Using Evidence: Four Types of Evidence

Statistical Evidence
Statistical evidence is the kind of data people tend to look for first when trying to prove a point. That’s not surprising when you consider how prevalent it is in today’s society. Remember those McDonald’s signs that said “Over 1 billion served”? How about those Trident chewing gum commercials that say “4 out of 5 dentists recommend chewing sugarless gum”? Every time you use numbers to support a main point, you’re relying on statistical evidence to carry your argument.

Examples of Statistical Evidence
A. In 2015 alone, an estimated 350,000 migrants have crossed the borders of the European Union.

B. In America, more preschoolers are shot dead each year (82 in 2013) than police officers are in the line of duty (27 in 2013), according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the FBI (Kristof 4).

C. More kids than ever are becoming educated, especially girls. In the 1980s, only half of girls in developing countries completed elementary school; now, 80 percent do (Kristof 2).

Testimonial Evidence
Testimonial evidence is another type of evidence that is commonly turned to by people trying to prove a point. Commercials that use spokespersons to testify about the quality of a company’s product, lawyers who rely on eye-witness accounts to win a case, and students who quote an authority in their essays are all using testimonial evidence.

There are two types of Testimonies: Experts/Authority & Witnesses.

A. An EU leader, Federica Mogherini, has gone as far as to say, “We are rich. We are in peace. We have the duty to save and protect people that are fleeing from war” (qtd. In Pearson 42).

B. President Obama’s frustration with the inaction of his critics on gun control measures shown through this week when he pointed out that, “There is a gun for roughly every man, woman, and child in America. So how can you, with a straight face, make the argument that more guns will make us safer?”

C. Famous and accomplished writer Stephen King advices young writers that, “If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others; read a lot and write a lot. There’s no way around these two things that I’m aware of, no shortcut.”
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Anecdotal Evidence

Often dismissed as untrustworthy and meaningless, anecdotal evidence is one of the more underutilized types of evidence. Anecdotal evidence is evidence that is based on a person's observations of the world. It can actually be very useful for disproving generalizations because all you need is one example that contradicts a claim. Be careful when using this type of evidence to try and support your claims. One example of a non-native English speaker who has perfect grammar does NOT prove that ALL non-native English speakers have perfect grammar. All the anecdote can do is disprove the claim that all immigrants who are non-native English speakers have terrible grammar.

You CAN use this type of evidence to support claims, though, if you use it in conjunction with other types of evidence. Personal observations can serve as wonderful examples to introduce a topic and build it up – just make sure you include statistical evidence so the reader of your paper doesn’t question whether your examples are just isolated incidents.

Examples of Anecdotal Evidence

Good Examples:
However, the critique that all the immigrants are drains on society simply does not hold weight. Look for example at 24 year old Syrian Hesham Modamani who is a student searching for the opportunity to continue his education in Germany. If fact, UN studies have shown that over half of all refugees enter Europe come from middle-class and educational backgrounds.

Mr. Bonica's class is an example of how the 8:05am start time has impacted late arriving students to Tualatin High School, as he has seen a sharp decline in tardy students. This year alone, his rate of tardy students has dropped from 12% to 8%.

Bad Example:
It is clear that strict gun regulation in Australia has failed to protect the Australian people as evidenced by the 2014 Sydney hostage. The gunman chose Australia because he knew that he would not encounter armed citizens in the café.

(Reality...Australia has one of the rates of lowest gun related deaths in the world.)
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**Analogical Evidence**
The last type of evidence is called analogical evidence. It is also underutilized, but this time for a reason. Analogies are mainly useful when dealing with a topic that is under-researched. If you are on the cutting edge of an issue, you're the person breaking new ground. When you don’t have statistics to refer to or other authorities on the matter to quote, you have to get your evidence from somewhere. Analogical evidence steps in to save the day.

Take the following example: You work for a company that is considering turning some land into a theme park. On that land there happens to be a river that your bosses think would make a great white-water rafting ride. They've called on you to assess whether or not that ride would be a good idea.

Since the land in question is as yet undeveloped, you have no casualty reports or statistics to refer to. In this case, you can look to other rivers with the same general shape to them, altitude, etc. and see if any white-water rafting casualties have occurred on those rivers. Although the rivers are different, the similarities between them should be strong enough to give credibility to your research. Realtors use the same type of analogical evidence when determining the value of a home.

**Examples of Analogical Evidence**

A. While no one can predict the future impacts of the mass migration into the EU, studies of the past can shed light on the matter at hand. A study conducted in Denmark during the 1990’s showed that an influx of refugees actually pushed native workers into more skilled jobs and increased their standards of living (NY Times 3).

B. Actually, cars exemplify the public health approach we need to apply to guns. We don’t ban cars, but we do require driver’s licenses, seatbelts, airbags, padded dashboards, safety glass and collapsible steering columns. And we’ve reduced the auto fatality rate by 95 percent (NY Times, 8).

C. Based on the recent legalization of marijuana, Oregon leaders would be wise to look towards Colorado as a warning of what may come. In the years since legalization of Marijuana, Colorado has seen, “...increased use among teens, resulting in educational problems in middle schools and high schools, a spike in “edibles”-related emergency room visits, consumption by children and pets resulting in illness and death and regulatory confusion surrounding public consumption and enforcement” (Haun 15).