

# Essay Writing

Unit 3B – How to Use Evidence: Supporting Your Argument With the Evidence

**INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES**

Learning Centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

*This unit's place in the whole module:*

Unit 1A How to be analytical:  
What is analysis?

Unit 1B How to be analytical:  
Setting up a taxonomy

Unit 2A How to structure an essay:  
Developing an essay structure

Unit 2B How to structure an essay:  
Writing introductions and conclusions

Unit 3A How to use evidence:  
Developing an argument out of the evidence

**Unit 3B How to use evidence:  
Supporting your argument with the evidence**

Unit 3C How to use evidence:  
Avoiding plagiarism

Unit 4A How to develop an argument:  
Being persuasive

Unit 4B How to develop an argument:  
Being critical

## **UNIT 3B      How to use evidence: Supporting your argument with the evidence**

### **OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT**

After you have finished this unit, we hope you will be able to:

- synthesize information from a number of sources
- know how to choose to focus on the source of the information or the information itself
- know the difference between merely summarising the evidence and using it to substantiate your thesis and develop your argument

### **IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEMS WITH USING EVIDENCE**

If you have been having difficulty in using evidence when you are preparing and writing your essays and assignments, your marker may have made a comment on your writing similar to these:

- *"You have made some good points but you have not substantiated them."*
- *"Where are your references?"*
- *"You need to show me that you have done the reading on this topic."*
- *"I know the literature myself so you don't need to just tell it all to me: What I want to know is - what is your position?"*
- *"You have plagiarised parts of this essay from several sources. See me!"*

### **INTRODUCTION TO THIS UNIT**

So far in this unit, we have looked at how you can develop an argument through reading critically and then developing your own point of view. Now we will go on to presenting this point of view. When you present your point of view, it will only be convincing if you use the evidence to support your argument.

### **1. SUMMARISING EVIDENCE**

A persuasive analytical essay must be based on a logical structure which is *your own way* of seeing the topic. It must use the research literature in order to support your way of seeing the topic. You have to choose those ideas from the literature that are useful to support your thesis and show the inadequacies of other ideas that contradict your thesis. There is no point at all in just making a summary of what the various authors have all said.

#### **Exercise 1**

Compare the following two paragraphs and decide which one is a mere summary and which one uses the evidence to support the essay-writer's thesis:

- Dickson (1984: 12) maintains that television violence has a marked effect on the development of the child. Brown (1985: 176) says that children who watch a great deal of televised violence could be affected for many years. The Television Broadcasting Tribunal (1982: 16) recommends that we should "limit the number of hours per week of programmes showing violence during children's viewing times".*
- That television violence has a considerable effect on the development of the child is not disputed. Both Dickson (1984: 12) and Brown (1985: 176) have shown through*

*extensive experiments that the majority of children are affected by television violence, Brown having extended the base of her research to longitudinal studies which reveal that this effect is quite long-term. In the face of such convincing evidence, the Television Broadcasting Tribunal has been compelled to act in order to reduce the impact that increased television viewing could have on children. The Tribunal has recommended (1982: 16) that the number of hours per week of violent programmes should be limited during children's viewing times. In spite of these recommendations, however, there continues to be a significant level of violence in programmes which are broadcast at prime viewing times for children.*

## 2. SYNTHESIZING INFORMATION

One of the main reasons why students tend to summarise their evidence rather than using it to substantiate their thesis and develop an argument is that they fail to see the relationships between the different pieces of evidence. Instead they see the evidence simply as a list of various sources without asking themselves how the ideas in one source are related to the ideas in other sources. In other words they do not synthesize the information and ideas in their sources.

### Exercise 2

Examine the following brief summaries of evidence in the area of passive smoking and allergic reactions. Make comparisons among the pieces of evidence and fill in the table underneath which summarises the similarities and differences among the pieces of evidence.

