



This exercise sheet accompanies my video: “Using Evidence Successfully”. In the video, I show how to deploy scholarly literature and evidence in a convincing fashion.

PART A: Rote learning can give you confidence and context. Take a set of names, dates or places from your own subject and time yourself: 10 minutes to memorize them, 10 minutes to check and correct, and another 5 minutes write them out in order without notes.

To see how much you can remember, try the following:

- Post-war Presidents of the United States (13)
- British monarchs (Houses of Plantagenet, Lancaster and York) from 1216 to 1485 (13)
- Member countries of NATO (29)
- Transition metals in the periodic table (35)

PART B: But rote learning is not enough. You need deep knowledge and careful case selection. For each of the following theses, consider which cases are ‘easy’ (you expect it to conform to the pattern and prove the thesis right, so if it doesn’t then the thesis is in trouble) and which cases are ‘hard’ (the case is less likely to conform to the pattern, so conforming really strengthens the thesis).

1. ‘Food makes people happy’ (Lettuce, Milk, Bread, Chocolate)
2. ‘Children’s stories empower girls’ (Cinderella, Frozen, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood)
3. ‘Taking public transport reduces stress’ (Train, Subway, Bus, Gondola)
4. ‘Superheroes are excellent role-models’ (Superman, Batman, Silver Surfer, Wolverine)
5. ‘Sport is dangerous’ (Table Tennis, American Football, Tenpin Bowling, Skiing)

PART C: No amount of exercises will help you if you don't know your stuff. As there's no substitute for simply *knowing what the literature says*, this exercise requires you to take a subject you know well and extract its core propositions.

1. For each journal article, chapter or book that you have read on a topic, write down up to three grammatical sentences, in your own words, which *summarize its main arguments*.
2. Write down the three main *controversies* in that literature.
3. Consider what the literature *doesn't say*. Write down what scholars fail to consider/explain.

For example, three works on prison policy could be summarized as follows:

- Alexander: 'Mass incarceration is a system of social control that resembles Jim Crow.'
- Miller: 'Institutional fragmentation facilitates a punitive response by policymakers.'
- Weaver: 'Conservatives rhetorically sharpened the connection between civil rights and crime'

There is disagreement about the extent to which state punitivity is related to actual crime, the level of support for punishment in violent areas, and the appropriateness of the Jim Crow metaphor.