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ARGUMENTS

Argument: An attempt to convince, using reasons.

An argument consists of two parts:

- A **conclusion**, which is the sentence that the argument is arguing for, or that part of the argument that the arguer is trying to convince you of. The conclusion is always a claim.
- The **premises**. These are sentences that are supposed to support, lead to, provide evidence for, prove or convince that the conclusion is true. An argument is an attempt to convince someone (though not necessarily someone in particular) that a certain claim is true.

Example 1: Mr. Johnson's fingerprints, and only Mr. Johnson's fingerprints, were found at the crime scene. A knife was found on Mr. Johnson's person, and it matched the wounds on the victim, and contained traces of the victim's blood. Mr. Johnson's cellmate testified that Mr. Johnson confessed to the crime, and hidden cameras recorded this confession. Therefore, Mr. Johnson is guilty.

The last sentence is the **conclusion**. The other sentences are **premises**.

Example 2: When I left the house there was cake in the refrigerator. You're the only other person with a key to the house, and now the cake is gone. So you ate the cake.

Again, the last sentence is the **conclusion**, the others are **premises**.

Example 3: You should complete your college education. People who graduate from college not only earn, on average, more money than college dropouts, they also report much higher levels of satisfaction in life.

In this case, the first sentence is the **conclusion**, and the rest are **premises**. You should be able to note this because the other sentences give reasons that you should accept the first sentence. That is, they act as premises, or evidence, for the conclusion. Another way to see that this is the conclusion is to ask yourself: what is the person trying to convince me of? It's not "college graduates earn more money." He's telling me that without any evidence. But, if that's true, that's a reason to graduate from college. In other words, it's a premise. The premise is presented as evidence for the conclusion.

Indicator words

An argument can be thought of as premises that present evidence for a conclusion which is supported by the evidence.

In ordinary language, the following words often appear before a conclusion. We call them "**conclusion indicators**:"

Thus Therefore So In conclusion Implies that Hence Consequently Wherefore Indicates Entails It follows that It must be

The following terms act as **premise indicators**:

Since Because Given That Inasmuch as Insofar as For the reason that As

It's important to note that not all passages contain an argument. Newspaper reports are generally not arguments: they simply describe what happened. There is no one sentence that all the other sentences aim at. It's also the case that sometimes polemical writings that seem angry and pointed do not contain an argument, because they have no premise-conclusion relations.

For example, we might read the following in the paper:

The Illinois House wasted little time today in voting to impeach Gov. Rod Blagojevich, with just one representative in the 115-member chamber voting against the measure. It's the first time in Illinois history the governor has been impeached.

There's **no argument** there, just a report on what happened.

However, if the legislator has said, "Blagojevich is a stain on our state. I am ashamed of him. He makes a mockery of our electoral process. And he never even consulted the legislature before making his senate pick. Plus, I heard he cheats on his wife." That would not be an argument because there's no conclusion. Each sentence is an attack on Blagojevich, but they don't all give evidence for any one sentence in the set. It's an attack, but not an argument.