

10:

Acknowledgments and Responses

1. As you plan and draft your report, however, your readers won't be there to object, question you, or offer their own views. So you have to imagine their questions, not just the predictable ones that they ask about any argument, but those that question yours in particular.
2. You may freeze up if you try to imagine every possible alternative. But once you create that core, imagine colleagues questioning your argument more sharply than you hope your readers will.
3. Note where your argument looks weak but is not. If, for example, you anticipate that readers will think your solution has costs that it does not, you can defuse that concern by acknowledging and responding to it.
4. The problem of sufficient evidence is even worse when readers resist your solution because they have a stake in a different one. When they do, you can expect them to demand more evidence of higher quality, perhaps more than you have time to find.
5. A crucial step in assembling your argument is to test your argument as your readers will, even in ways they might not. Then acknowledge and respond to at least the most important objections that you can imagine them raising.
6. Note where a source takes an approach different from yours, focuses on different aspects of the problem, and so on, especially where you and your source disagree. Also note where one source takes issue with another, ...
7. Don't dismiss evidence because you think it is irrelevant or unreliable. If your readers might consider it relevant, acknowledge it but explain why you didn't use it. That's one way to compensate for not having enough evidence of your own.
8. Most researchers argue that rules and other forms of formal writing advice degrade rather than improve performance because writing "is a non-conscious act of making meaning, not a conscious process of following rules." That is true for parts of the process: writers should not consult rules as they draft sentences. But writing involves not just drafting but many conscious processes. What we show here is what kinds of formal advice do and do not work for conscious aspects of writing.
9. You could ignore the problem, hoping readers won't notice. But that's dishonest. If they do notice, you have a bigger problem because they will doubt your competence. And if they think you tried to hide a weakness, they will question your honesty. In any case, the damage could be fatal, not only to your argument but to your own ethos and reputation.
10. Some writers fail to acknowledge alternatives because they can't think of any. The strategies in this chapter will help you overcome that problem. Others can think of views to acknowledge, but fear that if they do, they weaken their argument. In fact, most readers think that such acknowledgments enhance a writer's credibility.