1

Foundations of Arguments

What Is a Critical Thinker and When Do You Need to Be One?

A critical thinker understands the structure of an argument, whether that argument is presented by a politician, a salesperson, a talk-show host, a friend, or a child.

A critical thinker recognizes the issue under discussion and the varying conclusions about the issue.

A critical thinker examines the reasons given to support conclusions.

This chapter will cover

- The structure of an argument
- The three parts of an argument: issues, conclusions, and reasons
- An approach to making decisions

We live in what has been called the Information Age because of the many messages that we receive daily from television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and the Internet.

Sometimes we turn to this information for its entertainment value, such as when we watch a situation comedy, listen to music, read the sports page, or participate on-line in a chat room. But in a democratic society, in which the people are asked to vote on candidates and political propositions, we also need to use print and electronic sources to help us make decisions about the direction our community, state, and nation will take.

We need to know how to understand and evaluate the information that comes our way. This book will give you tools for coming to rational conclusions and making responsible choices.

> *A critical thinker is someone who uses specific criteria to evaluate reasoning, form positions, and make decisions.*

You can strengthen your critical thinking by becoming aware of and practicing certain skills. The skills will be covered in this text and include an understanding of:

- The structure of arguments
- Value assumptions and reality assumptions that are foundational to arguments
- The quality of evidence used to support reasoning
- Common errors in reasoning
- The effect of language on perception, and
- The ways in which media frames issues

In addition, **critical thinkers** develop and exhibit personal traits, such as fair-mindedness and empathy; we will discuss how these qualities strengthen critical thinking and decision making. Finally, critical thinkers use their skills to advocate for causes in which they believe. This chapter covers the first skill: understanding the structure of arguments.

STOP AND THINK

When people hear the word *critical,* they sometimes associate it with faultfinding. The field of critical thinking, however, uses the word *critical* to mean discerning. A film, art, dance, or music critic forms and expresses opinions on the basis of standards. The skills you will learn in this text will give you a set of standards with which to evaluate messages. Then, the decisions you make will be thoughtful.

When you learn to communicate well in a formal situation, your skill usually transfers to informal situations as well. For example, if you learn to

make an effective informative speech in the classroom, you will also feel better about introducing yourself at parties or making a spontaneous toast at your brother's wedding. This same principle applies to critical thinking skills.

When you can listen to a presidential debate and make good judgments about what each candidate has to offer, you may also be more thoughtful about less formal arguments that are presented, such as which breakfast cereal is best for you or which car you should buy. You will be better prepared to deal with sales pitches, whether written, televised, or personal.

The methods of discernment and decision making that you will learn apply to choosing a viewpoint on a political issue or to choosing a career, a place to live, or a mate.

In short, critical thinkers do not just drift through life subject to every message that they hear; they think through their choices and make conscious decisions. They also understand the basics of both creating and presenting credible arguments.

THE STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENT

> *The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.*
> Joseph Joubert, *Pensees* (1842)

When most people hear the word argument, they think of a disagreement between two or more people that may escalate into name calling, angry words, or even physical violence. In their book, *Metaphors We Live By,* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss how our metaphors for argument often affect our perception and our behavior. They claim that the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR "is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions":

Argument is War

Your claims are indefensible.
He attacked every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were right on target.
I demolished his argument.
I've never won an argument with him.
You disagree? Okay, shoot!
If you use that strategy, he'll wipe you out.
He shot down all of my arguments.[1]

Similarly, Deborah Tannen, in her book, *The Argument Culture,* notes that as a society, we frame our social issues in warlike terms:

[1]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 4.

> The war on drugs, the war on cancer, the battle of the sexes, politicians' turf battles—in the argument culture, war metaphors pervade our talk and shape our thinking. Nearly everything is framed as a battle or game in which winning or losing is the main concern. These all have their uses and their place, but they are not the only way—and often not the best way—to understand and approach our world.[2]

Our definition of argument is different. When critical thinkers speak about arguments, we are referring to a **conclusion** that someone has (often called a claim or position) about a particular **issue**. This conclusion is supported with **reasons** (often called premises). If an individual has a conclusion but offers no reasons why he has come to that conclusion, then he has made only a statement, not an argument.