#### The evidence:

1. *Speer (1968) reported on a group of 441 non-smokers who complained of sneezing, running nose and other respiratory symptoms when exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. He concluded that the reactions were irritative in nature rather than a form of allergy involving the formation of immune antibodies.*
2. *Salvaggio et al (1981) have found no allergic response even in people who claim to be smoke sensitive and they suggest that the reported sensitivity may be due to psychological factors.*
3. *Zussman (1970) reported that exposure to tobacco smoke caused a specific form of allergy of the mucosal membrane. He selected a random group of patients from those who had a history of skin sensitivity including some who complained they could not tolerate exposure to tobacco smoke. Most of these patients showed a positive reaction to tobacco leaf extract. He argued that nonsmokers exposed to tobacco smoke develop allergy of the nose and allergic conjunctivitis and even serious caripulmonary diseases.*
4. *McDougall and Gleich (1976) found no evidence of tobacco smoke allergens in their tests of 30 subjects who reportedly experienced allergic symptoms on exposure to tobacco or tobacco smoke.*
5. *Becker et al (1976) reported the isolation of a large molecular weight molecule from tobacco smoke which the authors claimed to be an allergen. They claimed that this might be responsible for health problems in smokers and nonsmokers (1977, 1978).*

**The synthesis:**

| Source<br>(by author) | Dates | Aim of study topic | Study subject(s) | Outcomes |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------------|------------------|----------|
|                       |       |                    |                  |          |
|                       |       |                    |                  |          |
|                       |       |                    |                  |          |
|                       |       |                    |                  |          |
|                       |       |                    |                  |          |

**3. DEVELOPING YOUR ARGUMENT**

In the previous exercise you have compared and contrasted the different pieces of evidence. However you could still simply summarise these similarities and differences without telling the reader your own position. What you need to do next is decide on your own position, your own thesis. Then you can begin to sequence the evidence in a logical way to develop your argument and support your thesis. In this next exercise, you will see how another writer has done this.

**Exercise 3**

Let's have a look at how one writer has organised the above pieces of evidence to develop an argument. As you are reading, try to identify:

- a) the writer's thesis
- b) how the writer has analysed the evidence
- c) how the writer has sequenced the evidence
- d) the new pieces of evidence the writer has added

**Allergy**

*Although the sight and smell of tobacco smoke can cause annoyance and irritation in some individuals, the existence of human allergens in tobacco smoke has not been established. A number of studies have been carried out to assess the effects of tobacco smoke and tobacco leaf extract on human population samples but the results are not conclusive. In 1968, Speer reported on a group of 441 nonsmokers who complained of sneezing, running nose and other respiratory symptoms when exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. He concluded that the reactions were irritative in nature rather than a form of allergy involving the formation of immune antibodies. However, a later study by Zussman (1970) claimed that tobacco smoke was responsible for an allergic reaction. He selected a random group of patients with skin sensitivity including some who complained they could not tolerate exposure to tobacco smoke. Most of these patients showed a positive reaction to tobacco leaf extract. He argued that nonsmokers exposed to tobacco smoke develop allergy of the nose and allergic conjunctivitis and even serious cardiopulmonary diseases. However, as Taylor (1974) has pointed out, there are 'great difficulties' in determining whether positive reactions to tobacco leaf extracts are relevant to clinical responses to tobacco smoke.*

*Studies of the constituents of tobacco smoke have not resolved the issue. Becker et al (1976) reported the isolation of a large molecular weight molecule from tobacco smoke which the authors claimed to be an allergen. They claimed that this might be responsible for health problems in smokers and nonsmokers (1977,1978). However the separation technique they used has been criticised in the scientific literature (Stedman, 1978) and this casts doubt on the validity of their results.*

*Accordingly, it is not surprising that McDougall and Glieich (1976) failed to find any evidence of tobacco smoke allergens in their tests of 30 subjects who reportedly experienced allergic symptoms on exposure to tobacco or tobacco smoke. Salvaggio et al (1981) have found no allergic response even in people who claim to be smoke sensitive and they suggest that the reported sensitivity may be due to psychological factors. In his analysis of the tobacco allergy question, Taylor (1974) cautioned that 'there is not proof that specific sensitization to tobacco smoke exists'. The above statement remains valid despite the fact that tobacco smoke continues to be described as an allergen.*

#### **Exercise 4**

Examine the following extract from a student response to the essay on tobacco.

- a) Is the evidence being used to support a thesis?
- b) Is the evidence being used to develop an argument?

