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Critical reasoning: Reading 5

OER University

The aim of this course is to provide an opportunity to acquire critical thinking tools to critically analyse and evaluate knowledge claims. These tools are crucial to making informed decisions in study, work and private situations. Reading 5 explores the use of arguments in different kinds of writing. This Reading also contains a Bibliography and Glossary for the course as a whole.



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TOPIC 5: The use of arguments in different kinds of writing

If you actively participate in the learning opportunities provided in Topic 5, you will acquire the competence to:

- distinguish between different kinds of writing
- understand and follow generally accepted guidelines for constructing arguments when writing argumentative essays
- understand that a critical evaluation of the ideas and beliefs of other people requires a critical attitude of self-reflection and critical evaluation of our own biases, misconceptions and preconceived ideas.

5.1 Different kinds of writing

By now you should have a clear idea of how to analyse and evaluate the arguments of others. But this is only one aspect of your task as a critical reasoner. A second, and equally important task, is the construction of arguments — that is, the construction and defence of a philosophical argument of your own. Obviously, you should expect your own argument to meet the requirements that you demand of any other argument. Your argument must be coherently stated and its premises must supply sufficient and relevant reasons for the conclusion to be accepted.

Because critical reasoning is about arguments and argumentation, its primary focus is argumentative writing. However, it would be a mistake to think that argumentative writing is the only kind of writing. There is nothing new in telling you that writing can exist in different forms. Most likely we have all composed both a grocery list and a love letter at some point in our lives already, so we needn't tell you the obvious. There is also descriptive writing, comparative writing and narrative writing. Although we are concerned only with argumentative writing in critical reasoning, we should know about other kinds of writing, because this will help us to better understand what argumentative writing entails.

Activity 1

In order to help you to begin to think about the issues we need to address, write down answers to the questions following below in your journal before you read any further:

- (1) Why do students write?
 - (2) What are the different kinds of writing which, up to now, you have been asked to use in the school or university environment?
 - (3) Why is it necessary to have different kinds of writing?
 - (4) What do different kinds of writing have to do with philosophy?
-

Please do not take this exercise lightly. Remember that, through journal writing, you write in order to understand yourself better:

In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself to understand himself ... (Alfred Kazin)

Feedback

Why do students write? Easy, most students would say, “Because we have to.” Honest, perhaps, but discouraging. It makes writing seem pretty trivial. How about another go? Here’s a likely second answer: “To show what we know.” Hmm, we’re not sure we like that much better. Isn’t there something more positive we can say about writing?

Yes, there is. The best reason to write is the best reason to do anything: because it helps you grow and develop your potential. Writing is a terrific way to learn. When you write you discover whether you really understand something, or just think you do; and the very process of writing makes you think, and think hard.

The process of writing pushes students toward the true goals of higher education: critical thinking, creativity, analysis, synthesis, and informed judgment. Therefore, writing is primarily about learning, not showing off what you already know. If writing an essay teaches you nothing, the assignment has been a failure. One common way to categorise writing is to distinguish between **expressive** and **communicative** writing.

5.1.1 Expressive writing

Expressive writing is personal and informal, written to encourage comprehension and reflection on the part of the writer. Open-ended and creative, expressive writing is a good way to start learning about a topic. By contrast, communicative writing is analytical, formal and more or less impersonal. It presupposes that the writer already has considerable knowledge and understanding of the topic and is writing to inform a reader. It demands adherence to established conventions of tone, voice, diction, evidence, and citation; these conventions will vary according to discipline and type (e.g., laboratory report, history paper, business plan, legal brief).

Writing as learning begins with expressive writing. Consider what it’s like when you’re first learning about a topic. Everything is unfamiliar. It’s like being in a strange land where not only the terrain but even the signs and maps are unfamiliar, and the words themselves are foreign. That’s the situation students find themselves in when they begin studying a field like history or anthropology or biology or business. Expressive writing gives students an opportunity to start to make sense of the world they find themselves in, to bring the myriad facts, definitions, rules, theories, and perspectives to life and impose some order on them.

There are many different kinds of expressive writing: one kind used in this course is journals.

5.1.2 Journals

Many educators rely on journals (also known as learning logs, idea notebooks, laboratory journals, or commonplace books) to encourage student thinking. Journals give students the chance to reflect on what they’re studying, to record thoughts, questions, ideas, hunches, or seemingly stray tangents.