Political slogans often found on billboards or in television advertisements, are good examples of conclusions (opinions) that should not be relied upon because supporting reasons are not offered. If you see a billboard that proclaims "A vote for Johnson is a vote for the right choice," or if you hear a politician proclaiming "Education has always been a priority for me," you are encountering conclusions with no evidence; that does not constitute an argument.

Critical thinkers withhold judgment on such a claim until they have looked at evidence both for and against Johnson as a candidate.

STOP AND THINK

Can you think of a slogan, perhaps from an advertisement or a bumper sticker, that is a statement without supporting reasons?

An argument has three parts: the *issue,* the *conclusion,* and the *reasons.*

The Issue

The *issue* is the question that is being addressed. It is easiest to put the issue in question form so that you know what is being discussed. When you listen to a discussion of a political or social issue, think of the question being addressed.

Examples of Issues

- Should North, Central, and South Americans work together to combat acid rain?
- Should air traffic controllers be given periodic drug tests?

[2]Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999), p. 4.

- Should we have a flat tax rate?
- Are the salaries paid to professional athletes too high?

The same method of "issue detection" will be useful in understanding commercial appeals (ads) and personal requests.

More Examples of Issues

- Is Alpo the best food for your dog?
- Should you marry Leslie?
- Should you subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal?*

Another way to isolate the issue is to state, "The issue is whether _____."

- The issue is whether aspirin can prevent heart disease.
- The issue is whether reproductive cloning should be banned.
- The issue is whether our community should create 200 new homes.

It is important to distinguish issues from topics. Topics are ideas or subjects. Topics become issues when a question or controversy is introduced. In the above examples, the topics would include Alpo, Leslie, the *Wall Street Journal,* aspirin, and cloning. The issues are questions about the topics.

Issues can be about facts, values, or policies. Factual issues, sometimes called descriptive issues, concern whether something is true or false, as in the following examples:

- Does zinc prevent common colds?
- Are smog control devices effective in preventing pollution?
- Do we have enough money to buy a new car?

Issues about values, sometimes called prescriptive issues, deal with what is considered good or bad or right or wrong, as, for example:

- Is there too much violence on television?
- Is marriage better than living together?
- Are salaries of executives of major corporations too high?

Policy issues involve taking action; often, these issues emerge from discussions of facts and values. If we find that, in fact, smog-control devices are effective in preventing pollution and if we value clean air, then we will probably continue to support policies to enforce the use of these devices. If aspirin prevents heart disease and we value a longer life, then we might ask a doctor whether we should take aspirin. If we do have enough money for a new car and we value a car more than other items at this time, then we should buy the new car.

Every decision that we need to make, whether it involves public or private matters, will be made easier if we can define exactly what it is that we are being asked to believe or do. Discourse often breaks down when two or more parties get into a heated discussion over different issues. This phenomenon occurs regularly on talk shows.

For example, a recent television talk show featured the general topic of spousal support, and the issue was "Should the salary of a second wife be used in figuring alimony for the first wife?" The lawyer who was being interviewed kept reminding the guests of this issue as they proceeded to argue instead about whether child support should be figured from the second wife's salary, whether the first wife should hold a job, and even whether one of the wives was a good person.

A general rule is that the more emotional the reactions to the issue, the more likely the issue will become lost. The real problem here is that the basic issue can become fragmented into different sub-issues so that people are no longer discussing the same question.

SKILL

Understand the issue, make sure everyone is discussing the same issue, and bring the discussion back on target when necessary.

When you listen to televised debates or interviews, note how often a good speaker or interviewer will remind the audience of the issue. Also notice how experienced spokespersons or politicians will often respond to a direct, clearly defined issue with a preprogrammed answer that addresses a different issue, one they can discuss more easily.

If a presidential candidate is asked how he is going to balance our federal budget, he might declare passionately that he will never raise taxes. He has thus skillfully accomplished two things: He has avoided the difficult issue, and he has taken a popular, vote-enhancing stand on a separate issue.

EXERCISE

Purpose: To be able to identify issues.

1. Read an essay or an editorial, study an advertisement, listen to a radio talk show, or watch a television program about a controversial issue. Decide whether the issue is primarily one of fact, value, or policy. Define the issue and see if the speakers or writers stay with the issue.

2. By yourself or as a class, come up with as many current issues as you can. Think of both light and serious issues; consider campus, community, social, national, and international concerns.