*Tobacco becomes a net cost to society when a large enough proportion of the population smokes enough to suffer the impact of tobacco-induced diseases (NSW Cancer Council, 1985: 21), resulting in lost production from sickness, health care, loss of life and property destroyed by fire (Miller, 1982: 182). However, tobacco has a nett advantage to the economy by maintaining employment levels (Small Retailers' Association, 1982: 42; Gray and Walter, 1986: 267) and providing an easily grown cash crop (UNFAO, 1978: 290). The majority of governments extract huge taxes from the tobacco industry, particularly at the point of sale (Mathews, 1978: 17) whilst the tobacco manufacturers continue to make large profits in spite of the economic recession (Prices Surveillance Authority, 1985).*

#### **4. CHOOSING YOUR FOCUS**

When you refer to a source, you can focus either on the author or on the ideas in the source. This means that you begin your sentence with either the author's name or with the actual idea in the source. We can represent your choice as follows:

focus of the sentence- $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{on the author} \\ \text{on the evidence} \end{array} \right.$

In the first exercise in this unit, we looked at two texts to see the difference between summarising evidence and arguing using the evidence. In the summarising text, the focus or theme of all the sentences is the authors responsible for the research:

- Dickson maintains
- Brown says
- The Television Broadcasting Tribunal recommends

In the arguing text, the focus is more varied and the relationships between the different pieces

of evidence are brought out in the sentence themes:

- That television violence has a considerable effect on the development of the child
- Both Dickson and Brown
- In the face of such convincing evidence
- The Tribunal (has recommended)
- In spite of these recommendations

If your focus on the author is too dominant, the danger is that you are merely summarising the evidence and not using it to develop an argument and support your own thesis.

### Exercise 5

Read the following text and notice the way that it is very focussed on the authors of the various pieces of evidence.

*Tobacco use only benefits certain sectors of society. UNFAO (1977) reports that tobacco is easy to cultivate and provides money directly to small farmers who are the world's largest producers. The Small Retailers Association (1982) argues that thousands of retail traders would have difficulty to continue their business if tobacco use was restricted. Mathews (1978) states that 60 per cent of the sale price of a packet of cigarettes goes to the government in China. The Cancer Council of NSW (1985) says that the government and tobacco firms gain substantial revenue from tobacco use.*

For this exercise, rewrite the text by taking the emphasis away from the authors. To be able to do this exercise, you need to work out a position or thesis statement for the paragraph. Notice that the first sentence presents a position statement that you can use to give the paragraph its purpose. The way that you change each part of the paragraph to focus on the information, and to show the relationships between each piece of evidence will depend on the position that you want to present.

To help guide you in your rewriting, some questions have been included in brackets in the text this time to prompt you to think analytically.

*Tobacco use only benefits certain sectors of society. (which sectors?)*

*UNFAO (1977) reports that tobacco is easy to cultivate and provides money directly to small farmers who are the world's largest producers. (what sector is referred to in the second sentence and how does it compare to the other sectors eg who gets the most benefit?)*

*The Small Retailers Association (1982) argues that thousands of retail traders would have difficulty to continue their business if tobacco use was restricted. Mathews (1978) states that 60 per cent of the sale price of a packet of cigarettes goes to the government in China. The Cancer Council of NSW (1985) says that the government and tobacco firms gain substantial revenue from tobacco use.*

## 5. LANGUAGE STRATEGIES FOR FOCUSING ON IDEAS, NOT AUTHORS

In the last exercise, you have been changing the focus from the author

*UNFAO (1977) reports that .....*

to the ideas

*Tobacco is easy to cultivate .....(UNFAO, 1977).*

The process of rewriting in this way involves taking away the reporting verb (if it exists) and acknowledging the source by footnoting or putting the author's name in brackets after the idea. We are now going to look at some special language strategies you can use to help you to focus on the ideas rather than the authors.

### 1. Using the passive

Example of the passive form in use:

*Although the extent to which environmental tobacco smoke may bother or annoy individuals under normal conditions **has not been established** scientifically, it has been suggested that tobacco smoke is at most a minor annoyance for many individuals.*

If we were to change the verb "establish" from the passive to the active form we would have to say **who** is responsible for not establishing the extent to which environmental tobacco smoke bothers or annoys individuals. We might write something like this:

***Scientists** have not established the extent to which tobacco smoke may ...*

The focus of the sentence would become the **scientists** and not **the extent to which environmental tobacco smoke bothers or annoys individuals**. However, for most academic situations, we don't want to know who is responsible. We either assume who was responsible for actions without naming them; or we decide not to name those responsible because it is not relevant.

