

Activity: Identifying Types of Evidence

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In the previous segment, Josh Pasek explained how to identify several different types of evidence. In particular, he identified the following 5 key types of evidence:

- **Proof:** evidence that can be proved through mathematical or logical reasoning
- **Claim:** evidence we've heard or read elsewhere
- **Experience:** evidence that relies on what someone has directly encountered or observed
- **Inference:** things we assume based on other pieces of evidence
- **Deductive Testing:** evidence that relies on the scientific method

In this exercise, you'll consider ten different quotes from individuals and new sources, and then match each quote with the type of evidence it relies on.

Exhibit A

"306 Electoral Votes is greater than the 270 Electoral Votes needed to win the Electoral College."

Answer

Correct:

This is a proof because it is about whether one quantity is larger than another. By definition, 306 is larger than 270.

Exhibit B

"I was at the inauguration and it was really crowded."

Answer

Correct:

This experiential evidence tells us about what someone saw at the inauguration. It provides some evidence about crowd size, but it is not a systematically generated piece of data.

Exhibit C

"In a survey of Americans, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to believe that September 11th was a government cover-up."

Answer

Correct:

This statement presents systematically derived evidence about the beliefs of Americans on a particular issue. It thus reflects deductive testing using the scientific method.

Exhibit C

Exhibit D

"James Comey (FBI Director) decided to reopen the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, that must mean that she did something else illegal."

Answer

Correct:

This assertion made here constitutes an inference. Following the statement that the investigation into Hillary Clinton was reopened (which is not disputed), the statement here extrapolates from what is known to assume that what occurred implied illegal behavior. It is therefore an inference.

Exhibit D

Exhibit E

"Scientists have looked for a potential link between vaccinations and autism and cannot find any evidence across multiple epidemiological studies."

Answer

Correct:

This statement summarizes deductive evidence that was generated to specifically and rigorously evaluate a particular question. It reflects deductive testing using the scientific method.

Exhibit E

Exhibit F

"Whomever wins the election will become president; Donald Trump won the election; Donald Trump therefore will become president."

Answer

Correct:

This is a proof consisting of three logical assertions. If the first two assertions are true – that is, if the winner of the election will become president and if Trump won the election, it must be the case that Trump will become president.

Exhibit F

Exhibit G

"We have a president who is a congenital liar." –David Gergen, former advisor to Presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Clinton (3/21/2017)

Answer

Correct:

This statement from David Gergen is a claim. His statement constitutes some evidence that this might be true, but the only reason someone has to believe it is because they trust David Gergen on this point.

Exhibit G

Exhibit H

1/1 point (graded)

"I saw the police pull someone over and that person happened to be Black."

Experience

Answer

Correct:

This experiential evidence tells us that someone saw a Black person was pulled over by the police. It may be relevant to forming opinions about policing and crime, but is not a rigorously collected piece of information and thus might be misleading.

Exhibit H

Exhibit I

"The Democrats will make a deal with me on healthcare as soon as ObamaCare folds - not long." -Donald J. Trump (3/27/2017)

Claim

Answer

Correct:

This tweet from Donald Trump is a claim. His statement constitutes some evidence that this might be true, but the only reason someone has to believe it is because they trust President Trump to know this.

Exhibit I

Exhibit J

"Michael Flynn (Trump's Former National Security Advisor) didn't tell Congress about his meetings with the Russian Ambassador, therefore there must be collusion between the Trump Campaign and Russia."

Inference

Answer

Correct:

This assertion made here constitutes an inference. Following the statement that Flynn did not inform Congress about meetings with the Russian Ambassador (which is not disputed), the assumption that there was some collusion between the Campaign and Russia is a clear extrapolation from what is known. It is therefore an inference.