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Craft of Research (CoR): Chapter 8 – Making Claims

The 10 **salient sentence strings** presented below are lifted from the chapter without modification. They are presented in order of appearance in the chapter.

Ten Salient Sentence Strings

1. The first four classes— fact, definition, cause, and value— concern conceptual claims. For claims of fact or existence, you must provide evidence that a situation is, in fact, as you characterize it. Claims of definition or classification depend on reasoning about similarities or differences that assigns an entity to some broader class or distinguishes it from other entities. Effective claims of evaluation or appraisal depend on criteria of judgment to justify why something is good or bad (or better or worse than something else). Finally, claims of cause or consequence connect sets of facts to show that some situation does (or doesn't) follow from or lead to another. (Quote – bottom of page 123).

2. A practical claim is one that argues for (or against) some action or policy. It is usually built from a chain of conceptual claims: one that demonstrates that a problem exists, another that shows what causes the problem, and still another that explains how doing what you propose will fix it. (Quote – top of page 124).

3. As you draft your working claim, try elaborating its logic in two ways: • Introduce it with a qualifying clause beginning with although or even though. • Conclude it with a reason- clause beginning with because. (Quote – bottom of page 125).

4. While that claim may seem overwritten, it foreshadows three of the five elements that you need for a full argument: (1) Although I acknowledge X, (2) I claim Y (3) because of reason Z. (Quote – top of page 126).

5. After the specificity of a claim, readers look most closely at its significance, a quality they measure by how much it asks them to change what they think. While we can't quantify significance, we can roughly estimate it: if readers accept a claim, how many other beliefs must they change? The most significant claims ask a research community to change its deepest beliefs (and it will resist such claims accordingly). (Quote – top of page 127).

6. To assess how much either claim is worth contesting, change an affirmative claim into a negative one and vice versa: Hamlet *is* a superficial character. This report does *not* summarize recent research on the disappearance of bees. If the reverse of a claim seems obviously false (like the first one) or trivial (like the second), then readers are likely to think the original claim is not worth an argument. (Quote – top of page 128).

7. If you are new to research, of course, your claim doesn't have to challenge the experts, just impress your teacher. If you can't predict whether it will, imagine your reader is someone like yourself. What did you think before you began your research? How much has your claim changed what you now think? What do you understand now that you didn't before? That's the best way to prepare for readers who will someday ask you the most devastating question any researcher can face: not Why should I believe this? But why should I care? (Quote – bottom of page 128).

8. As paradoxical as it seems, you make your argument stronger and more credible by modestly acknowledging its limits. You gain the trust of your readers when you acknowledge and respond to their views, showing that you have not only understood but considered their position. (Quote – top of page 129).

9. Scientists rarely acknowledge that their claims depend on the accuracy of their instruments, because everyone expects them to ensure that they are. But economists often acknowledge limits on their claims, both because their predictions are subject to changing conditions and because readers want to know which conditions to watch for. (Quote – bottom of page 129).

10. Only rarely can we state in good conscience that we are 100 percent certain that our claims are unqualifiedly true. Careful writers qualify their certainty with words and phrases called hedges. For example, if anyone was entitled to be assertive, it was Crick and Watson, the discoverers of the helical structure of DNA. But when they announced their discovery, they hedged the certainty of their claims. (Quote – middle of page 130).