Journals are easy to fit into any course – five or ten minutes of journal writing once or twice a week can be enough to keep a journal going (and spark better understanding of what you know and do not know). Even if a lecturer doesn’t require journals, you should consider keeping one. It can help you keep track of ideas you may wish to develop later on.

5.1.3 Communicative writing

With communicative writing, logic and argumentation count a great deal. Communicative writing includes essays, final papers, laboratory reports, hand-outs accompanying student presentations, senior theses, and the like. Outside the classroom, communicative writing includes reports, plans, official documents of all sorts, letters of application, and so on. What all these kinds of writing have in common is the great weight they place on logic. University assignments like essays or laboratory reports give students practice in writing for others according to a strict format and fixed conventions. Writing assignments trains students to turn personal observations into impersonal prose, avoid value judgments unwelcome in the sciences, and write with economy and precision.

Other kinds of writing include:

- descriptive writing
- comparative and contrast writing
- narrative writing
- argumentative writing.

These kinds of writing can largely be classified as communicative writing. Go on line to learn the distinction between these kinds of writing and then attempt the following activity:

Activity 2

Read the following passages and identify the kind of writing in each text. In each case, we will provide you with some background on the quoted text so that you have a context in which you could make sense of the passage and identify the kind of writing apparent in the text.

The following text was taken from a book on social psychology, dealing with social influence, attitude change, group processes and prejudice. TM Newcomb was a social psychologist, who conducted a study of student attitudes at Bennington College in Vermont. Vermont is one of the six New England states in America. Newcomb's study reports the impact the college environment had on student attitudes (Collins 1970:75):

(1)

“Newcomb chose to focus on changes in political and economic attitudes brought about by the Bennington experience. This was a topic of some concern to the community in general and provided an excellent opportunity to study the impact of the community on individual members. He found that the college community did indeed have a marked impact on students' attitudes. The generally liberal atmosphere resulted in a definite decrease in conservatism as the girls went from their freshman to their senior year. The senior class was more liberal than the freshman class; the attitudes of the students became more liberal each year they spent at Bennington. Newcomb's study, with this finding alone, provided an important starting point for the study of social attitudes, since it showed that attitudes can be modified as a result of social experience. Newcomb was also able to give us some insight into the specific mechanisms by which the values of the college community were internalised into individual attitudes.”

The text that follows was taken from a book written by Ursula LeGuin. Le-Guin is well-known for her poetry and science fiction writings. This text was taken from her book, *The left-hand of darkness* (LeGuin 1992:170):

(2)

“How the devil can I believe anything you say!” he burst out. Bodily weakness made his indignation sound aggrieved and whining. “If all this is true, you might have explained some of it earlier, last spring, and spared us both a trip to Pulefen. Your efforts on my behalf —”

“Have failed. And have put you in pain, and shame, and danger. I know it. But if I had tried to fight Tibe for your sake, you would not be here now, you’d be in a grave in Erhenrang. And there are now a few people in Karhide, and a few in Orgoreyn, who believe your story, because they listened to me. They may yet serve you. My greatest error was, as you say, in not making myself clear to you. I am not used to doing so. I am not used to giving, or accepting, either advice or blame.”

“I don’t mean to be unjust, Estraven —”

“Yet you are. It is strange. I am the only man in all Gethen that has trusted you entirely, and I am the only man in Gethen that you have refused to trust.”

We have constructed the next below to serve as an example of a particular kind of writing. It is up to you to identify what kind of writing this is:

(3)

Concerns about human rights presently fall into two schools: liberal and communitarian. Liberals base the notion of human rights on the democratic basis of basic civil and political rights of all citizens as **individuals** and insist that, since the individual’s interests can easily be threatened, all citizens should be protected against the oppression of the state and against collective authoritarianism. In contrast to the liberal perspective, communitarians argue that the **community**, rather than the individual, the state, or the nation, is the ultimate originator of values and, in their analysis of human rights, group or communal rights, rather than individual rights, are emphasised.

The following text was taken from a book written by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) was a French philosopher and contemporary of Jean-Paul Sartre, the well-known existentialist philosopher. Merleau-Ponty wrote numerous books on phenomenology and perception. The text below is taken from his book, *Signs* (Merleau-Ponty 1964:109):

(4)

“Since we are all hemmed in by history, it is up to us to understand that whatever truth we may have is to be gotten not in spite of, but through, our historical inherence. Superficially considered, our inherence destroys all truth; considered radically, it finds a new idea of truth. As long as I cling to the ideal of an absolute spectator, of knowledge with no point of view, I can see my situation as nothing but a source of error. But if I have once recognized that through it I am grafted onto every action and all knowledge which can have meaning for me, and that step by step it contains everything which can *exist* for me, then my contact with the social in the finitude of my situation is revealed to me as the point of origin of all truth.”

