

## Presenting, Explaining and Evaluating Arguments

**Argument** – An argument is a series of sentences. One of the sentences is the conclusion of the argument. The other sentences are the arguments premises.

**Valid Argument** – An argument is valid if and only if it is impossible for all of the argument's premises to be true while the conclusion is false.

**Sound Argument** – An argument is sound if and only if the argument is valid and all of the argument's premises are true.

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To **Present** an argument (or **extract** an argument from a text), do the following.

- (a) Locate the conclusion of the argument and formulate it in clear, literal terminology.
  - (b) Locate the central premises from which the conclusion is derived, and state them in clear, literal terminology.
  - (c) Add suppressed premises so as to make the argument valid (if necessary).
  - (d) Write the entire argument in numbered premise-conclusion form.
- The resulting argument should be valid. It should have no idle premises (premises that are not needed to reach the conclusion).

Some words that indicate a premise in a text: 'because', 'for', 'since'.

Some words that indicate a conclusion in a text: 'so', 'therefore', 'thus', 'hence'.

To **Explain** an argument that you have extracted, do the following.

- (a) Define all the technical terms that appear in the argument.
- (b) Give reasons for each of the premises of the argument. (Do not give reasons for the conclusion.) In some cases, the author's text provides reasons to believe the premise. In other cases, you must provide reasons which would lead a reasonable person to accept the premise, preferably reasons that you think the author would accept and that are consistent with the other premises of the argument.

To **Evaluate** an argument that you have extracted and explained, do the following.

- (a) State whether the argument is sound.
- (b) If you think the argument is sound, defend the weakest premise from the best possible objection you can think of.
- (c) If you think the argument is unsound, present an argument to the weakest premise.

**Finally**

- (d) defend yourself from a counter-response.

OR

- (e) If you really can't think of a counter-response repeat step (b) or (c) – but I'd much rather have you do (d).