

CSC: CoR: Chapter 8: Making Claims

The 10 **salient sentence strings** presented below are lifted from the chapter as is, without modification (except, perhaps, for a bit of punctuation here or there). They are presented in order of appearance in the chapter.

Ten Salient Sentence Strings

1. The kind of problem you pose determines the kind of claim you make and the kind of argument you need to support it. [A]cademic researchers usually pose not *practical* problems but *conceptual* ones, the kind whose solution asks readers not to *act* but to *understand*.
2. Beyond distinguishing between practical and conceptual claims, it is useful to recognize that claims address a range of questions: *Does a thing or a situation exist? If so, how should we characterize it? How did it get this way? Is it good or bad? What can or should be done about it?*
3. The first four classes—fact, definition, cause, and value—concern conceptual claims. For claims of fact or existence, you must provide evidence that a situation is, in fact, as you characterize it. Claims of definition or classification depend on reasoning about similarities or differences that assigns an entity to some broader class or distinguishes it from other entities. Effective claims of evaluation or appraisal depend on criteria of judgment to justify why something is good or bad (or better or worse than something else). Finally, claims of cause or consequence connect sets of facts to show that some situation does (or doesn't) follow from or lead to another.
4. A practical claim is one that argues for (or against) some action or policy. It is usually built from a chain of conceptual claims: one that demonstrates that a problem exists, another that shows what causes the problem, and still another that explains how doing what you propose will fix it. [...] If you advance a practical claim but don't make those four sub-arguments, your readers may reject your whole argument.
5. Don't inflate the importance of a conceptual claim by tacking on a practical action, at least not early in your paper. If you want to suggest a practical application of your conceptual claim, do so in your conclusion. There, you can offer it as an action worth considering without having to develop a case for it.
6. Vague claims lead to vague arguments. The more specific your claim, the more it helps you plan your argument and keep your readers on track as they read it. You make a claim more specific through precise language and explicit logic.
7. We do not recommend long, wordy claims for their own sake. But you benefit when you include in early versions of your claim more terms than you might ultimately use. That final claim should be only as specific as your readers need and should include only those concepts that you develop as themes in your argument.
8. After the specificity of a claim, readers look most closely at its *significance*, a quality they measure by how much it asks them to change what they think. While we can't quantify significance, we can roughly estimate it: *if readers accept a claim, how many other beliefs must they change?* The most significant claims ask a research community to change its deepest beliefs (and it will resist such claims accordingly).

9. If you can't predict whether [your claim will make a useful contribution, or whether it will challenge the experts], imagine your reader is someone like yourself. What did *you* think before you began your research? How much has your claim changed what *you* now think? What do *you* understand now that you didn't before? That's the best way to prepare for readers who will someday ask you the most devastating question any researcher can face: not *Why should I believe this?* but *Why should I care?*
10. Some new researchers think their claims are most credible when they are stated most forcefully. But nothing damages your ethos more than arrogant certainty. As paradoxical as it seems, you make your argument stronger and more credible by modestly acknowledging its limits. You gain the trust of your readers when you acknowledge and respond to their views, showing that you have not only understood but considered their position. But you can lose that trust if you then make claims that overreach. Limit your claims to what your argument can actually support by qualifying their scope and certainty.