   Now, look at your list of issues and choose three that really concern you. Then, try to choose three about which you are neutral. Finally, answer these questions:

   a. What is it about the first three issues that makes you concerned?

   b. Why are you neutral about some issues?

   c. Do you believe there are issues on the list that should be more important to you? Why or why not?

REMINDER

Whenever you are confronted with an argument, try to define the issue and put the issue in question form.

The Conclusion

Once an issue has been defined, we can state our *conclusion* about the issue. Using some examples previously mentioned, *we can say yes or no to the issues presented:* Yes, I believe air traffic controllers should be tested for drug usage; yes, I want to subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal;* no, I will not marry Leslie at this time; and so on. We take a stand on the issues given.

The conclusion can also be defined as the position taken about an issue. It is a claim supported by evidence statements. These evidence statements are called reasons or premises.

We often hear the cliché "Everyone has a right to his or her opinion." This is true, in the legal sense. North Americans do not have "thought police" who decide what can and cannot be discussed. When you are a critically thinking person, however, your opinion has *substance.* That substance consists of the reasons you give to support your opinion. Conclusions with substance are more valuable and credible than are conclusions offering no supporting evidence.

Critical thinkers who strive to have opinions with substance exhibit two important qualities as they try to understand the truth of a matter:

1. They realize their own personal limitations. They know that they have a lot to learn about different areas and that they may need to revise their thoughts on issues as new information comes to light.
2. They strive to be discerning about what they read and hear; they look for good evidence and are open to hearing all sides of an issue. When

they make up their minds about something, they have solid reasons for their decisions.

The term *conclusion* is used differently in different fields of study. The definition given here applies most correctly to the study of argumentation. In an argumentative essay, the thesis statement will express the conclusion of the writer. In Chapters 3 and 4, you will note a related definition of conclusion used by philosophers in the study of deductive and inductive reasoning. In addition, the term *conclusion* is used to describe the final part of an essay or speech.

REMINDER

Conclusions are the positions people take on issues. Other words used to mean conclusions are *claims, viewpoints, opinions,* and *stands.* We use the term *conclusion* because most people who teach argumentation use the term. The other words listed can mean the same thing.

How can we locate the conclusion of an argument? Try the following methods when you are having trouble finding the conclusion:

1. Find the issue and ask yourself what position the writer or speaker is taking on the issue.
2. Look at the beginning or ending of a paragraph or an essay; the conclusion is often found in either of these places.
3. Look for conclusion indicator words: *therefore, so, thus, hence.* Also, look for indicator phrases: *My point is, What I am saying is, What I believe is.* Some indicator words and phrases are selected to imply that the conclusion drawn is the right one. These include *obviously, it is evident that, there is no doubt (or question) that, certainly,* and *of course.*
4. Ask yourself, "What is being claimed by this writer or speaker?"
5. Look at the title of an essay; sometimes the conclusion is contained within the title. For example, an essay might be titled "Why I Believe Vitamins Are Essential to Health."

SKILL

Find the conclusion or conclusions to an argument. Ask yourself what position the writer or speaker is taking on the issue.

You may hear people discussing an issue and someone says, "I don't know anything about this, but . . ." and proceeds to state an opinion about the issue. This comment is sometimes made as a means of continuing a conversation. Critical thinkers take a stand only when they know something about the issue; they give reasons why they have come to a certain conclusion. Of course, a critical thinker is open to hearing new evidence and may change his or her opinion on issues, as new information becomes available.

STOP AND THINK

As humans, we have limitations in our perception and knowledge. At the same time, we have wonderful tools for discovering new truths in every area of life. What personal qualities does a person need in order to give a fair hearing to new information?

EXERCISE

Purpose: To be able to isolate conclusions.

Take your list of issues from Question 2 in the previous exercise. Choose four issues and, in a simple declarative sentence, write your conclusion for each one.

Example

Issue: Should air traffic controllers be given periodic drug tests?
Conclusion: Yes, air traffic controllers should be given periodic drug tests.

The Reasons

Everything reasonable may be supported.

Epictetus, *Discourses* (Second century)

Reasons are the statements that provide support for conclusions. Without reasons, you have no argument; you simply have an assertion, a statement of someone's opinion, as evidenced in the following limerick:

I do not like thee, Doctor Fell
The reason why I cannot tell
But this I know, I know full well
I do not like thee, Doctor Fell.

