Types of Evidence

It is necessary to include evidence to support a claim because the evidence, when it is well chosen, helps the listener to understand how the claim applies to real life. The type of evidence that one chooses depends on the content of the claim, and it also depends on whether you are engaged in a Prepared or an Impromptu debate. For an impromptu debate, one typically uses *qualitative evidence*, such as evidence by **Example, Commonplaces** or **Expert Opinion**, because this type of evidence is more accessible to your imagination during your short period of preparation time. For a Prepared debate, one often uses *quantitative evidence*, such as evidence by **Social Consensus**, **Objective Data**, or **Similar Structure.** because this type of evidence, which is arguably more credible, comes from research. What follows is a description of each type of evidence and how it could function in a simple argument.

A.   **Evidence by Example.** The most common form of evidence is an Example, which is a general description of a real-life situation. It is usually a recounting of a news story or a description of a historical event. It could also be an anecdote, but the anecdote must have a sample size of at least ten people--and the more the better--because an experience is considered true when many people have the same response. If the sample size is small, such as one's own experience, the evidence lacks credibility because the same response is not shared by several people. To clarify this point, consider the following **Resolution:** *Academic success is primarily based on effort.* To support this Resolution, on may use the following **Claim:** *Studying by speaking aloud improves results.* To support this claim, one may use the following **Evidence by Example**: *"My friend and I used this strategy recently and our marks went up by almost 20%."* Such evidence would not be considered credible because the sample size is too small. Now consider the following evidence by example in a sample simple argument:

B. **Evidence by Commonplaces.**   Another form of evidence comes from Commonplace statements, which are beliefs or judgments that people generally accept as being true. For example, consider the statements, *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,"* or *"What goes around comes around,"* or *"What is good for the crew is good for the captain."* Such statements are believed to be true because many people over time have found them to be helpful in their lives. Therefore, one can reason, if many people have found them helpful over time, that they are probably true in the present circumstance.

3. **Evidence by Expert Opinion:** To add credibility to a claim, it is very common to

refer to an expert because one assumes that the knowledge and experience of the expert discloses truth. In an impromptu debate, it is acceptable to paraphrase the words of an expert because it is usually not possible to remember the exact wording of a relevant statement that could be used as evidence. However, in a Prepared debate, one should quote the exact words of an expert. Consider the following example below:

4. Evidence by Social Consensus: This type of evidence is commonly used to support claims that focus on real life issues, such as how a population thinks about a political policy or a moral issue. The evidence itself typically comes from survey questions, which are carefully designed to draw out information that very accurately reveals the thoughts and feelings of each subject. If the questions are well designed, and if the survey is given randomly to a population of at least 200 participants, one can assume that the results have a 4% margin of error, which means that there is a 4% chance that the results are inaccurate for several reasons, such as bad question design, misunderstanding several questions and a deliberate attempt to answer incorrectly. However, because the results are 96% accurate, most people believe that the information is true.

For example, most people agree that we are living through economically difficult times, so consider the following Resolution: *During difficult economic times, socialism grows.* Now consider the following claim: *The NDP party in Canada is becoming more popular.* To support this *Claim*, one may use the following *Evidence* that is based on EKOS surveys:

> *The Conservatives finished with **31.4%** support in this survey, compared to **29.5%** for the New Democrats and **24.8%** for the Liberals ... But EKOS also filtered these numbers out according to who voted in the May 2011 election, [which was a time of less economic difficulty], ... With those weightings, EKOS pegs Conservative support at **36.7%,** with the NDP at **27.8%** and the Liberals at **21.9%,** which is quite a big difference between the voting intentions of the general population and the voting population. (Grenier 23)*

The Liberal and the NDP parties, both of whom are considered socialist, rose from 2011 to the present whereas the Conservative party fell from 36.7% to 31.4%. Although the Liberal party, which rose from 21.9% to 24.8%, showed the greatest gains, the gains of the NDP, which rose from 27.8% to 29.5%, are notable enough to use as evidence to support the Claim.

