

Analyzing Evidence

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about integrating evidence into essays by discussing how to introduce evidence with context, how to translate the meaning of evidence, and how to provide analysis.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Principles of Integrating Evidence

1a. Context

1b. Translation

1c. Analysis

2. Evidence Principles in Practice

1. Principles of Integrating Evidence

Recall that evidence is composed of facts and details that support an argument. While you can use personal evidence and researched evidence in an essay, this lesson will specifically focus on integrating quotations from research sources.

Still, the principles that you practice today are just as important when you're integrating personal narratives, summaries of big ideas, and paraphrased concepts. You can apply these tools across the board.

To be integrated effectively, each piece of evidence must be:

- Introduced with context
- Translated for clarity
- Analyzed directly

1a. Context

Context is an explanation of the circumstances of a piece of text. Say you're reading an argument and you see this quotation:

"Tattoos have a long cultural history in many different parts of the world; however, they carry vastly different social meanings across cultures."

What do you need to know in order to understand what this means and how it fits into the argument? Right away you know that this needs a citation:

"Tattoos have a long cultural history in many different parts of the world; however, they carry vastly different social meanings across cultures" (Smith, 1999, p. 45).

Now you have an APA-style, in-text citation, which is a good start for context. But does that citation tell you much about Smith's argument? You don't know who Smith is or why this is a worthwhile piece of evidence. Answering those questions in brief is the main purpose of context.

According to Joan Smith (1999), an anthropologist who researches the history of body modification, "Tattoos have a long cultural history in many different parts of the world; however, they carry vastly different social meanings across cultures" (p. 45).

Notice that as a reader, you now know who Smith is and why she is a worthy, valid source, making this a much more convincing appeal to ethos. Using the author's name like this is called a **signal phrase**, which is a phrase preceding a quotation that identifies the author of the quoted text.

Context can also help you make sentences, including quotations, clearer. This means you could take the following quotation:

"By the 1950s, tattoos had become associated with criminals, gang members, and the lower class. But by the early 21st century, tattoos had become common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art" (Smith, 1999, p. 70).

And then use context to create this much more specific sentence:

The social stigma of tattoos has diminished because tattoos have "become common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art" (Smith, 1999, p. 70).

Because you're integrating with clear context, you're able to only use the part of the quotation that's necessary to make your point; you've cut out everything else that could be distracting for your readers.



You don't have to quote an author's entire sentence. You can select the portion that is most important for you, as long as you don't change the author's original meaning.

The overall goal of context, as you can see in these two examples, is to give a brief introduction to the author, the work being cited, or the ideas being quoted. This should be very brief, meaning no more than a sentence or so.



TERMS TO KNOW

Context

An explanation of the circumstances of a piece of text.

Signal Phrase

A phrase preceding a quotation that identifies the author of the quoted text.

1b. Translation

Next, you need **translation**. When you're translating, you're telling your readers what you think the quotation means. This is important because two readers can interpret the same passage in two different ways, but you really want each reader to interpret that passage the way you have.

Thus, after you give a quotation, you can say something such as "This means that," followed by a restating of the quotation in your own words.

Here you have a paragraph presenting some important data:

In the U.S., tattoos were once "associated with criminals, gang members, and a lack of class." However, these days, the social stigma of tattoos has diminished because tattoos have become "common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art" (Smith, 1999, p. 70).

You can see the context and two different quotations. But what does this all mean? You need a translation sentence here, which might look something like this:

In the U.S., tattoos were once "associated with criminals, gang members, and a lack of class." However, these days, the social stigma of tattoos has diminished because tattoos have become "common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art" (Smith, 1999, p. 70). This means that tattoos are no longer stigmatized and hidden like they once were and are instead commonplace across our culture.

That one little sentence ensures that your readers will know exactly what you think this evidence means. Therefore, translation is especially important if you're presenting lots of technical, complex, or very detailed evidence that you need to make sure your readers understand.