### 2. Using a predicting it clause

Example of the "predicting it" clause in use:

*Although the extent to which environmental tobacco smoke may bother or annoy individuals under normal conditions has not been established scientifically, **it has been suggested** that tobacco smoke is at most a minor annoyance for many individuals.*

In this example the focus of the sentence is 'it' which refers forwards or predicts the whole of 'that' clause. The 'that' clause contains the ideas from the sources. Since the 'it' refers to the 'that' clause the ideas of the sources become the focus or theme of the sentence. Once again the verb 'suggest' is in the passive, so we don't know who is doing the suggesting.

If we wrote this part of the sentence in the active and take out the 'it', we might write something like this:

*Cohen (1978) has suggested that tobacco smoke .....*

### 3. Using a noun to refer to the source

Example of a noun referring to the source:

*The suggestion that tobacco smoke is at most a minor annoyance for many individuals has been strongly challenged by the anti-smoking lobby.*

In this example, instead of using a verb 'suggest' to report the information in the source, the noun 'suggestion' has been used. This noun is expounded into a long noun group with a 'that clause' which contains the ideas from the source. In this way the focus of the sentence becomes the ideas from the source.

*The suggestion that tobacco smoke is at most a minor annoyance for many individuals ...*

Notice that when we use this language structure we need to put something else in the sentence to finish it off. In this example we have added in another idea, namely the reaction of the anti-smoking lobby.

### Exercise 6

1. Rewrite the following sentences using a passive structure to take the focus away from the author and place it on the idea.
  - a) One study by Collins in 1973 (in Stein and Friedrich) provides convincing evidence that a time delay between a violent act and its punishment causes the child to miss the point of the punishment entirely.
  - b) Becker et al (1986) isolated a large molecular weight molecule in tobacco smoke and argued that it was responsible for health problems in smokers and non-smokers.
  - c) Stedman (1978) questions the existence of a large molecular weight molecule in tobacco smoke responsible for health problems in smokers and non-smokers.
  - d) McDougall and Glicich (1987) failed to find any evidence to tobacco smoke allergens.
2. Rewrite the following sentence using a 'predicting it' clause to take the focus away from the person and place it on the idea.
  - a) Stein and Friedrich (1976: 216) proposed the notion of base levels or habitual levels of aggression to explain individual differences in response to television violence.
3. Rewrite the following sentence pairs into one sentence using a noun group to express the ideas being reported. This will mean changing the reporting verb into a noun.
  - a) It has been claimed that modern children spend more hours watching television than they spend at school. This is cause for alarm amongst educationists.
  - b) Smith and Weston (1979) along with less well-known psychologist Mabe (1984), have all been convinced that violence on television is most likely to

- affect children who already display a high level of aggression. The implications of this for educators are quite serious.
- c) It has also been suggested that extreme reactions to tobacco smoke exposure may have a strong emotional or psychological basis" (Tobacco Institute of Australia Ltd, 1987: 44).  
(Add an idea or comment of your own to complete this sentence.)

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ANSWER KEY</b><br/><b>ESSAY MODULE</b></p> |
|--|

# Unit 3B

## How to use evidence:

### Supporting your argument with the evidence

#### Exercise 1

Text a) is just a summary of what was found in the different readings. This is clear just from looking at the way each sentence begins with the name or source of the evidence, and then uses a verb of reporting to introduce the argument from each piece of evidence:

Dickson maintains that ...

Brown says that ...

The Television Broadcasting Tribunal recommends that ...

But from this piece of the essay, we don't know what is the essay writer's point of view. We also don't know what is the connection between these three other people's arguments. For example, do Dickson and Brown argue a similar point of view or not?

Text b) is much more academically appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, from the beginning, we can see what is the essay writer's point of view - it is arguing that television violence has a big effect on children. This argument of the essay writer is made even stronger because of the support that is found in the academic literature. Secondly, we can see the connections between the ideas. For example, we can see that Dickson and Brown argued something similar (*Both Dickson and Brown*), but that Brown developed the argument based on longitudinal research (*Brown having extended ...*). We also see that the Television Broadcasting Tribunal made its recommendations because the evidence from research was so strong (*in the face of such convincing evidence...*).

