

ARGUMENTS

WORKSHEET 2: ADDING EVIDENCE (PROOF)

Why use evidence?

As we saw in the lesson, a **contention**, such as

We should all protect our environment.

(the proposition that is the key to your argument) is **not enough** on its own.

It needs to be supported by **reasons** or **proof**. The **reasons** are what make your contention believable. Without reasons, you won't convince anyone. A contention without proof is like saying "Believe me – just because I say so!"

Where do you find evidence?

Reasons or evidence or proof **must** be **reliable** (believable and trustworthy). That means they have to come from trustworthy sources, such as

- Government (eg the Bureau of Statistics or the Department of Environment)
- University studies (eg University of Sydney Department of Medicine)
- Authoritative organisations (eg the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change)
- The opinions of experts (professional people who have been trained to know all about the subject) such as a professor who has spent years studying a topic

This means you **have to do research**. Go to the library and look up reputable books. Or go online and search websites run by authoritative bodies (the Anti-cancer Council, NASA, the CSIRO, etc).

Don't just type in a search term and read **any** website. There are millions of them and some of them are not trustworthy. Plenty of people have strong opinions, but that doesn't make their opinions true.

How do you build a body of evidence?

As a rough rule of thumb, if you can find **three or four different reasons** (or proofs) for your contention, with the associated evidence (which reputable source claimed it), then you have enough to be convincing.

Here's a simple example:

Contention: The world is warming up dangerously.

Evidence:

- (1) Average air temperatures have been rising in the last century (IPCC)
- (2) The amount of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) has increased enormously in the last few decades and is unprecedented in Earth's history (NASA)
- (3) Ice core evidence demonstrates climate change (Professor Thompson, Geology Dept, University of Ohio)
- (4) Australia has warmed 0.8 degrees over the past century (Austral Ecology periodical)

ACTIVITY 1

Here are some contentions (or arguments). Choose one and then, after careful research (library and web-based), write down notes for at least four "proofs" (or pieces of evidence) that would make people believe the contention. Make sure you note the reliable sources from which the evidence comes.

- A. Bullying is very harmful to children, and must be stopped.
- B. Cruelty to animals is inhumane and should end.
- C. Obesity is becoming a major health issue in Australia.
- D. Our cities are becoming more dangerous.

ACTIVITY 2

Now choose your own argument. Work through the following sequence:

- (1) What is your **contention**? (Write it out as clearly as you can. It must be a statement.)
- (2) What are **four "proofs"** or pieces of evidence that demonstrate your contention?
- (3) Write the **first paragraph** of what would be the full essay, in which you
 - (a) state your contention
 - (b) summarise the major evidence for that contention.