

ISSUE ONE · FROM THE DESK OF SARAH BONANNO

Start with your evidence — not your claim.

01

The first thing I teach my students.

The most common thing I notice when a writer sits down to draft is that they start with a thesis — an idea they think they're going to argue — and then go looking for evidence that confirms they're right. Each paragraph ends up being another version of the same point.

The trouble with this isn't that it's wrong. It's that it almost always produces a flat, predictable argument. The writer never gets to be surprised by their own thinking, and neither does the reader.

If you already know what you're going to say before you've engaged with your material, what's left for you to discover?

Done well, you'll come away with a claim that surprised you — and that's almost always where the best writing lives. Here's how it works.

THE METHOD *five moves for evidence-first drafting*

- 01 Sit with your evidence**
Whether that's the text you're analyzing, the memory you're writing from, or your research sources — return to it and read like it's new.
- 02 Catalogue what you notice**
Write down everything that catches your attention: interesting, contradictory, surprising, strange. Don't filter yet for what fits an idea.
- 03 Ask "so what?"**
Push on each observation. Why does this matter? What does it actually tell you about the text, the moment, or the source?
- 04 Ask "yes, and?"**
Take your strongest observation and ask what it opens up. Where else does it point? What does it make you curious about?
- 05 Let a claim emerge**
Now draft your thesis — sharper, less obvious, and more genuinely yours than anything you could have written before you started looking.

COMPONENTS OF AN ARGUMENT



A specific, contestable statement — one a reasonable reader could debate.

The analysis that connects evidence to claim. The glue of an argument.

The data for your claim — what readers won't doubt is true.