Evaluating an Argument

0:00	**Owl:** Welcome to Evaluating an Argument, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.
0:13	Pretty much anything you read will contain one or more explicit or implicit arguments.
0:19	The ability to evaluate these arguments to determine their credibility involves analysis and critical thinking.
0:25	However, by evaluating what you read, you will have a much better understanding of what the text is trying to say and whether you agree with it.
0:34	In this video, we will cover three topics to help you evaluate what you read: the difference between facts and opinions, the difference between opinions and arguments, and common types of logical fallacies that may invalidate an argument.
0:52	After watching this video, be sure to visit the Online Reading Comprehension Lab of the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for additional videos and resources on how to analyze a text, such as How to Identify Writing Patterns and Evaluating and Author's Intent.
1:10	The books and articles you read are full of facts and opinion.
1:14	A fact is information that can be proven or disproven.
1:18	An example of a fact is the statement: 50% of politicians in the U.S. Congress are millionaires while only 1% of U.S. citizens are millionaires.
1:29	While a fact can be proven or disproven, an opinion cannot.
1:34	This is because an opinion is a claim made without any supporting facts or evidence to back it up.
1:41	An example of an opinion is:
1:43	Big government is horribly inefficient.
1:46	Although this statement might be true, there is no attempt to support it with facts or evidence, so it remains just an opinion.
1:54	Furthermore, it's not clear what exactly "big government" means.
1:59	Opinions rely on assumptions—unstated and unproven beliefs—to convey their point.
2:05	In this case, the statement assumes that people will know what "big government" means and agree that it is horribly inefficient.
2:14	When an opinion is supported with evidence, it becomes an argument.
2:19	To put it another way, an argument is a claim that is supported with evidence.
2:24	We can see the difference by comparing an opinion with an argument.
2:28	Let's take this example of an opinion:
2:31	The New York Yankees is the best team in the history of Major League Baseball.
2:36	This claim has no supporting evidence.
2:38	It relies on an assumption to prove its point.

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2:42	However, we can convert this claim into an argument by adding some evidence to support it:
2:48	The New York Yankees is the best team in the history of Major League Baseball because it has won more World Series titles than any other team.
2:57	The difference between the two statements is that the first example only provides a claim, while the second example provides some evidence to support the claim.
3:07	Not all arguments are created equal.
3:10	Some arguments are better supported than others.
3:13	When evaluating an argument, think about how compelling the evidence is.
3:18	Is it relevant?
3:19	Is it persuasive?
3:21	Is it logical?
3:23	Sometimes, an argument is poorly supported because it is based on a logical fallacy.
3:29	A logical fallacy is an error in reasoning based on poor or faulty logic.
3:35	There are many types of logical fallacies.
3:38	Let's go over the most common ones.
3:41	The Straw Man Fallacy involves taking someone's argument and distorting or exaggerating it, then attacking the distortion as if it were the original claim.
3:51	Here's an example:
3:52	Person 1: I think pollution from humans contributes to climate change.
3:57	Person 2: So, you think humans are directly responsible for extreme weather, like hurricanes, and have caused the droughts in the southwestern U.S.? If that's the case, maybe we just need to go to the southwest and perform a "rain dance."
4:13	The False Dilemma Fallacy involves presenting only two options or sides when there are many options or sides.
4:21	Here's an example:
4:22	Person 1: You're either for the war or against the troops.
4:27	Person 2: Actually, I do not want our troops sent into a dangerous war.
4:34	The Hasty Generalization Fallacy involves making a claim based on evidence that is too small.
4:41	Here's an example:
4:42	Some teenagers in our community recently vandalized the park downtown. Teenagers are so irresponsible and destructive.
4:51	The Appeal to Fear Fallacy involves appealing to people's fears by presenting a scary future if a certain decision is made today.
5:00	Here's an example:
5:01	Elizabeth Smith doesn't understand foreign policy. If you elect Elizabeth Smith as president, we will be attacked by terrorists.
5:11	Ad hominem means "against the man."

