

I. What a Claim Is

- A claim is the main argument of an essay. It is probably the single most important part of an academic paper. The quality of the entire paper hinges on the claim, so if your claim is boring or obvious, the rest of the paper probably will be too.
- A claim must be argumentative. When you make a claim, you are arguing for a certain interpretation or understanding of your subject.
- A good claim is specific. It makes a focused argument (MTV's popularity is waning because it no longer plays music videos) rather than a general one (MTV sucks).

II. What a Claim Is Not

- A claim is not a statement of opinion. Fried Twinkies are delicious is not a claim. There is no way to argue against it, because it is subjective.
- A good claim is not overly general. The Seattle Seahawks had a bad defense last year is not a very good claim. A better one would be: Last season, the Seattle Seahawks' defensive problems resulted largely from the offense's short possession times.
- A claim is not limited to one sentence. If you have a complicated claim, it may take several sentences or even a whole paragraph to articulate it.
- A claim is not always followed by three supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. In college, you don't have to write five-paragraph essays. Use as many paragraphs as you need.
- A claim is not obvious. Using scientific evidence, expert interviews, and close reading of meteorological texts, you could successfully argue that it rains a lot in Seattle. But this might not be the most interesting argument to make.

III. General Definition

- A claim is the main argument of an academic essay. It defines your paper and is supported by evidence, quotations, argumentation, expert opinion, statistics, etc.

IV. Counterclaims

- In arguing a claim, you should always consider potential counterclaims and counterarguments. For instance, in response to my above claim about the Seahawks, someone might say: You're wrong. The Hawks defensive problems last year were a result of poor coaching on the part of the defensive coordinator. This counterclaim denies the validity of my claim. Usually, it's important to address counterclaims in your writing.