

USING CLAIMS

In order to create an argument, you must have a claim. The claim is the beginning point of an argument. To create a claim, you must have chosen a side in the argumentative binary.

When constructing a claim, there are three things to remember:

- 1) A claim clearly states your position/your opinion in the argument (claims are not facts).
- 2) A claim is a declarative sentence.
- 3) A claim should be qualified (that is, a claim must have qualification).

USE YOUR OPINION

Typically, a claim is an opinion, an assertion, or a hypothesis, not a fact. For example, you can make a sort of declaration:

"Eating fiber is good for you" (An opinion which offers an evaluation...)

However, you cannot say:

"Eating fiber reduces instances of colon cancer." (This would be a fact)

Changing the subject, you could say

"Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs."

However, you should not say:

"Blu-ray discs offer five times the storage capacity of traditional DVDs." (This would be a fact).

DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

A declarative sentence is a sentence which makes statements. Declarative sentences do not ask questions, do not make commands, and do not make exclamations.

QUALIFICATION

One thing that helps many authors to have valid and significant claims is qualification. When you qualify your statement, you help to make the statement more true (recognizing that arguments have definite limitations).

Think of qualification in this way: Oftentimes, a claim can be too strong (leaving us open to attack from the opposing side). If we soften the claim, then we make the claim truer and more valid. Additionally, a claim may not consider a possibility which has not presented itself yet (an alternative not yet known to the problem or an explanation not yet available). In order to write in a way which considers all the options, then we must qualify our claims.

Consider the "Fiber" example again:

"Eating fiber is good for you."

With qualification, you would probably say:

"Eating fiber may be good for you."

-OR-

"In most cases, eating fiber is good for you."

One thing which has plagued scientists, mathematicians, rhetoricians, and philosophers for generations is the question of "universal statements." Universal statements are statements about things in the universe which seem to apply to ALL circumstances, conditions, or situations.

For example,

I could say that: "Larger objects attract smaller objects." (This rule of gravity was in textbooks for years).

In recent years, we have learned that: If an object has greater density than the stronger the "gravitation pull" it exerts on another object.

For example, a black hole or a piece of dark matter (which is thought to be smaller but be extremely dense, perhaps as small as the eye of a needle) could theoretically pull a much larger object (the size as a car) towards it. Given that this idea is true, we cannot knowingly apply the "Larger objects attract smaller objects" idea to all circumstances.

So, we could say: "Oftentimes, larger objects attract smaller objects."

The statement would then contain a stronger sense of truth and validity. But, the statement would not be a universal statement.

Ultimately, with the "Disc" example, you would have to make some changes as well....

So, you could write:

"Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs."

However, if you wrote:

In most cases, Blu-ray discs should replace DVDs.

You would have written the statement with a larger sense of truth and validity, and you would left open the possibility that DVDs might (in some way) be better than Blu-ray discs. Consider if some technologies still rely on using DVDs and are incompatible with Blu-ray discs. Keeping this question in mind, we qualify the claim by adding the phrase "In most cases...." Then, the statement would be more acceptable.

Other qualifiers are: Oftentimes, most likely, in most cases, some, often, regularly, more than likely, etc.