of college is no longer enough because the stock of knowledge in almost all fields of study continues to increase. The arguer would provide data to show that students today have many more choices in history, literature, and science than students had in those fields a generation ago and would also emphasize the value of greater knowledge and more schooling compared to the value of other goods the audience cherishes, such as earlier independence. Finally, the arguer would offer a plan for implementing the policy. The plan would have to consider initial psychological resistance, revision of the curriculum, costs of more instruction, and costs of lost production in the workforce. Most important,

this policy would point out the benefits for both individuals and society if it were adopted.

In this example, we assumed that the reader would disagree that a problem existed. In many cases, however, the reader may agree that there is a problem but disagree with the arguer about the way to solve it. Most of us, no doubt, agree that we want to reduce or eliminate the following problems: misbehavior and vandalism in schools, drunk driving, crime on the streets, child abuse, pornography, pollution. But how should we go about solving those problems? What public policy will give us well-behaved, diligent students who never destroy school property? safe streets where no one is ever robbed or assaulted? loving homes where no child is ever mistreated? Some members of society would choose to introduce rules or laws that punish infractions so severely that wrongdoers would be unwilling or unable to repeat their offenses. Other members of society would prefer policies that attempt to rehabilitate or reeducate offenders through training, therapy, counseling, and new opportunities.

ARGUMENT ESSENTIALS

Claims of Policy

- Claims of policy argue for an action or a change in thinking.
- Claims of policy express or imply that something should or must be done.
- Claims of policy usually depend on a factual claim that establishes that present conditions are unacceptable.

READING ARGUMENT

Seeing a Claim of Policy

The following essay has been annotated to highlight claims of policy.

College Life versus My Moral Code

ELISHA DOV HACK

This reading selection has been omitted intentionally in this sample due to copyright restrictions. It is available in the print and e-book versions of this book.

Background that reveals his respect for Yale and his connection to it through his brother

Elisha Dov Hack was a member of the Yale College freshman class of 1997. This article appeared on September 9, 1997, in the *New York Times*. The case brought by Hack and four other Jewish students remained in court until all but Hack had graduated. Hack went on to marry — and live off campus — before his 2003 graduation in engineering sciences.

How residency rules have changed

Establishes the problem

Examples of affronts to his religious beliefs

Another example of accepted dorm standards

5

Challenges whether Yale should make it difficult for students to maintain their morals outside of class

Tries to achieve middle ground by acknowledging that morality has changed, but argues that exceptions to the policy are already made

Claim of policy

Attacks the opposition by defining immorality as Yale's religion

Floors designated by gender are not the solution.

10

The source of conflict

Uses Yale's own advertising against it

Follow Up

What happened to the lawsuit to which Hack refers? It was tied up in court until 2001, when all of the students involved except Hack had graduated. The students lost the legal battle at all levels, primarily because their case depended on their proving that having to live in a residence hall constituted discrimination based on religion. The university successfully argued that the residence requirement was not discriminatory. Hack graduated from Yale in 2003. All five students chose to live in apartments during their first two years while paying full housing fees for dorm rooms they never occupied.

Practice: Claim of Policy

Read the following essay and answer the questions at the end.

How to Avoid Cultural Appropriation at Coachella

JESSICA ANDREWS

This reading selection has been omitted intentionally in this sample due to copyright restrictions. It is available in the print and e-book versions of this book.

Jessica Andrews is the Deputy Director of Fashion at Refinery29, a media and entertainment company for young women. Before that she was Fashion Features Editor at *Teen Vogue*. She has her own blog, Glamazons, and writes for *ELLE*, *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times*, and *Essence*. This article appeared online at *Teen Vogue* on April 13, 2018.

Reading, Writing, and Discussion Questions

1. What claim of policy is Jessica Andrews supporting in her essay? Can you find one or more sentences where she most clearly articulates her claim?
2. What was Andrews's organizational plan in the piece?
3. Do you feel that Andrews builds a convincing case for her thesis? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between appropriation and assimilation, and how does that relate to points that Andrews is making?
5. What other examples can you think of where appropriation of certain aspects of another culture might be offensive or perhaps has already been discarded for that reason?

Strategies for Reading and Writing Claims

READ: Claims

All Claims

Keep the author's audience and purpose in mind. Ask:

- Whom was the author writing for, and why?
- What was the author trying to convince that audience of?
- What did he or she want them to do?
- Would it be clear to the audience how the issue pertains to them?

Claims of Fact

- Consider whether the author has provided sufficient supporting evidence to back up his or her claim.
- Consider whether the author has used qualifiers such as *generally*, *usually*, *always*, and *never*. Evaluate if the qualifiers help clarify the writer's argument or weaken it.
- Consider whether the author has considered opposing viewpoints and, if necessary, refuted them.

WRITE: Claims

All Claims

Keep your audience and purpose in mind. Ask:

- Whom are you writing for, and why?
- What are you trying to convince them of?
- What do you want them to do?
- How will readers know the issue should be important to them and that they should listen to your argument?

Claims of Fact

- Find supporting evidence to back up your claim.
- Use qualifiers such as *generally*, *usually*, and *probably* to limit a claim; avoid using words such as *always*, *every*, *all*, and *never*, which do not allow for exceptions.
- Acknowledge viewpoints or claims that oppose your own, and refute them in a way that shows respect but also proves that your claim is more persuasive.

continued

READ: Claims

Claims of Value

- If the author is writing about an aesthetic issue, consider whether he or she has made clear the criteria by which the aesthetic judgment is being made.
- If the author is writing about a moral issue, consider whether he or she has used ideas or language that would alienate or offend those holding opposing views on the subject.
- Consider whether the author has provided strong evidence and good reasons for any claim of value.

