

IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

An argument differs from a description, a statement of belief or opinion, a hypothetical scenario, a command, or a mere set of facts. While each of these may have its own intents and purposes, an argument uses a series of statements to convince a listener or reader that certain facts, conditions, or positions are true. An argument's **premise** is an initial or foundational statement or assumption that sets forth the reason or evidence, and from which the **conclusion** of the argument follows.

Often, the premises and the conclusions of an argument can be identified by the use of key words or phrases.

The following words and phrases might indicate a premise:

since	in that	for	owing to
as	as indicated by	for the reason that	may be inferred from
given that	because	in as much as	seeing that

The following words and phrases might indicate a conclusion:

therefore	we may conclude	it must be that	implies that
accordingly	hence	it follows that	so
entails that	thus	consequently	as a result

Useful Questions for Evaluating an Argument

1. What assumptions does the writer make?

Does the writer assume that you will come to the text with certain knowledge, or that you will share certain of his or her values?

2. Does the writer have an agenda?

If the writer has a particular political slant, for example, where does it show through in the argument? Does it sway or influence his or her interpretations of the evidence? How?

3. How does the author use language?

What is the writer's tone of voice? Are there specific words that you find intriguing, effective, ineffective, or downright bizarre? Are there specific rhetorical "moves" being made, effectively or ineffectively?

4. How convincing is the writer's evidence?

Does it come from trustworthy and credible sources? Is it relevant? Does the writer interpret that evidence in a way that makes sense?

5. How convincing is the writer's overall argument?

Do you think the writer accomplishes what she set out to accomplish? Depending on the assignment, your answer to this question may be your thesis!