Feedback

- (1) This text is an example of **descriptive writing**. The author describes the impact of the community on individuals' attitudes. Note that the author is not telling a story, comparing phenomena, or engaging in an argument.
- (2) This kind of writing is **narrative writing**. Note that the text does not argue for or against a particular point of view. Rather, the text aims at unfolding a story.
- (3) This kind of writing is **comparative writing**. Here the author compares two different approaches to human rights: liberal and communitarian.
- (4) This text is an example of argumentative writing. It argues about the philosophical problem of absolute truth versus subjective truth.

You should now have a basic idea of what the various kinds of writing entail. Let us look for an opportunity to practise this basic competence by doing the following activity.

Activity 3

This activity could be done in a public or private library or online. Identify and collect a range of hardcopy or digital versions of magazines newspapers and books. Select an example of each of the following different kinds of writing: descriptive writing, narrative writing, comparative writing, and argumentative writing.

You may need to consult a variety of books, dealing with different topics, such as philosophical problems, psychology, law, history, and fiction. But in the end you should have selected only four different passages, each of them representing a particular kind of writing. Now make a collage of these four passages by making photocopies of them and pasting the photocopied passages in your hardcopy journal or by scanning copies into your digital journal. Mark each of them according to the appropriate type of writing and add a full reference for the source of each example.

5.2 Writing argumentative essays

Good critical essays cannot be plucked out of the sky. They depend on a good knowledge of the issues and arguments dealt with in a particular topic. A good starting point when writing critical or argumentative essays is to apply the experience and competence you have gained from your critical reasoning studies. A careful reading of the suggested resources and other philosophy texts will give you a good idea of how to write argumentative essays. Don't worry if you have difficulty in understanding some of what you read. It is not easy to reach a full understanding of a complex philosophical text on an issue which has puzzled minds much greater than yours and mine. So you should not expect to understand such a text before you have read through it several times. All we expect is that you offer a reasonable interpretation. Keep in mind that the more you read, the easier you will find it to understand these texts.

Earlier on we have said that critical reasoning is concerned about argumentative writing. The aim of this section, then, is to introduce you to some key features of argumentative writing. This should enable you to start writing argumentative essays within the framework of an acceptable structure. As you become more skilled, you may want to change this method and organise your arguments

differently. Until then, this method is useful to get you going and, by using it, you can be confident that you have adopted a sound approach.

When writing argumentative essays, we should keep the following key points in mind:

- Clearly state the thesis that you intend to defend in your essay.
- Analyse and explain the problem the thesis deals with.
- Use research material, documentation and referencing.
- Provide sufficient and relevant reasons to support the thesis.
- Define the key concepts used in your arguments.
- Consider/anticipate possible opposition (counterarguments) to the thesis.
- Reply to possible opposition.
- Use appropriate language and structure.

Below is a brief guide to writing argumentative essays. These hints will probably dovetail well with the key aspects of argumentative essay writing that you will explore in the suggested resources. Consider these hints together with the key aspects and do the activity that follows (Jordan-Henley 1988).

A Brief Guide to Writing Argumentative Essays

Jennifer Jordan-Henley

The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if one simply has an opinion, one can argue it effectively, and these folks are always surprised when others don't agree with them because their logic seems so correct. Additionally, writers of argumentation often forget that their primary purpose in an argument is to "win" it — to sway the reader to accept their point of view. It is easy to name call, easy to ignore the point of view or research of others, and extremely easy to accept one's own opinion as gospel, even if the writer has not checked his or her premise in a couple of years, or, as is the case for many young writers, never questioned the beliefs inherited from others.

Want to know what you think about something? Then write an argumentative essay. To be fair, however, you'll find that one of the first things you must do is become an expert on the issue. When you pick a topic, you should avoid writing about issues that cannot be won, no matter how strongly you might feel about them. The five hottest topics of our time seem to be gun control, abortion, capital punishment, freedom of speech, and probably the most recent, euthanasia, or the right to die. If possible, avoid writing about these topics because they are either impossible to "win," or because your instructor is probably sick of reading about them and knows all the pros and cons by heart (this could put you at a serious disadvantage). The topics may be fine reading material, however, because most people are somewhat aware of the problems and can then concentrate on understanding the method of argument itself. But care should be taken that if you read one side, you also read the other. Far too many individuals only read the side that they already believe in. These issues cannot be won for good reason: each touches on matters of faith and beliefs that for many people are unshakable and deeply private.

