

Argument

Argument – a process during which a claim is made and logical details are offered to support that claim

Claim – the main point of an argument; like a main idea it has a topic and controlling point

Support – the evidence or reasons that support the author's claim

Relevant Support – support that really applies to the claim

Adequate Support – enough support to prove the claim

Bias – words that express opinions and value judgments; often they are loaded with emotion

****The purpose of an argument is to persuade the reader that the claim is valid.****

How to Determine the Validity of a Claim

1. Identify the author's claim and supports

Ask yourself:

What is the topic and what is the author telling me about that topic?

The Beef and Burger Shop is a poor fast-food restaurant. The burgers are full of gristle. The roast beef sandwiches have a chemical taste. The fries are lukewarm and soggy.

The first sentence, "*The Beef and Burger Shop is a poor fast-food restaurant,*" is the author's claim. Each of the sentences following the first supports the fact that the restaurant is not very good.

2. Decide whether the supports are relevant

Relevant support answers the reporter's questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?).

Why is The Beef and Burger Shop a poor fast-food restaurant?

The burgers are gristly.

The sandwiches taste like chemicals.

The fries are soggy.

Each of the supports provide information telling the reader why this is a poor restaurant. Each applies to the claim; therefore, the support is relevant.

3. Decide whether the supports are adequate

Adequate support also answers the reporter's questions, but the reader must decide if there is enough support to hold up the claim.

In the example above, the three supports give enough information to make the claim valid.

4. Check the argument for bias

Ask yourself:

Does the author provide mostly positive or negative supports? If the supports are mainly negative, the argument is biased and not necessarily valid.

Does the author provide mostly factual details or rely on biased language? An effective argument uses factual information.

Does the writer include or omit opposing views? An effective argument gives both points of view. In the example above, the three supports are biased against the restaurant. The author does not offer the point of view of the restaurant.

Biased Argument Techniques

Advertisements, editorials, and political campaigns constantly offer one-sided, biased information to sway public opinion. It is important as a reader to identify and understand these techniques used in biased arguments.

Fallacy – an error in the process of logical thought that leads to an invalid conclusion

Types of Fallacies:

Personal Attack is the use of abusive remarks in place of evidence for a point or argument.

During the 2004 presidential campaign, Senator Tom Harkin said that Vice President Dick Cheney was a coward.

Straw Man is a weak argument substituted for a stronger one to make the argument easier to challenge. It distorts, misrepresents, or falsifies an opponent's position.

Rachel should not be class president because she is a cheerleader.

Begging the Question restates the point of an argument as the support and conclusion. It is also known as *circular reasoning*.

I love going to the movies because watching movies is my favorite leisure time activity.

Either-Or assumes that only two sides of an issue exist. It leaves no room for the middle ground or other options.

Smoking cigarettes helps me control my weight, so either I can smoke, or I can get fat.

False Comparison assumes two things are similar when they are not.

Being in school is like being in a concentration camp.

False Cause assumes that because events occurred around the same time, they have a cause-and-effect relationship.

I shouldn't have gone to bed with my hair wet; now I have a cold.

Propaganda – a biased argument that attempts to persuade based on emotional appeal

Types of Propaganda:

Name Calling uses negative labels for a product idea, or cause. It is an expression of personal opinion.

People who burn the flag are traitors.

Testimonials use irrelevant personal opinion to support a product, idea, or cause. A celebrity is usually the person providing the testimonial.

Tennis pro, Serena Williams, appears in an advertisement for a brand of chewing gum.

Bandwagon plays on the natural desire of most individuals to conform to group norms for acceptance. It suggests that “everyone is doing it.”

Sixteen million people can't be wrong: Buy your next computer online from CompuBuy.com.

Plain Folks is an approach in which a person, organization, or cause puts forth an image to which everyday people can more easily relate.

A commercial for a yogurt snack shows a group of young child actors sitting in a living room enjoying it and talking about how good the snack is.

Card Stacking omits factual details in order to misrepresent a product, idea, or cause.

House for sale: Built in 2007, this three bedroom, two-bath home is located close to shopping and is in an excellent school district.

Omitted information: The house is located on a very busy road.

Transfer creates an association between a product, idea, or cause with a symbol or image that has positive or negative values.

If you use the Lean Body Weight Loss System, then you can have a body as beautiful as Jennifer Anniston, Halle Barry, or Angelina Jolie.

Glittering Generalities offer general positive statements that cannot be verified. It is the opposite of name-calling.

A vote for candidate Anthony Vacarro is a vote for honesty and integrity.

Practice Exercises

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Personal Attack b. Straw Man c. Begging the Question d. Either-Or e. False Comparison f. False Cause | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. Testimonials h. Bandwagon i. Plain Folks j. Transfer k. Glittering Generalities l. Name Calling |
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1. ___ We don't need Alfred Simons in Congress; he's a multimillionaire.
2. ___ Algebra is too hard because the concepts are difficult.
3. ___ The right to burn the flag is part of the right of freedom of speech.
4. ___ Be like Alicia Silverstone, Bill Maher, and Woody Harrelson, and a host of other successful people. Go vegetarian; don't eat meat.
5. ___ Join the 3.1 million people who are already using Lean Body.
6. ___ Just listen to what superstar Charlene Lovely has to say about Lean Body: "With Lean Body I lost 45 pounds and 3 dress sizes; Lean Body saved my career."
7. ___ I knew I was going to see you today because my horoscope said that I was going to meet someone special today.
8. ___ Want a meal that tastes like mom's? For down home hospitality, eat at Mom's Diner.
9. ___ A true patriot serves in the military.
10. ___ Animals deserve the same legal rights as humans.
11. ___ The senator doesn't care about the environment because it doesn't win him any votes to care.
12. ___ At a political rally, a speaker opposed to John Kerry accused Kerry of constantly changing his views to win votes. The audience held flip-flops above their heads and chanted, "Flip-flopper, flip-flopper, flip-flopper."

Identify the detail from the list of details that was **omitted** from the paragraph for the purposes of card stacking.

13. Car for sale: This low-mileage 2004 Honda Accord has leather seats and a sunroof. It provides comfortable seating for five and has an adequate amount of trunk space. Additionally, the car has all new tires.
 - a. The car was recently in a wreck and has had major repairs.
 - b. The Honda Accord has received excellent reviews from *Consumer Reports*.
 - c. The car has had only one owner, an elderly woman who didn't often drive.