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Time	Text
5:14	Hence, the Ad Hominem Fallacy occurs when someone attacks the person instead of his or her argument.
5:21	Here's an example:
5:23	Person 1: I am for raising the minimum wage in our state.
5:28	Person 2: She is for raising the minimum wage, but she is not smart enough to even run a business.
5:35	The Slippery Slope Fallacy involves claiming that an action or decision will lead to other terrible events that build up to an awful conclusion.
5:45	Here's an example:
5:46	If we enact any kind of gun control laws, the next thing you know, we won't be allowed to have any guns at all. When that happens, we won't be able to defend ourselves against terrorist attacks, and when that happens terrorists will take over our country. Therefore, gun control laws will cause us to lose our country to terrorists.
6:07	The Bandwagon Fallacy involves convincing people to do or think something because everyone else does.
6:15	Here's an example:
6:16	Everyone is going to get the new smart phone when it comes out this weekend. Why aren't you?
6:23	The Guilt by Association Fallacy involves connecting an opponent to a demonized group or bad person in order to discredit his or her argument.
6:33	Here's an example:
6:34	We cannot have the educational reform that my opponent calls for because Dr. Crazy has also mentioned this kind of educational reform.
6:45	Visit the Online Writing Lab for more information about logical fallacies.
6:51	Analyzing a text can be difficult.
6:54	However, by applying the information on how to evaluate an argument shared in this video, you'll be able to tell the difference between a strong argument and a weak or flawed one.
7:06	Remember to visit the Online Reading Comprehension Lab of the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for additional videos and resources on how to analyze a text.
7:18	Thanks for listening to this instructional video on Evaluating an Argument!
7:23	Visit the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for more support with reading and writing skills.

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Appendix

Logical Fallacy	Explanation	Example
Straw Man Fallacy	Taking someone's argument and distorting or exaggerating it, then attacking the distortion as if it were the original claim.	**Person 1:** I think pollution from humans contributes to climate change. **Person 2:** So, you think humans are directly responsible for extreme weather, like hurricanes, and have caused the droughts in the southwestern U.S.? If that's the case, maybe we just need to go to the southwest and perform a "rain dance."
False Dilemma Fallacy	Presenting only two options or sides when there are many options or sides.	**Person 1:** You're either for the war or against the troops. **Person 2:** Actually, I do not want our troops sent into a dangerous war.
Hasty Generalization Fallacy	Making a claim based on evidence that is too small.	Some teenagers in our community recently vandalized the park downtown. Teenagers are so irresponsible and destructive.
Appeal to Fear Fallacy	Appealing to people's fears by presenting a scary future if a certain decision is made today.	Elizabeth Smith doesn't understand foreign policy. If you elect Elizabeth Smith as president, we will be attacked by terrorists.
Ad Hominem Fallacy	Ad hominem means "against the man." This fallacy occurs when someone attacks the person instead of his or her argument.	**Person 1:** I am for raising the minimum wage in our state. **Person 2:** She is for raising the minimum wage, but she is not smart enough to even run a business.
Slippery Slope Fallacy	Claiming that an action or decision will lead to other terrible events that build up to an awful conclusion.	If we enact any kind of gun control laws, the next thing you know, we won't be allowed to have any guns at all. When that happens, we won't be able to defend ourselves against terrorist attacks, and when that happens terrorists will take over our country. Therefore, gun control laws will cause us to lose our country to terrorists.
Bandwagon Fallacy	Convincing people to do or think something because everyone else does.	Everyone is going to get the new smart phone when it comes out this weekend. Why aren't you?
Guilt by Association Fallacy	Connecting an opponent to a demonized group or bad person in order to discredit his or her argument.	We cannot have the educational reform that my opponent calls for because Dr. Crazy has also mentioned this kind of educational reform.

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