Features

1. So, what do you write about? Pick a welldefined, controversial issue. (Spend some time with the latest copies of several news magazines, watch 60 minutes, or listen to National public Radio to generate ideas.) Readers should understand what the issue is and what is at

stake. The issue must be arguable, as noted above. After stating your thesis, you will need to discuss the issue in depth so that your reader will understand the problem fully.

2. A clear position taken by the writer. In your thesis sentence, state what your position is. You do not need to say: "I believe that we should financially support the space station." using the first person weakens your argument. Say "funding for the space station is imperative to maintain America's competitive edge in the global economy." The thesis can be modified elsewhere in the essay if you need to qualify your position, but avoid hedging in your thesis.
3. A convincing argument. An argumentative essay does not merely assert an opinion; it presents an argument, and that argument must be backed up by data that persuades readers that the opinion is valid. This data consists of facts, statistics, the testimony of others through personal interviews and questionnaires or through articles and books, and examples. The writer of an argumentative essay should seek to use educated sources that are nonbiased, and to use them fairly. It is therefore best to avoid using hate groups as a source, although you can use them briefly as an example of the seriousness of the problem. Talk shows fall into the same category as they are frequently opinionated or untrue.
4. A reasonable tone. Assume that your reader will disagree with you or be skeptical. It is important, therefore, that your tone be reasonable, professional, and trustworthy. By anticipating objections and making concessions, you inspire confidence and show your good will.

Activity 4

Write an argumentative essay on a topic of your own choice by applying the key rules of writing argumentative essays. Your essay need not be longer than 2 000 words. WE will give you examples of argumentative themes but the choice of topic is entirely yours. Have fun and enjoy writing in order to understand yourself better!

- (1) When, in your opinion, is euthanasia legally and morally acceptable?
- (2) Do you think cloning human beings should be allowed? Why? Why not?
- (3) Give an informed opinion on the looming threat of bioterrorism.
- (4) Is affirmative action, according to you, justifiable? Give reasons for your answer.
- (5) Express an informed opinion on the moral permissibility of the death penalty.
- (6) What is your opinion on human trafficking?
- (7) Give an informed opinion on the issue of xenophobia.

Feedback

When we write an argumentative essay, we should consider the following points:

- (1) Explain the relevant problem/claim and say what it entails; then state the position you are going to defend (your thesis).
- (2) Argue your claim, by giving acceptable and adequate reasons for your standpoint.
- (3) Your discussion must be relevant. Make sure that you discuss the issues raised in the premises.
- (4) Illustrate and clarify the points you are making by giving examples.
- (5) Always consider the opposite viewpoint and discuss one or two possible counterarguments to your position.

- (6) Always include a bibliography, listing the sources that you have consulted and referred to in your essay.

Let us put some of these guidelines into practice and write brief notes on an argument that deals with abortion.

Let us say our thesis is the following:

The practice of abortion is morally permissible when the mother's life is endangered by continued pregnancy.

One **argument** we might use here is that, since everyone has a right to self-defence and even the right to kill someone when this is the only way to save oneself, therefore a mother has the right to **defend** herself against a foetus whose continued existence clearly and unambiguously threatens her life. Here there is an appeal to a general principle that "everyone has a right to self-defence." We might defend this by showing through examples how the principle fits in with what we take to be **reasonable**. For instance, could we morally blame someone who defended herself from a lethal attack from a man wielding a knife if she deliberately pushed her attacker over a cliff and this was the only way to save herself? Surely not. We may then go on to claim that a mother who requests an abortion when continued pregnancy is a clear danger to her life is doing nothing more than the victim in this example and, by parity of the same kind of reasoning, we should attach no moral blame to such actions. We may offer **further arguments** claiming that, since a foetus is not yet, properly speaking, a person (perhaps only a potential person), the rights of a mother (who is a person) should take precedence over the less important rights of the foetus. Here we would have to defend our **definition** of "person," and show how being a person makes one a rights-bearer, and how some rights are more important than other rights. Our definition of a person may assume some factual claims about human abilities, such as the ability to reason and communicate, and these assumptions would have to be articulated and defended.