5. Evidence by Objective Data: The phrase 'objective data' refers to evidence that is indisputable, which means that the evidence is considered 99.9% accurate. Usually, such information is gathered from scientific measurement, such eating cured meats increases your cancer risk by 18%, or from empirical observations, such as Canada admitted over 420,000 immigrants in 2022. Although objective data is a very credible form of evidence, one must always be careful to select the

correct evidence to support the claim. For example, consider the following Resolution: *Girls are more intelligent than boys.* This is controversial because there are different types of intelligence, but if one models 'intelligence' as only academic intelligence, then one may consider the following claim: *Based on GPA, more girls are accepted into elite universities.* To support this claim, one may use the following objective data: *"In 1996, there were 20% more girls accepted into Princeton university than boys."*

6. Evidence by Structure. Sometimes the writer will argue the truth of a claim by using evidence that follows a similar structure to what is referred to in the claim. For example, consider the following Resolution: *The current price of oil is artificially high.* To support this Resolution, one might state the following claim: *The price of oil has risen because of the war in Ukraine.* To support this claim with evidence, one could refer to the Gulf War in 1992 because the oil price also rose at the time and because the structure of the two situations is sufficiently similar.

What follows are three samples of Simple Arguments that one could write for a Prepared Debate. As you will see, they are written with considerable detail, which we recommend because by doing so, you are training yourself to be very concerned about the details of the evidence that you select to support the claim.

Sample 1: Evidence by Example

Leaders of social movements should not be permitted to become leaders because they often make unrealistic economic decisions. They are unable to make good economic decisions because social leaders are often not trained in economics, nor are they sufficiently experienced in running a business. As a result, if they become the leader of a nation, they do not have good judgement with regards to economic policy. To be sure, they hire people who have financial experience, but the leader still needs to have good judgement to decide who to hire and what policies should be implemented to make the proper changes. Without this judgment, the economic future of the nation, which is fundamental to making social change, can be jeopardized. In the following article, the author uses the example of Hugo Chavez, the former President of a Venezuela, to prove his point that leaders of social movements are unfit for making economic policies.

"The Chavez administration forced private oil companies to sell majority ownership in their firms to the state and increased their tax and royalty payments. […] They also have boosted state spending considerably, particularly on social programs. The Chavez administration has gone furthest in this   regard,

nearly doubling public spending as a percent of GDP and running a large budget deficit in most   years because they anticipated a level oil price on the global market. However, when the oil price fell   in 1998, it had a devastating effect on the economic stability of Venezuela, from which is has never   recovered. (Madrid 589)

The decision by Hugo Chavez to buy the "private oil companies" was a good concept because companies were mostly foreign owned, which meant that most of the profits from the oil of Venezuela went to countries like the United Sates and England. Very little stayed in the country of Venezuela itself.   However, Chavez could not afford to buy these companies, so he borrowed heavily, which meant Venezuela "doubl[ed] public spending" and "[ran] a large public deficit," for he believed that the oil revenues would serve to pay off the debt. Although this worked for as long as the oil price remained high, it did not work when the price of oil began to fall in 1998. At first the fall was manageable, but by 2002, it was no longer sustainable, so Venezuela began defaulting on its debt, which has had devastating effects on the citizens. In hindsight, Chavez had good intentions because he wanted to keep the oil profits within Venezuela, which could be used to develop his society. However, like many inexperienced businessmen, he did not properly assess the risks involved with paying for companies based on a revenue source that would surely fluctuate because the price of oil is dependent on many factors beyond anyone's control. In my view, he should have bought the companies back at a slower pace, which would mitigate his risk. Because he did not know this, it clearly shows that social leaders should not be allowed to become political leaders.

Madrid, Raul L. "The origins of the two lefts in Latin America." Political Science Quarterly, vol. 125, no. 4, 2010, p. 587.

