

# **EVALUATING ARGUMENTS**

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Dona Warren

UW – Stevens Point

## The Pedagogical Challenge

- Arguments can be difficult for students to evaluate because evaluating an argument involves asking targeted questions of different parts of the argument and because it can be difficult to correctly identify an argument's parts. As a result, students naturally fall back upon vague and general assessments of an argument, speak to irrelevant parts of the argument, or focus on relevant parts of the argument incorrectly.
- Graphically representing an argument (i.e. argument mapping) is an excellent way to help students correctly identify an argument's parts and ask the appropriate questions.
- It's unrealistic to expect students to master argument mapping in a class not devoted to mapping. Fortunately, the skills related to and developed by mapping are much more important than mapping itself.
- We can use mapping in class to help students develop these "mapping-related" skills without expecting students to map entire arguments on their own :
  1. We can present mapped arguments, or parts of arguments, for class discussion, asking the appropriate questions of each part.
  2. We can map arguments, or parts of arguments, with students, asking the appropriate questions of each part.
  3. We can teach students to evaluate arguments by internalizing a series of questions that help students to identify and evaluate the parts of an argument.

## Evaluating an Argument as You Encounter It

If there is a claim you disagree with, ask:

1. "Is that claim part of the argument?" If not, ignore it.

### General Principle:

We should address claims in the spirit that they're offered.

- If the claim is taken for granted, the argument is saying "Accept this," which means we can say, "I don't, and here's why."
- If the claim is supported by other claims, the argument is saying "I have convinced you of this," which we means we can say, "You haven't, and here's why."

This will result in tracing all objections to a premise or an inference.

## Evaluating an Argument as You Encounter It

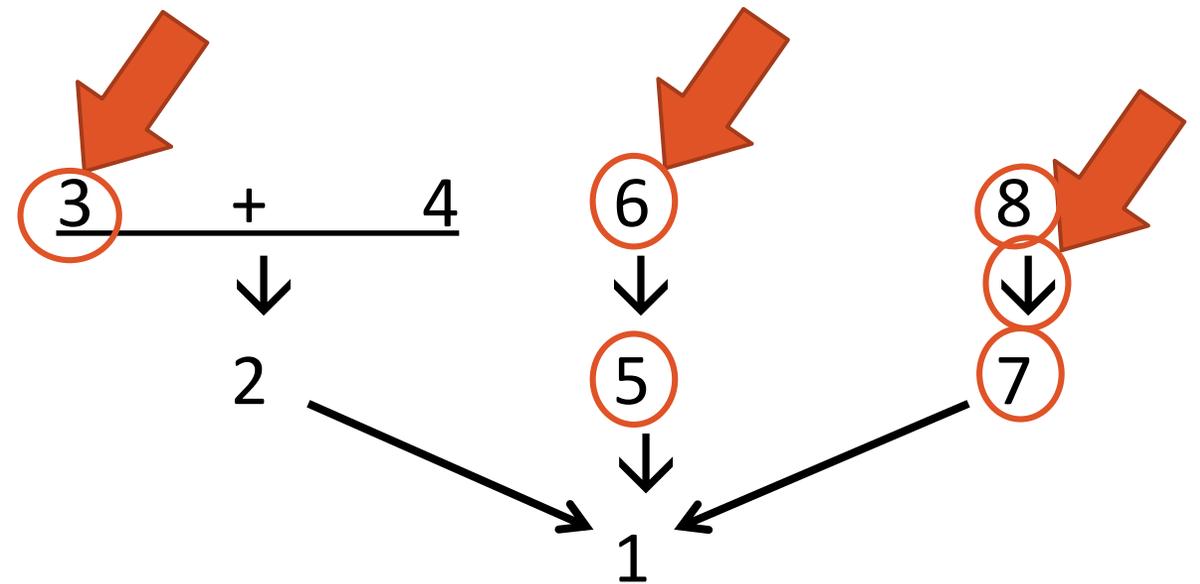
If there is a claim you disagree with, ask:

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2. "Is that claim taken for granted or is it supported by other claims?"
3. If the claim is taken for granted, ask
  - 3.1. "Is it true?"
    - Note: Be open to changing your mind about the claim by deciding, after reflection or investigation, that it's true.
  - 3.2. "Is it acceptable to the audience?"
4. If the claim is supported by other claims, ask
  - 4.1 "What reasons support the claim I disagree with?"
  - 4.2. "Do I agree with these reasons?"
    - If not, return to 2.
    - If so, there might be an inference problem. Identify the missing assumption and return to 3.

If there isn't a claim that you disagree with, ask:

1. "What claims are being taken for granted by this argument? Are they true? Are they acceptable to the audience?"
2. "What claims are taken to follow from those assumptions? Do they really follow?"

"1 is the case. For one thing, 2 because 3 and because 4. Additionally 5 because 6. Finally, 7 because 8."



## Communicating the Evaluation of an Argument

General Principle:

Knowing what's wrong with an argument and communicating that evaluation are two distinct skills.