Claims of Policy

- Consider whether the author has built a convincing case that a problem exists.
- Consider whether the claim of policy is worded in such a way that is inclusive to all readers, no matter what their position.
- Consider whether the author has acknowledged other possible solutions and explained convincingly why his or her proposal is superior.
- Consider whether the author has made clear what he or she wants the audience to do about the situation, whether to do something or simply to consider the situation from the author's perspective.

WRITE: Claims

Claims of Value

- Be sure you understand and have successfully established the criteria used to measure standards in the field of aesthetics you are writing about: sports, dance, music, photography, and so on.
- When writing about a moral issue, be careful to be respectful of readers who may espouse opposing views on the subject, and use language that will be convincing, not dismissive.
- As much as possible, provide strong evidence and good reasons for your claims of value, and avoid dogma.

Claims of Policy

- Begin by proving that the problem exists: employ a claim of fact with supporting evidence. (You may also need to include a claim of value to convince readers that something must be done.)
- Use special care to frame your claim of policy in a way that readers — especially those with a high level of emotional involvement in the topic — will not immediately reject.
- Acknowledge viewpoints or claims that oppose your own, and refute them in a way that shows respect but also proves that your claim is superior.
- Have realistic expectations about what you hope to achieve — what your audience can actually do about the situation. Sometimes you may argue for people to vote a certain way, sign a petition, or write letters to officials. At other times, the most you might hope to accomplish is to get your audience to consider the situation from your perspective.

Assignments for Claims

Reading and Discussion Questions

1. Find several recent print ads and explain what their claims are.
2. Notice that Amy Froide's essay "Spinster, Old Maid or Self-Partnered: Why Words for Single Women Have Changed through Time" does not take a side in whether or not singleness is a positive state; she just concludes that it is meaningful to our society. Choose a similar current controversial issue, and brainstorm some claims of fact about it.
3. Locate a movie review online or in hard copy that has a clear claim and is based on clear evaluative criteria. Choose a review that is an essay, not just a single paragraph. Bring it to class, and share it with your class or group. By looking at a range of different reviews, come to some conclusions about the sorts of criteria used in making judgment calls about movies and what sort of claims provide good thesis statements for reviews. What are some other characteristics that all or most good movie reviews share?
4. Consider one or more of your school's policies that you would like to see changed. In your opinion, what is wrong with the policy as it currently stands? What exactly would you recommend be done to improve the situation?

Writing Suggestions

1. Choose a controversial issue in the field in which you are majoring or one in which you might major. Practice differentiating among the three types of claims by writing a claim of fact, a claim of value, and a claim of policy on that issue.
2. Choose one of the claims of fact you wrote for #2 under Reading and Discussion Questions above, and write an essay supporting it.
3. Choose a recent print ad, and write an essay explaining how text and pictures work together in it to support a claim.
4. Write a review of a recent movie. Your thesis will be a claim of value.
5. Write a review of a recent play, concert, art exhibit, or similar cultural event. Your thesis will be a claim of value.
6. Using Elisha Dov Hack's essay as a model, write an essay suggesting a change at your school. Write it in the form of a letter to your school's newspaper or to the appropriate school official. Your thesis will be a claim of policy.
7. Some sports teams have long used Native American mascots or symbols, but that practice has come under scrutiny in recent years. Do you feel that these uses were signs of disrespect that were appropriately banned, or do you think arguments against them went too far in the attempt to be politically correct? Write an essay defending your position.

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT Acknowledging Reliable Authorities

The following is a list of quotations and the names of those who are quoted. Do some research to find out what gives the person quoted the authority to speak knowledgeably on the subject of the quotation. Then work the information you found into a lead-in to the quotation, as in the example.

Example

"We are promoting human rights by building homes for people who don't have them."—Jimmy Carter

"We are promoting human rights by building homes for people who don't have them," explains former president Jimmy Carter, who has been involved with Habitat for Humanity International since 1984 and who, with his wife, leads its Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Work Project one week each year.

1. "Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It's not about money. It's about the people you have, how you're led, and how much you get it."—Steve Jobs
2. "If gun laws in fact worked, the sponsors of this type of legislation should have no difficulties drawing upon long lists of crime rates reduced by such legislation. That they cannot do so after a century and a half of trying—that they must sweep under the rug the southern attempts at gun control in the 1870–1910 period, the northeastern attempts in the 1920–1939 period, the attempts at both Federal and State levels in 1965–1976—establishes the repeated, complete, and inevitable failure of gun laws to control serious crime."—Orrin G. Hatch
3. "That the networks and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that it's hardly worth discussing anymore. No, we don't sit around in dark corners and plan strategies on how we're going to slant the news. We don't have to. It comes naturally to most reporters."—Bernard Goldberg
4. "You built a factory and it turned into something terrific or a great idea—God bless! Keep a hunk of it. But part of the underlying social contract is you take a hunk of that and pay forward for the next kid who comes along."—Elizabeth Warren
5. "It takes more courage to send men into battle than to fight the battle yourself."—Colin Powell
6. "I want to state upfront, unequivocally and without doubt: I do not believe that any racial, ethnic, or gender group has an advantage in sound judging. I do believe that every person has an equal opportunity to be a good and wise judge, regardless of their background or life experiences."—Sonia Sotomayor