TERM TO KNOW

Translation

An interpretation or explanation of the meaning of a piece of text.

1c. Analysis

Analysis is the most important part, as it is detailed explanations of an idea and interpretations of its intended meaning within a piece of writing. Analysis is where you say how a piece of evidence supports your main point.

The thesis statement of the following paragraph appears bolded at the bottom:

In the U.S., tattoos were once “associated with criminals, gang members, and a lack of class.” However, these days, the social stigma of tattoos has diminished because tattoos have become “common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art” (Smith, 1999, p. 70). This means that tattoos are no longer stigmatized and hidden like they once were and are instead commonplace across our culture.

Workplaces should not be allowed to prohibit tattoos in their employee dress codes.

How do the sentences in this short paragraph support that main point? Right now you could make a lot of guesses, but as a reader, you don’t yet know exactly how this evidence proves that employee dress codes shouldn’t include prohibitions on tattoos.

If you were writing this essay, you wouldn’t have convinced your readers to believe your side yet. What you would need to convince them is analysis. A nice way to begin your analysis is with the word “therefore.” That might look something like this:

In the U.S., tattoos were once “associated with criminals, gang members, and a lack of class.” However, these days, the social stigma of tattoos has diminished because tattoos have become “common on a wider variety of people, leading to greater acceptance of body art” (Smith, 1999, p. 70). This means that tattoos are no longer stigmatized and hidden like they once were and are instead commonplace across our culture. Therefore, tattoos should not be prohibited in the workplace, because though they may have once seemed inappropriate to customers, today they are no different than pierced ears.

See how this piece of evidence is now directly linked to the main point? When you’re working on your analysis, remember to ask yourself what you’re hoping this piece of evidence will prove to your reader, and why or how this piece of evidence proves that point. You can even brainstorm your analysis by finishing the sentence “This proves that....”



TERM TO KNOW

Analysis

A detailed explanation of an idea and interpretation of its intended meaning within a piece of writing; a demonstration of how a piece of evidence supports a main point.

2. Evidence Principles in Practice

To see how these three principles (context, translation, and analysis) work together, it's helpful to know how to locate them in a short piece of writing.



TRY IT

Take a moment to read the following short paragraph, making note of the context, translation, and analysis that you see.

In recent years, it has become common to see tattoos on many people in many places. However, according to the anthropologist Joan Smith (1999), in “the 1950s, tattoos had become associated with criminals, gang members, and the lower class,” and this association did not change until “the early 21st century” (p. 70). This means that many people still have negative associations with tattoos, regardless of current cultural changes. Therefore, there are still customers who may not want to do business with people whom they associate with criminality, and thus, employee dress codes prohibiting visible tattoos may protect a company's customer base.

Based on this paragraph, what do you think is the main point of the essay?

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For the main point, you probably wrote something such as “Workplaces should be allowed to prohibit tattoos in employee dress codes.” To get to that answer, you can break down the paragraph by focusing on each principle.

In the context, notice that the evidence is introduced a little differently. The essay is making an argument against tattoos. Thus, the context places emphasis on a particular aspect of this quotation. You can see, then, that the same evidence can be used to support different arguments.

Likewise, the translation points out the long history of negative associations with tattoos. This ensures that readers will focus on the many years when tattoos were taboo, and not on the recent change in their status.

Finally, the analysis shows how these ongoing negative associations might hurt businesses. Overall, then, this paragraph uses the same evidence as an opposing argument might, but by providing clear context, translation, and analysis, it makes a convincing argument for its particular side.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that there are three main **principles for integrating evidence** successfully into an essay: **Context** provides an explanation of the circumstances of a piece of text, and helps make sentences and quotations clearer; **translation** provides an explanation of what you think the quotation means and ensures that your readers interpret the passage the same way you do; **analysis** provides detailed explanations of an idea and interpretations of its intended meaning, and shows how a piece of evidence supports your main point. You then learned how these **evidence principles work in practice** by looking at the way they help you understand what the main point of an essay is.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

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