## Evaluating an Argument as You Encounter It

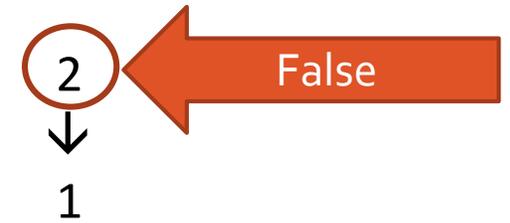
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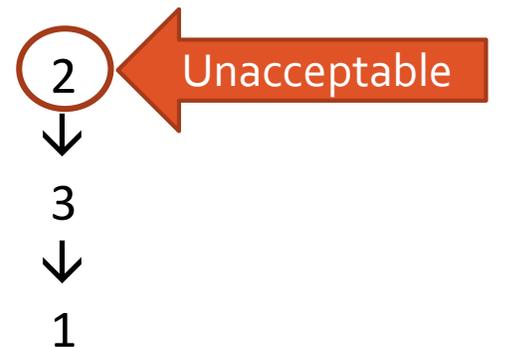
1) "2. Philosophy is a waste of time. Therefore, 1. philosophy has no place in a university curriculum."



2) "1. Anyone with a Ph.D. works in a philosophy department because 2. Ph.D.' means 'Doctor of Philosophy.'"



3) "1. I'm not hallucinating all the time. I know this because 2. other people usually indicate that they see and hear the same things that I do, which means that 3. the things that I seem to see and hear are really there."



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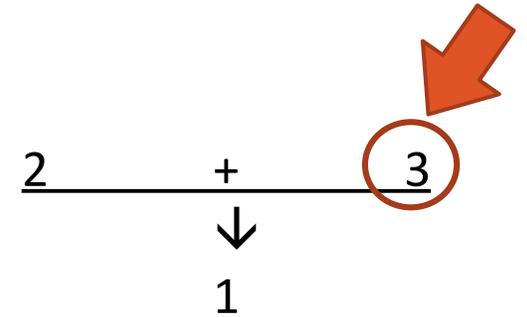
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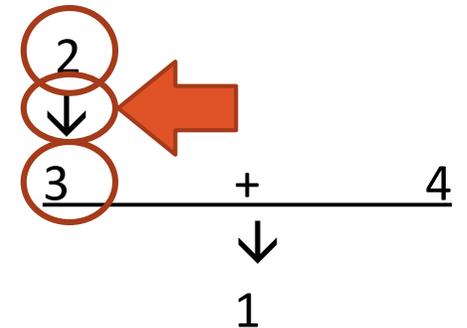
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4) "2. Eyes are composed of many individual parts working together. 3. Things composed of many individual parts working together were created by an intelligent a designer. Therefore 1. eyes were created by an intelligent designer."



5) "1. God doesn't exist. After all, 2. God is supposed to be all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good so 3. if God exists then there would be no suffering. Clearly, however, 4. there is suffering."



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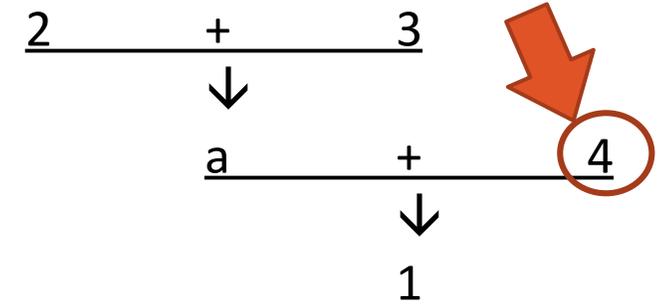
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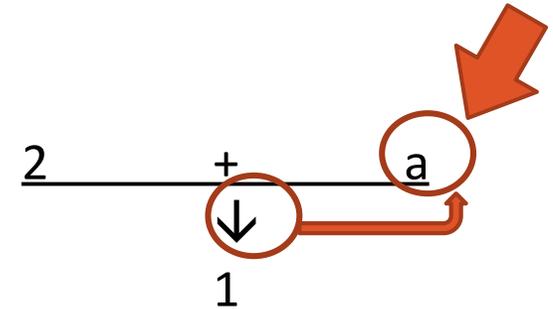
1. "What claims are being taken for granted by this argument? Are they true? Are they acceptable to the audience?"
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6) "2 Miracles are violations of the laws of nature. 3 We are never justified in believing that laws of nature are violated. And 4 belief in miracles is the only justification for belief in God. Consequently, 1 we aren't justified in believing in God."

7) "2 Belief in God will make us happier and healthier. Therefore, 1 we should believe in God."

