

Argument Forms

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1 Deductive argument forms

Form A: *reductio ad absurdum*

A1: Suppose that P is true.

A2: If P is true, then Q is true.

A3: But Q is crazy/absurd/false.

A4: Therefore, P is false.

Form B: *modus ponens*

B1: P is true.

B2: If P is true, then Q is true.

B3: Therefore, Q is true.

Form C: *modus tollens*

C1: If P is true, then Q is true.

C2: Q is false.

C3: Therefore, P is false.

Comments

1. Note that *reductio ad absurdum* is just a kind of *modus tollens*.
2. You can have multiple applications of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* in one argument. For instance, I could argue like this: (i) P ; (ii) if P , then Q ; (iii) if Q , then R ; (iv) if R , then S ; (v) therefore, S . That would be three applications of *modus ponens*. The same applies for *modus tollens*.

3. Oftentimes, unpacking an argument means finding all the intermediate conditional premises. The argument form given in the previous comment shows how intermediate conditionals may appear in full argument reconstructions.
4. *Modus ponens* is the form you want to use if you're trying to argue for something. *Modus tollens* is what you use if you want to argue against something.

2 Risky argument forms

Form D: argument by analogy

D1: x s are like y s.

D2: x s have some feature F .

D3: Therefore, y s have feature F .

Form E: argument to best explanation

E1: P is some fact everyone accepts.

E2: The competing explanations for P are A , B and C .

E3: A is the best explanation of P out of A , B and C .

E4: Therefore, A is true.

Comments

1. Remember, risky arguments are not valid. But that does not necessarily impugn their status as good arguments. Some risky arguments are good arguments.