

Are you presenting both sides of the argument?

Most environmental issues are controversial and there are reasonable arguments to support differing opinions. This is one reason environmental topics are so fascinating. You may hold strong views on a topic, but your essay will be more convincing and interesting if you present different opinions before arguing that the weight of the evidence supports your view. If your essay starts with an unsupported sentence such as “Fossil fuels are destroying our planet”, you label yourself as unobjective and your essay will have less impact.

Getting into the details

When you have only 5 pages to address a complex topic, it's tempting to write a broad brush summary that gives equal weight to all aspects. However, you and your reader will probably find it more interesting if you get into depth on a few key issues. Find aspects of the problem that interest you and are particularly critical to a solution. If you write about the application of a technology, discuss one or two specific examples in depth rather than trying to present a catalog of all applications.

Are your sources objective?

You need to evaluate whether your sources are likely to be objective and unbiased. For instance, the American Wind Energy Association has an excellent web site with lots of information, but the mission of this organization is to advocate “the development of wind energy as a reliable, environmentally superior energy alternative”. Thus, it is unlikely to include anything written by wind power skeptics, although such are published, and the data presented may be misleading. You need to look elsewhere to check facts and get different opinions for wind power.

Citations and References

There are several styles for in-text citations but the most compact form (and what we'd like here) is to cite the references in the order they appear either with a superscripted number¹ or a number in parentheses (2). You need to include enough citations so it is clear where you got your information and, by the omission of citations, when you are presenting your own opinions or calculations. If a whole paragraph is from a single source, you need not repeat the citation number for each sentence, but certainly once or twice. If you're quoting a whole paragraph, set it off by indentation.

Your reference list must include enough information to properly credit the author and find the article.

For a journal article, the bibliography should include:

- (1) Author, Title, Journal, Volume, Page, Year

For a Book:

- (2) Author, Title, Publisher, Year

For a Web page the format is a little less well established. Many web pages have neither permanence nor clear authorship. Also, if a web site is large, just citing the homepage URL (e.g., www.awea.org) may be insufficient to find your source page. A reasonable citation might be

- (3) Author and/or Organization, Title (or title of Web Page), specific URL, Year written or accessed