In general, whatever arguments we use, all the points that we made in the preceding topics (on awareness of fallacious reasoning and avoidance of fallacies, and on argument analysis and evaluation) should guide us in our defence of our thesis.

We should take care never to simply make an assertion but always back it up with reasons which we ourselves would accept as appropriate and well founded.

When we write an argumentative essay, our opinions carry more weight if we look at both sides of the issue. In other words, we acknowledge our opponents' views but try to convince the reader that our own argument is stronger.

Our essay would be extremely dull if we used the words "supporters" and "opponents" all the way through. Similarly, it would be unimpressive if we only used the verb "say" to refer to people's opinions. The tables below contain lists of useful alternatives. Study them and then do the gap-fill task that follows.

+	-
supporters	Opponents
proponents	opponents
those in favour of ...	those opposed to ...
defenders of ...	critics of ...
advocates of ...	objectors
pro-... (eg <i>pro-abortionists</i>)	anti-... (eg <i>anti-abortionists</i>)

	Alternative words
say that ...	argue claim maintain assert contend allege insist contend suggest point out

Activity 5

(1)

Complete the text below using words/phrases from the tables above. (Solid lines relate to the first table; dotted lines relate to the second):

_____ of TV that it exposes us to too much violence and, as a result, we become less sensitive to real-life violence. They also that schoolchildren neglect homework and have problems concentrating in class as a result of spending too much time glued to the box. Finally, _____ that television has turned many of us into overweight, unfit “couch potatoes”.

_____, on the other hand, that it is a blessing for lonely, elderly or housebound people. Furthermore, they, it does not simply entertain; it can be very educational as well. Another argument _____ of TV is that it sometimes plays an important role in fundraising for disaster relief and various charities. For example, the “Live Aid” rock concert in 1984 raised millions of pounds for victims of the Ethiopian famine.

(2)

Choose another controversial issue (eg school violence, hijacking, school uniforms, meat eating, the use of animals in medical research, single sex schools, etc). Write some sentences that express the views of people on both sides of the argument. Aim for variety in your choice of language.

5.3 The philosophical attitude

In all the sections of this course, you have been doing (or practising) philosophy. But what does it mean to “do philosophy”? It is not easy (perhaps not even desirable) to give a definition of philosophy. So, it is equally difficult to say exactly what we are doing when we engage in philosophical reasoning. Although it would be convenient to have a recipe, it would be contrary to the spirit of philosophical enterprise — which demands a critical and open attitude toward the ideas and beliefs of other people; a critical attitude and evaluation of our own beliefs and assumptions; and a critical, open attitude toward philosophy itself.

In the following few paragraphs we discuss some of the key features of a philosophical attitude to questions and problems. There is no recipe here: merely a few essential ingredients.

- (1) Philosophers have an absolute regard for **clear and rigorous reasoning** and the clear and rigorous use of language.

Clarity in thought and language leaves few hiding places for prejudice and distortion. Clarity is therefore essential if we are to achieve an acceptable understanding of the fundamental questions which puzzle us and if we are to obtain the likely answers to these questions. This is not to say that philosophical writings are easy to understand (they seldom are), but rather that the difficult and complex concepts and arguments employed should be articulated in a way which is precise and exact.

- (2) The philosophical attitude requires **tolerance** of the opinions, thoughts, attitudes and arguments of others.

Philosophers should be swayed only by the cogency of an argument, not by preconceived ideas and prejudices. This calls for an openness to other viewpoints, however unpalatable these views may seem to us at first. This does not mean that a philosopher may not strongly and forcibly advocate a particular position (the best philosophers always do). What it does mean is that a philosopher’s advocacy stands on a reasoned conviction that his or her arguments are sound, together with an openness to the possibility that he or she is mistaken.

Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it on something solid. (GK Chesterton)

- (3) The philosophical attitude is a **critical** one.

The questions philosophers ask are important and they are aimed at the foundations of our thought about the world and our place in it. A **critical attitude** takes nothing as “given”. This may appear to the outsider as “nitpicking”, but there is no surer way of being led astray in thought than simply to assume that something is true. To allow one’s mind to glide over uncomfortable and difficult issues is the opposite of the philosophical attitude. However, having a critical approach does not mean that we argue merely for argument’s sake. Philosophers treat their questions seriously and treat arguments with respect.

- (4) Finally, a philosophical attitude demands **imagination**.

