

***Reading to Write:
Distinguishing Between Information and Argument***

There should be a thoughtful purpose and design behind a piece of academic writing. This overall design is usually composed of both **information** and **argument**. **Information** may consist of the following:

- facts that can be verified by a number of reliable sources,
- quotations from primary sources,
- numerical data,
- names,
- dates,
- summaries of previously published writings or studies,
- brief biographical sketches or other historical anecdotes

Argument may consist of these elements:

- explanations of how or why events occurred, particularly when the “how” or “why” is *debatable*,
- interpretations of primary sources,
- synthesis or comparison of previously published writings or studies,
- interpretations of literary material or artistic creations,
- explanations of the behaviour of individuals, groups, or nations

Note the **explicit** way the authors you read often connect the **information** they present with the overarching **argument**. For example, in an article titled “Propagating Female Virtues in Choson Korea,” Martina Deuchler first presents a long quotation from *History of Koryo*, a fifteenth century text describing the need to educate women to “establish themselves firmly and, when confronted with disaster or in the face of blank weapons, not to change their resolve...” (qtd in Deuchler). This quote is presented as a piece of evidence from a primary text, and it is meant to **inform** the reader of Deuchler’s article about the expectations for women’s education in this period.

However, Deuchler goes on to explicitly link this information to her overall **argument** about women’s education: “In the absence of proper instruction, these early stories about women who selflessly risked their lives for their husbands were to convey an educative message. The spotlight of the historian was on the heroic deed illustrating Confucian notions of womanly behavior

rather than on women as agents of their own will.”* As readers, we should distinguish between the **primarily informative** nature of this evidence and the **interpretive argument** that follows it. Aim to use this type of pattern in your own writing. Keep in mind that your goal is to **return to your own analysis after presenting information**. The reader shouldn't be left to connect the information and the argument; rather, the writer should explicitly do so.

*Deuchler, Martina. “Propagating Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea.” In Ko, Haboush, and Piggott, eds. *Women and Confucian Cultures in premodern China, Korea, and Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.