#### Exercise 2

| Source (by author) | Dates | Aim of study topic   | Study subject(s)   | Outcomes  |
|--------------------|-------|--|--|---|
| Speers             | 1968  | reason for respiratory effects of tobacco smoke on non-smokers | 441 non-smokers with allergic responses                    | reaction was irritative not allergic (no immune antibodies)   |
| Salvaggio et al    | 1981  | reason for effects of tobacco smoke                            | sample included smoke sensitive people                     | reaction not allergic, smoke sensitivity could be psychological   |
| Zussman            | 1970  | effect of tobacco leaf extract on skin sensitive patients      | skin sensitive patients, some also tobacco smoke sensitive | positive reaction to tobacco leaf extract, argued that tobacco smoke causes specific allergy of mucosal membrane, and other |

|                      |                  |                                     |   |   |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
|                      |                  |                                     |   | allergic reactions in nonsmokers and cardio-pulmonary diseases                                  |
| McDougall and Gleich | 1976             | allergic reactions to tobacco smoke | 30 subjects who claimed to be allergic to smoke | no allergic reactions   |
| Becker et al         | 1976, 1977, 1978 | composition of tobacco smoke        | tobacco smoke                                   | isolated large molecular weight molecule, probably allergen, responsible for allergic reactions |

### Exercise 3

a) The writer's thesis is that, although the sight and smell of tobacco smoke can cause annoyance and irritation in some individuals, the existence of human allergens in tobacco smoke has not been established.

b) One way of depicting the analysis of the evidence is thus:

|                         |                             |                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
|                         | <b>(types of reactions)</b> | <b>(causes)</b>  |
|                         | - non-allergic ----         | - irritation     |
| Studies of -- reactions |                             | - psychological  |
|                         | - allergic ----             | - smoke molecule |
|                         |                             | - leaf extract   |

c) The evidence has been sequenced thus:

- evidence of non-allergic reaction - tobacco smoke - early literature 1968
- evidence of allergic reaction - tobacco leaf extract - later literature 1970
- criticism of evidence of allergic reaction - 1974
- evidence of allergen in tobacco smoke - 1976
- criticism of evidence of allergen in tobacco smoke - 1978
- evidence of non-allergic reaction - 1976
- evidence of non-allergic reaction - 1981

d) New evidence:

1. However, as Taylor (1974) has pointed out, there are 'great difficulties' in determining whether positive reactions to tobacco leaf extracts are relevant to clinical responses to tobacco smoke.

2. However the separation technique they used has been criticised in the scientific literature (Stedman, 1978) and this casts doubt on the validity of their results.

3. In his analysis of the tobacco allergy question, Taylor (1974) cautioned that 'there is not proof that specific sensitization to tobacco smoke exists.'

#### **Exercise 4**

This text does not have a single thesis statement. Instead, there are several contradictory points of view being presented. The evidence has not been used to develop an argument at all. Instead, the text is a mere summary of the evidence.

#### **Exercise 5**

Here is a suggested rewriting of the text:

*Tobacco use only benefits certain sectors of society, namely those which are involved in its production and governments who raise taxes from its sale. The primary producers, mainly small farmers, gain direct financial benefit from tobacco growth (UNFAO, 1977). In addition, thousands of small retailers, it is argued, are heavily dependent on the sale of tobacco for the survival of their business (Small Retailers Association, 1982). However the main beneficiaries of tobacco use are tobacco firms and governments who gain substantial revenues from tobacco (The Cancer Council of NSW, 1985). The Chinese government, for example, gains 60% of the sale price of a packet of cigarettes (Mathews, 1978).*

#### **Exercise 6**

- 1.a) A time delay between a violent act and its punishment has been convincingly shown (Collins, 1973, in Stein and Friedrich) to cause the child to miss the point of the punishment entirely.
- 1.b) A large molecular weight molecule thought to be responsible for health problems in smokers and nonsmokers was isolated in tobacco smoke (Becker et al, 1976)
- 1.c) The existence of a large molecular weight molecule in tobacco smoke responsible for health problems in smokers and non-smokers is questioned (Stedman, 1978)
- 1.d) No evidence of tobacco smoke allergens was found (Mcdougall and Gleich, 1976)
2. It has been proposed that base levels or habitual levels of aggression explain individual differences in response to television violence (Stein and Friedrich, 1976, p216)
- 3.a) The claim that modern children spend more hours watching television than they spend at school is cause for alarm amongst educationists.
- 3.b) The argument that violence on television is most likely to affect children who already display a high level of aggression (Smith and Weston, 1979, Mabe, 1984) has quite serious implications for educators.
- 3.c) The suggestion that extreme reactions to tobacco smoke exposure may have a strong emotional or psychological basis has been challenged by the Cancer Council.