

# Evaluating Evidence

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**proposition or claim:** the writer's position on an issue or problem

**evidence:** a reason, fact, statistic, example, or expert opinion that supports a proposition or claim

evaluate evidence: determine the strength and quality of the facts, statistics, reasons, examples, and sources that support a position or claim

## HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Look for opinions to be sure they are supported.** No one can check whether an opinion is true or false. So a writer must support claims, positions, or opinions with facts and reasons. For expert opinions, make sure sources are clearly identified. Don't accept vague language, such as "experts agree."

**Step 2: Look for facts—statistics, examples, and expert opinions.** Part of a writer's job is to present enough facts to support each claim. Facts include quotations from experts, examples, and **statistics** (mathematical data). Decide whether there is enough evidence to back up the ideas.

**Step 3: Look for source documentation.** Writers should name the source of their facts. Look for sources that are **objective** and **credible**, such as an encyclopedia, rather than **subjective** and **biased**, such as a blog. Good documentation includes the *who*, *where*, and *when* of each source, so that readers can check it.

**Step 4: Weigh the evidence.** After evaluating the support, data, and documentation, decide whether to accept a writer's position. You can also weigh how reasonable, valuable, or useful the writer's ideas are to you.

The city police should arrest anyone who panhandles downtown. I've heard there are four times as many panhandlers this year than last year. Clearly the problem is totally out of control. Studies show that these people commit all kinds of crimes besides panhandling. As a result, no one is safe walking the streets these days. So, decent citizens should demand that the police clear panhandlers off our streets.

The writer opens with an **opinion** that is the **proposition**, or **claim**.

The first **fact** is not **documented**. What is the source of the numbers?

The second argument, is an opinion with no support. The writer should name the "studies"—who did them, when, and where.

The conclusion is another opinion without support.