Sample 2: Evidence by Expert Opinion

A creator's content should be judged independently of the creator because of the obstacle it constructs against people with undesirable pasts. An individual is likely to note displeasure in content when he or she realizes that it was created by a prior convict or a person with a difficult past. The terms 'convict' and 'wrongdoer', which have a negative impression in society, prevent individuals from pursuing content creation because of previous mistakes or actions. Because negatively viewing a convict or wrongdoer is an instinctive part of the human mind, a judgment is constructed with a bias and a preconceived opinion. In his research novel, *American Journal of Sociology*, Devah Pager was able to expand on the idea that prior criminals face barriers in pursuing content creation because of society's labels.

> Those sent to prison are institutionally branded as a particular class of individuals with implications for their perceived place in the stratification order. The "negative credential" associated with a criminal record represents a mechanism of stratification, in that it is the state that certifies individuals in ways that qualify them for discrimination or social exclusion. (1)

The author explores the "negative credential" or label attached to prior criminals, and the implications it has on society's decision making. In other words, being "branded as a particular

class of individuals" prevents prior criminals from pursuing content creation without judgment. The qualifications enforced by society "for discrimination or social exclusion," are factors that contribute to a dishonest opinion and the thought for a preconceived opinion against prior criminals and wrongdoers. Hence, viewing content with the mindset of the creator will prevent the consumer from forming the intended pleasure and will instead act as a reason to negatively view the content. Preconceived judgement or an established opinion of convicts and wrongdoers prevents fair and unbiased evaluations of content. For the given reasons, content should be judged independently of the creator.

Pager, Devah. "American Journal of Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology*, The University of Chicago Press Journals, 2003, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/pager_ajs.pdf.

Sample 3: Evidence by Objective Data

The United States of America should ban automatic assault rifles because they are the most common weapon used in mass shootings, leading to many innocent individuals losing their lives. In 1994, the US Congress passed the Federal Assault Weapons Ban. Former president Bill Clinton was the leader of this motion, and he believed strongly in its potential effectiveness. Although the ban expired in 2004, several cities and jurisdictions reported a decrease in assault rifles found at crime scenes from 1994 to 2004. The following excerpt shows the positive impact that this federal ban had on the number of mass shootings, along with what happened when the ban expired.

"The decade during which the federal assault weapons ban was in effect was linked to a 25 percent decrease in mass shootings and a 40 percent decrease in mass shooting deaths. Additionally, the research found that in the decade after the ban expired, mass shooting deaths increased by 347 percent. […] Since the expiration of the federal ban, assault weapons and high-capacity magazines have been used to perpetrate some of the deadliest public mass shootings in modern US history. […] On October 1, 2017, in Las Vegas, 480 people were shot, 58 fatally." (1)

Unbanning assault rifles has many negative impacts on American society and its overall well-being. As explained in this excerpt from the Center for American Progress, "mass shooting deaths increased by 347 percent" one decade after the ban expired. This astronomical increase proves that many innocent people lose their lives at the mercy of assault rifles. Furthermore, this statistic demonstrates the harsh reality of permitting individuals to use "assault weapons and high-capacity magazines." Since the ban expired, there have been countless opportunities for untrained and irrational people to access deadly firearms with ease. These people have been allowed to possess assault weapons, and they have caused "some of the deadliest public mass shootings in modern US history." The most substantial of these mass shootings occurred on "October 1, 2017, in Las Vegas," where "480 people were shot," 58 of which were fatal, by a 64-year-old man named Stephen Paddock. Because the federal ban no longer existed, he was able to get his hands on a registered AR-15-type assault rifle, allowing him to fire over 1000 rounds of ammunition. Undoubtedly, the mass shootings that result from the use of assault rifles can tremendously decrease through a federal ban, which would ultimately preserve the

lives of many innocent Americans.

Center for American Progress. "Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines Must Be Banned." Center for American Progress, Center for American Progress, 19 Aug. 2019.