**Definitions**

**Evidence**: Any factual information presented to support a claim. Evidence may be strong or weak. Evidence is weak when it can be shown to lack **validity** or **relevance**.

**Validity:** the degree to which something is well-founded, true, or accurate.

**Relevance:** the degree to which something relates or is connected to a topic

**Why does it matter if evidence is relevant?**

When we are selecting evidence to support or disprove a claim, we have to start by **evaluating** the evidence itself. Although a great deal of evidence you find about a topic may be valid, NOT all of it is relevant to your claim. To make a strong argument, **only evidence that is both valid and relevant should be used**.

**How do you figure out if evidence is relevant?**

You can use this checklist to help determine if your evidence is relevant.

**RELEVANCE CHECKLIST**

* Does your evidence **connect to your claim?**
* Does your evidence **help prove your claim?**
* **When** was your evidence written/created? Does this time period apply to your claim?
* **Where** was your evidence written/created? Does this location apply to your claim?
* **Who** wrote/created your evidence? Does this source have the experience and knowledge to speak to your claim?

For example:

* My claim is: “A certain rectangle has a length to width ratio of 2:3.” The fact that squares have equal sides, though mathematically valid, does not connect to my claim directly and thus that evidence is not relevant.
* My claim is: “The Civil Rights movement changed American society.” The fact that Martin Luther King was named after a famous Protestant leader, though valid, is not relevant. The origin of King’s name did not affect the Civil Rights movement.

**Relevance “Continuum”**

Unlike validity, relevance can be judged along a continuum – meaning you can say a piece of evidence is “more relevant” or “less relevant” than another piece of evidence. So, even if you are evaluating evidence that is all valid and relevant, choosing the **best evidence** to use in an argument involves **choosing which evidence is most relevant.**

For example:

* My claim is: “The enslavement of Africans in America was a crime against humanity.” I might be choosing between the following 3 pieces of evidence, all of them valid and relevant:
  + - 1. During slavery, it was legal for a master to kill his or her slaves.
      2. During slavery, children of slaves were automatically slaves, and could be sold as property and taken away from their parents.
      3. During slavery, it is estimated that 15-20 million Africans died as a direct result of enslavement.

All three pieces of evidence are valid, relevant, and support my claim. **Which do you think is the strongest**?