



## Descriptive and Evaluative Claims

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Writers rely upon a collection of descriptive and evaluative claims to compose an argument. At times, an author might present the facts of a case in a dispassionate manner, letting them speak for themselves. These constitute *descriptive claims*. At other times, a writer will rely upon a value judgment, or an *evaluative claim*, to present a contention that could be argued. The strength of an author's evaluative claims ultimately depends upon the evidence he/she is able to present. Upon collecting the facts and making some inferences with descriptive claims, a writer is able to draw evaluative conclusions and, ultimately, a thesis.

A history essay should feature a reading of the evidence that supports your point of view on what it means—your interpretation of the facts of the case, also known as your **thesis**. You analyze the available evidence in order to make an argument.

An **argument** uses evidence and builds a case for your thesis. In a successful argument, claims and evidence work together to prove that your thesis—even though it's debatable—is a reasonable claim and therefore a valid claim.

A good thesis has to be evaluative rather than merely descriptive. What's the difference?

A **descriptive claim** is a readily shared perception of the facts of the case; it's unlikely to be debated, because no other interpretation of the evidence is available. "George Washington reluctantly agreed to become the first president of the United States." The evidence to support such a claim is readily at hand, and the claim itself is all but indisputable. It's relatively easy to agree with such a claim—to accept it as true.

An **evaluative claim** involves a value judgment—an act of interpretation. This view of the matter may be disputed by others; it's provocative, debatable, arguable: "George Washington's experiences as a frontiersman made him wary of executive authority." Or still more interpretive: "George Washington's career as a frontiersman made him wary of executive authority, even as it developed him into a leader of men." Claims such as these require supporting evidence to be accepted as true.

**The more self-evident the claim, the closer it is to the "D" end of the scale below. The more challenging the claim, the closer it is to the "E" end of the scale. An academic argument relies on a central claim (a thesis) that is more "E" than "D"—that can be located somewhere on the right side of the scale:**

facts / **D** ----- ^ ----- **E** / interpretation  
(Descriptive) (Evaluative)