

Reading to Write: How is Information used in an Argument?

Sometimes students think that the purpose of academic writing is to display the information they've learned. However, this is generally not the full goal. In your own essays, you need to **select** the information that will fit your overall purpose, whether that purpose is an explanatory synthesis of course materials or a more interpretive argument. The goal is to show that you can **apply** your knowledge of the course material in your own critical thinking. When you write, you are drawing on the **information** that will assist you in constructing an **argument**; you're not reproducing the texts you've read. In a similar way, the authors you read have chosen from within the vast information in a particular field to illustrate their analyses.

Here are some key aspects of the uses authors make of both information and argument. Giving attention to these aspects as you read should assist you in your own writing:

- a. Remember that the line dividing information from argument is not necessarily a rigid boundary. When an author **selects** information on which to base her argument, the selection process inevitably becomes part of the construction of the overall argument.
- b. As you learn more about a discipline, you will find it easier to compare the information you've read in various sources to determine an author's **theoretical tendencies**, which may well have guided the **selection** of information as well as the **interpretation** of evidence and the **structure** of the argument.
- c. You will also become better equipped to determine which information has been omitted or emphasized in the construction of an argument, and to evaluate to what extent the information is **representative** and **relevant**. All of these judgements influence our perceptions of how **convincing** we find an author's argument.
- d. Note that authors frequently focus closely on analyzing very specific information as part of their arguments. The amount of information in a paper should ideally be balanced with enough room given to detailed analysis of facts or textual evidence. As a reader, you will want both

information and a convincing argument. Keep this in mind as you **balance information and argument** in your writing.

- e. **Compare** the earlier sections of an article with the later sections. What has shifted in your own perceptions over the course of the argument? When you write, too, think of how you want your argument to cause a gradual **shift in perception** between the reading of your introduction and your conclusion.

- f. Remember that authors may be writing a highly **complex** argument that attempts to account for many kinds of available information. Information is selected to help support an argument; however, authors may be **critically analyzing contradictory information**. You, too, should write about a topic in a way that admits to the complexity of the available information.