

1.) you need attempted an answer to your research question to focus your research for evidence that will test and support its answer. as you test it, you will likely revise it, but as you assemble your argument, you must understand the kind of claim you are making. you must also make sure that your claim is not just sound, but significant enough to need an argument in the first place.

2.) so as you assemble your argument, be clear about the kinds of claims you are making, whether conceptual or practical. don't inflate the importance of a conceptual claim by tacking on a practical action, at least not early in your paper. if you want to suggest a practical application of your conceptual claim do so in your conclusion.

3.) we do not recommend long, wordy claims for their own sake. but you benefit when you include in early versions of your claim more terms that you might ultimately use.

4.) after this 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?*

5.) early in your career, you won't be expected to know what those in a field should (or even could) be revised. But you can still gauge the significance of your claim by asking how strongly readers might contest it. one way to do that is by considering opposite claims.

6.) but you don't have to make big claims to make a useful contribution: small findings can open up new lines of thinking. If, for example, you discovered that Abraham Lincoln read some obscure philosopher, historians would comb Lincoln's text for traces of that influence.

7.) some new researchers think their claims are most credible when they are stated most forcefully. but nothing damages your ethos more than arrogant certainty.

8.) but every claim is subject to countless conditions, so mention only those that readers might plausibly think of. Scientists rarely acknowledge that their claims depend on the accuracy of their instruments, because everyone expects them to ensure that they are.

9.) only rarely we can stay in good conscience that we are 100% certain that our claims are unqualifiedly true. Careful writers qualify their certainty with words and phrases called hedges.

10.) of course, if you hedge too much, you will seem timid or uncertain period but in most fields, readers distrust flatfooted certainty expressed in words like *all, no one, every, always, never*, and so on.