The best philosophy invites us to look at our world in fresh and new ways. This requires an imaginative approach. To have an imaginative approach means to be creative about other possibilities, to imagine alternative scenarios and consider different options.

Activity 6

Turn back to Topic 1 and reflect critically on the following:

At the beginning of this course, we said that the aim of this course is to equip you with the necessary critical thinking tools to critically analyse and evaluate knowledge claims and provide you with the skills to develop a critical attitude towards cultural stereotypes, biases and preconceived ideas. We also said that these tools are vitally important for making informed, rational and responsible decisions so that, when you are faced with ethical dilemmas in your professional or even private lives, you will have the tools that will enable you to make the appropriate choice.

Now take your journal and write reflective answers to the following questions:

- (1) What did you gain from your studies in critical reasoning?
 - (2) How did critical reasoning help you to make responsible decisions and to justify choices in difficult situations you encountered in your work environment, your home life and interaction with your community?
 - (3) Did critical reasoning assist you with your studies of other disciplines, such as Psychology, History, English, Political Science and Health Care?
 - (4) What, according to you, does it mean to think critically about the world?
-

Feedback

The point of this exercise is to make you aware that our worldviews colour our perception of the world, other people and ourselves. People differ in their approach and views on issues because they see things differently. That is, their understanding and interpretation of issues differ. The way a person sees things is fundamentally influenced by his or her worldview. A worldview is the comprehensive framework of a person's basic beliefs about gender, race, religion, life and death, the meaning of human life, and so on. In turn, these beliefs influence our values, attitudes, assumptions and emotional experiences. Fortunately, our worldviews are not static but they change as we go through life, encountering a variety of experiences. Reflecting on your own thinking about these issues might give you the opportunity to "dig a little deeper" to uncover your framework of basic beliefs and see how these beliefs influence your attitude and behaviour. A further point of this exercise is to share with you the idea that a critical attitude calls for an openness (which is not the same as blind acceptance) to the viewpoints of other people.

Conclusion

In this course we have invited you to explore the path of critical self-reflection and self-discovery. If you have taken your role as "initiate" seriously by actively participating in the "initiation process" and you have worked conscientiously, you will have acquired the competence and experience to reflect on your own thinking, to develop a critical attitude towards all kind of stereotypes, biases and

fallacies in reasoning, to analyse and evaluate different kinds of arguments, and to construct your own critical arguments.

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Glossary: English

NOTE

In the original South African version of this course, glossaries are provided also in Afrikaans, Zulu and N Sotho.

Ad hominem argument. An attack on the character, interests or circumstances of an opponent who is making a claim rather than challenging the claim itself.

Affirming the consequent fallacy. This fallacy is committed when the consequent in a conditional statement is affirmed and the antecedent is taken to be true on these grounds.

Analogy. Reasoning by analogy is based on comparison with similar cases. An argument based on analogy only succeeds when the similarities between the cases or entities are relevant.

Analysing arguments. The process of dismantling arguments in order to identify their premises and conclusions.

Antecedent. An antecedent is the condition that is claimed to lead to a certain effect (also called the “consequent”).

Appeal to force fallacy. This fallacy occurs when an arguer appeals to the threat of force or coercion to persuade an opponent to accept a point.

Appeal to the masses. Fallacious reasoning based on mass sentiment, popular feelings, or nationalism, rather than offering good reasons for accepting a conclusion.

Argument. An argument is a group of statements, one of which is called the conclusion, whose truth or acceptability the argument is intended to establish. The other statements are called premises, which are supposed to support the conclusion.

Argumentative writing. Argumentative writing argues for or against a particular point of view. It is concerned with arguments and the point of an argument is to convince the reader or the audience that a claim is true or acceptable.

Begging the question fallacy. This fallacy occurs when what is supposedly proved by the conclusion of an argument is already assumed to be true in the premises.

Cause-and-effect reasoning. A kind of inductive argument in which it is argued that a particular event or effect occurs on the basis of specific antecedent conditions or causal factors.

Comparative writing. A kind of writing that compares or contrasts two or more things, events or viewpoints by focusing on similarities and differences.

Complex question fallacy. This fallacy occurs when two or more questions are disguised as one question and it demands a “yes” or “no” answer.

Conclusion. The main claim in an argument that the premises are intended to prove.

Conclusion indicator. A signal word or phrase that precedes a conclusion.