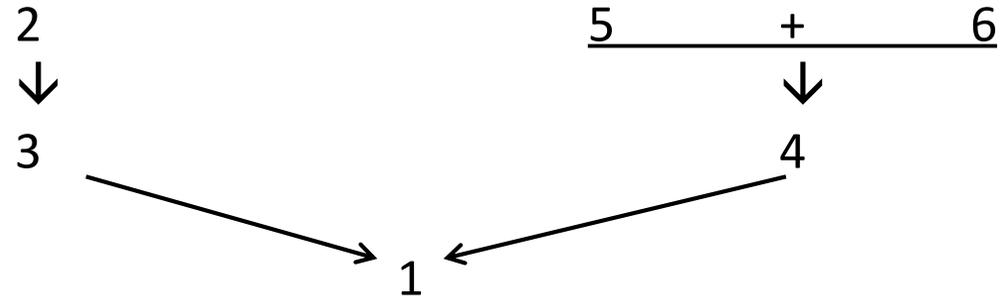


a = We are never justified in believe in miracles.

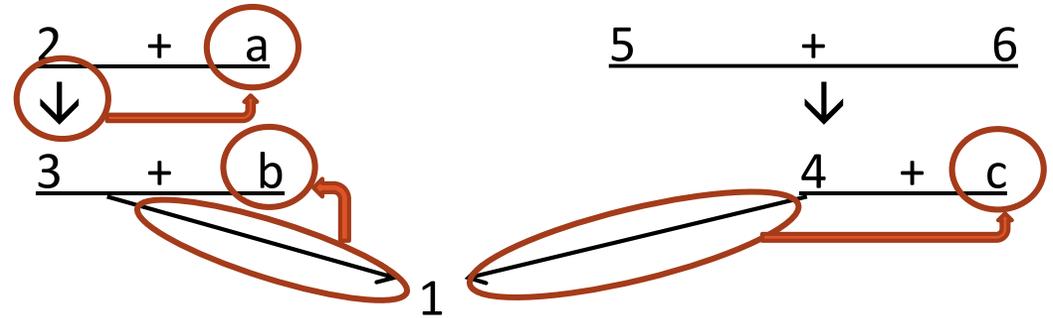


a = If (makes us happier and healthier) then (we should). = We should hold beliefs that make us happier and healthier.

8) "1. Stealing is morally wrong. For one thing, 2. we have laws on the books against stealing which means that 3. our culture thinks that stealing is morally wrong. For another thing, 4. stealing tends to produce unhappiness because 5. it involves taking people's property without their permission and because 6. people don't like to have their property taken away."



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a = If (law on books against) then  
 (culture thinks morally wrong).  
 a = If we have a law on the books  
 something then our culture  
 thinks that it's morally wrong.  
 a = We have laws against things  
 that we think are morally  
 wrong.

b = If (culture thinks morally  
 wrong) then (is morally wrong).  
 b = If our culture thinks that  
 something is morally wrong  
 then it is.  
 b = Our culture is the final arbiter  
 of morality.

c = If (produces unhappiness) then  
 (morally wrong).  
 c = If something produces  
 unhappiness then it's morally  
 wrong.  
 c = Whatever produces  
 unhappiness is morally wrong.

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## Communicating the Evaluation of an Argument

Premise Problem (where P is the premise)

If P is untrue, say something like

- “P is false because [evidence for P’s falsity].”

If P is unacceptable to the audience, say something like

- “People encountering this argument probably won’t accept P because [explain why P would be rejected by the audience].”

Inference Problem between R and C (where R is the reason and C is the conclusion)

If you do believe R, say something like:

- “Just because R it doesn’t follow that C because [explain how R can be true and C false at the same time or explain why the missing assumption is false].”

If you don’t believe R, say something like:

- “Even if R were true, it wouldn’t follow that C because [explain how R can be true and C false at the same time or explain why the missing assumption is false].”

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**Participants of Critical Thinking Faculty Exploration Group Meeting on 4/7/**

#	First Name:	Last Name:	Department:
1	Sarah Jane	Alger	Biology
2	Elia	Armacanqui-Tipacti	World languages and literatures
3	Tobias	Barske	World Languages & Literatures
4	Valerie	Barske	History and International Studies
5	Lindsay	Bernhagen	CITL
6	Agnes	Bolinska	Philosophy
7	Kym	Buchanan	Education
8	Chris	Cirmo	COLS
9	Dave	Dettman	Library
10	Jonah	Elrod	Music
11	Cary	Elza	Communication
12	Todd	Huspeni	Academic Affairs
13	Kathe	Julin	Interior Architecture
14	Mindy	King	Library
15	Mary Jae	Kleckner	Business & Economics
16	Cuiting	Li	HPHD
17	Nancy	LoPatin-Lummis	University College/History
18	Wade	Mahon	English
19	Elizabeth	Martin	Bus-Econ
20	Ismaila	Odogba	Geography & Geology
21	Jodi	Olmsted	SHCP
22	Justin	Rueb	Psychology
23	Thomas	Salek	Communication
24	Krista	Slemmons	Biology
25	Robin	Tanke	Chemistry
26	Pam	Terrell	CSD
27	Dona	Warren	Philosophy
28	Trish	Zdroik	Communication

*(as of 4/6/17)*