Let’s look at some potential student responses to the Essay Evidence questions on pages 246-247. The directions are repeated below.

As you read the following selection, look for different ways the author uses evidence to support his argument that old dams should be torn down and new dams should not be built. Identify four pieces of evidence, along with their sources, and describe how this evidence supports the author’s argument. Have a trusted reader check your work, and go online for some examples of possible answers.


1. Of the more than 80,000 dams listed by the federal government, more than 26,000 pose high or significant safety hazards. Many no longer serve any real purpose. All have limited life spans. Only about 1,750 produce hydropower, according to the National Hydropower Association.

2. Last year, 51 dams in 18 states were taken down, restoring more than 500 miles of streams, according to the group American Rivers. Nearly 850 have been removed in the last 20 years, and nearly 1,150 since 1912.

3. A case in point is the Elwha River on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, where two hydroelectric dams built early in the last century exacted huge environmental costs but were no longer important as power generators. Salmon runs that once reached about 400,000 fish a year dropped to fewer than 3,000. A year after the Elwha Dam was removed, Chinook salmon returned to the river in numbers not seen in decades, with three-quarters of them observed spawning upstream of the former dam site.

4. Time and again, I’ve witnessed the celebration that comes with the removal of an unnecessary dam. After a river is restored and the fish have returned you never hear a single person say, “Gee, I wish we had our dam back.”

1. The first piece of evidence I am analyzing:
   26,000 of 80,000 dams pose high or significant safety hazards

   Its source:
   An unnamed agency of the federal government

   How it supports the author’s argument:
   It provides a compelling reason (safety) for taking down dams.
2. The second piece of evidence I am analyzing:
   Only 1,750 of 80,000 dams produce hydropower

   Its source:
   National Hydropower Association

   How it supports the author’s argument:
   That most dams do not produce power suggests that there’s no compelling reason to keep them up.

3. The third piece of evidence I am analyzing:
   51 dams were taken down last year & 850 in the last 20 years

   Its source:
   American Rivers

   How it supports the author’s argument:
   By showing that many dams have already been removed, Chouinard shows that in many areas, authorities have already been persuaded to remove dams, and appeals to our desire to ‘go along’ with a trend of dam removal. This information also suggests that there have already been benefits (restoring streams) from taking down dams.

4. The fourth piece of evidence I am analyzing:
   Salmon populations declined seriously when dams were built on the Elwha River, and have begun to recover now that the dams have been removed

   Its source:
   Source not cited

   How it supports the author’s argument:
   It shows a specific case of the harms caused by dams and the benefits following their removal.