Consequent. A consequent is what is said to follow if the antecedent condition is assumed true.

Counterargument. This is an argument an arguer formulates in answer to another argument.

Counterexample. A counterexample is a specific example which defeats or runs counter to the claim made in an argument.

Critical reasoning. Critical reasoning involves the ability to actively and skilfully conceptualise, analyse, question and evaluate ideas and beliefs.

Critical self-reflection. Critical self-reflection is an act of examining one's own thoughts and beliefs; related to self-knowledge and self-awareness.

Critical thinking. Synonym for "critical reasoning".

Deductive argument. An argument in which the premises are claimed to give sufficient support for the conclusion to follow.

Denying the antecedent fallacy. This type of fallacy occurs when someone argues that because the antecedent doesn't happen, the consequent cannot happen.

Descriptive writing. A kind of writing that describes something or gives information about state of affairs or events.

Distraction fallacies. These fallacies occur when attention is distracted from the weak point of an argument.

Emotion fallacies. These fallacies confuse emotion with reason.

Empirical argument. An argument in which the premises assert that some empirically determinable facts apply.

Equivocation. The fallacy of equivocation occurs when a word or phrase is used in one sense in one part of an argument and in a different sense in another part of the same argument.

Evaluating arguments. The process of critically examining the plausibility of claims advanced in an argument; critically considering assumptions; and weighing possible solutions to issues.

Fallacy. A fallacy is a deceptive argument that tries to persuade us to accept the claim that is being advanced, but the reasons in support of the claim are irrelevant or inappropriate.

False appeal to authority. This fallacy is committed when someone cites an authoritative or famous person who is not an expert in the field under discussion.

False dilemma. A false dilemma is created when an arguer presents an either-or choice when, in fact, there are more than two alternatives.

Faulty analogy. The error of faulty analogy occurs when a comparison is drawn between two different cases or issues, and there are no relevant similarities between them.

Fallacious reasoning. Invalid reasoning that suppresses relevant evidence, or contains questionable

premises.

Hasty generalisation. The fallacy of hasty generalisation occurs when a conclusion is drawn on the basis of ill-considered or insufficient evidence.

Inductive argument. An argument in which the conclusion is subject to probability, even if the premises are assumed to be true.

Invalid deductive argument. An argument in which the structure is invalid and the premises fail to give sufficient support to the conclusion.

Logical definition. This type of definition defines a term by selecting those properties that are shared by and confined to all the things that the term covers.

Narrative writing. A kind of writing that aims at unfolding a story or recounting a series of events.

Persuasive definition. A type of definition that aims at influencing the reader's attitude and thinking by suggesting a new meaning for a term that is already in common use.

Preconceived idea. A preconceived idea is a societal assumption that decisively influence our thinking, but which we have not critically reflected upon.

Premise indicator. A signal word or phrase that precedes a premise.

Premise. A premise is a statement that serves as a reason in support of an argument's conclusion.

Principle of charitable interpretation. This principle entails that when more than one interpretation of an argument is possible, the argument should be interpreted so that the premises provide the strongest support for the conclusion.

Slippery slope argument. A slippery slope argument leads one from seemingly unimportant and obviously true first premises to exaggerated consequences in the conclusion.

Social conditioning. Seeing only what we expect to see.

Sound. An argument is sound if it is valid and you accept that all its premises are true.

Soundness. Refers to the truth or strength of the premises of an argument.

Statement. A statement is an assertion that is either true or false.

Statistical extrapolation. A kind of inductive reasoning that refers to some statistical study or evidence. An inference is drawn about a target population on the basis of what is taken to be true of a sample group.

Stereotypes. Generalisations, or assumptions, that people make about the characteristics of all members of a group, based on an image (often wrong) about what people in that group are like.

Stipulative definition. A kind of definition that stipulates that a given term should be used in a particular way.

Straw man argument. A fallacious form of reasoning that consists of making one's own position appear strong by misrepresenting, or ridiculing an opponent's position.

Structural fallacies. These fallacies contain flaws in reasoning because their form or structure is invalid.

Thesis. The conclusion of an extended argument.

Valid. A criterion of cogent reasoning that requires that the premises of an argument in fact support its conclusion, either deductively or inductively.

Valid deductive argument. An argument of which the structure is valid and the premises give sufficient support for the conclusion to follow.

Validity. Refers to the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an argument.

Value argument. An argument that asserts a claim of preference or a moral judgment about right and wrong, good and bad.