Craft of Research (CoR): Chapter 9 – Assembling Reasons and Evidence

The 10 salient sentence strings presented below are lifted from the chapter as is, without modification (except, perhaps, for a bit of punctuation here or there). They are presented in order of appearance in the chapter.

1. Readers look first for the core of an argument, a claim and its support. They look particularly at its set of reasons to judge its plausibility and their order to judge its logic. If they think those make sense, they will look at the evidence you present, the bedrock of every argument. If they don't believe the evidence, they'll reject the reasons and, with them, your claim.
2. When you order your reasons, you build a logical structure for your argument. To test that structure, you can make a traditional outline or visualize your plan in other ways.
3. When you turn to a first draft, you will reconsider your reasons in light of your readers' understanding (and yours) and perhaps arrange a new order.
4. Readers will not accept a reason until they see it anchored in what *they* consider to be a bedrock of established fact. The problem is, you don't get to decide that; your readers *do*.
5. Really skeptical readers just never give up. If you can imagine readers plausibly asking, not once but many times, *How do you know that? What facts make it true?,* you have not yet reached what readers want—a bedrock of uncontested evidence.
6. And at a time when so-called experts are quick to tell us what to do and think based on studies whose data we never see, careful readers have learned to view reports of evidence skeptically.
7. We know this distinction between evidence and reports of evidence must seem like a fine one, but it emphasizes two important issues. First, data you take from a source have invariably been shaped by that source, not to misrepresent them, but to put them in a form that serves that source's ends… Second, when you in turn report those data as your own evidence, you cannot avoid manipulating them once again, at least by putting them in new context.
8. We live in an age where we are all subjected to research reports and opinion surveys that are at best dubious and at worst faked, so you have to assure readers that they can trust your data.
9. Once you know the kind of evidence your readers expect, you must test the reliability of yours: is it *sufficient* and *representative*, reported *accurately* and *precisely*, and taken from an *authoritative* source?
10. Getting the easy things right shows respect for your readers and is the best training for dealing with the hard things. You can sometimes use even questionable evidence, *if you acknowledge its dubious quality*. In fact, if you point to evidence that seems to support your claim but then reject it as unreliable, you show yourself to be cautious, self-critical, and thus trustworthy.