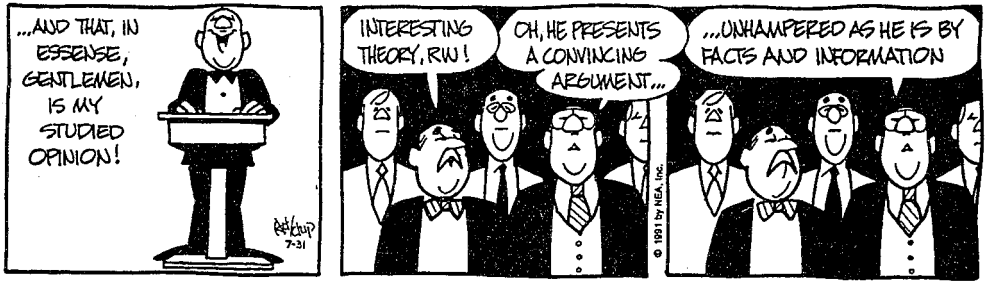
Reasons are also called *evidence, premises, support,* or *justification.* You will spend most of your time and energy as a critical thinker and responsible writer and speaker looking at the quality of the reasons used to support a conclusion.

Here are some ways to locate the reasons in an argument:

1. Find the conclusion and then apply the "because trick." The writer or speaker believes _____ (conclusion) because _____. The reasons will naturally follow the word *because.*
2. Look for other indicator words that are similar to *because: since, for, first, second, third, as evidenced by, also, furthermore, in addition.*
3. Look for evidence supporting the conclusion. This support can be in the form of examples, statistics, analogies, reports of studies, and expert testimony.

STOP AND THINK

What was your most recent "argument"? What reasons were given to you, or what reasons did you give to support your conclusion?



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There is a world of difference between supporting a political candidate because his policies make sense to you and supporting the same candidate because he or she seems like a charismatic person. Information in the following chapters of this book will give you the skills to help you decide whether a reason supports a conclusion.

Critical thinkers focus their attention on the issue being discussed; the conclusions taken; and the reasons given to support or justify the conclusions.

SKILL

Find the reasons that support the conclusion.

Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.

Napoleon, *Maxims* (1804)

Using Reasons to Make Decisions. When people engage in arguments, they usually present their conclusions about issues first and then give reasons to support their conclusions. In decision making, however, people often struggle with reasons on both sides of an issue in order to reach a conclusion (decision). For example, consider the following on-line dialogue between two friends, jointly deciding on the issue of whether to go to a water park. Note that the conclusion (the decision to go or not to go) does not become clear until they go over the reasons on both sides.

GenPeach: Hey Claire!
ClaireDies: hi Gen!
GenPeach: How are you Sweetie?
ClaireDies: I'm okay I think. kind of tired.
ClaireDies: am I going to see you today?
GenPeach: I think so, . . . Waterworld?
ClaireDies: yeah. should I go or not?
GenPeach: If you want, I dunno if I will or not. I'm so tired.
ClaireDies: Me too, and I have to pack. if you go, I will, but I don't want to come if I'm going to be the only one there
ClaireDies: my age
GenPeach: Ditto.
ClaireDies: so . . .
GenPeach: The ? is, do we really want to go, or not?
ClaireDies: well, what's the advantage of going?
GenPeach: I was just thinking that. Um . . . water and slides and stuff, and we get to see each other . . .
ClaireDies: and I'm leaving soon . . . but if we stay, well, I'll get to do laundry and sleep
ClaireDies: and pack and do the dishes
ClaireDies: I'm leaning towards going now
GenPeach: Negatives—small children screaming, sun, noise, more energy required than I have, . . .
ClaireDies: very true.
GenPeach: Not necessarily better than packing and cleaning . . .
ClaireDies: we wouldn't actually have to get up. We could grab a small section of grass and sleep, sunbathe

ClaireDies: relax, read
GenPeach: Yay . . .
ClaireDies: so . . . sounds like we should go.
ClaireDies: should we just go?
GenPeach: OK

SKILL

Try to list the reasons to go and the reasons not to go that the friends came up with before making their decision. Note that even routine daily decisions involve the process of weighing pros and cons (reasons) in order to come to a conclusion.

A Decision-Making Method

If you don't know where you're going, you might wind up somewhere else.
Yogi Berra

A decision involves a dilemma between two or more alternative actions. We face these dilemmas daily in small and big ways. Decisions need to be made about such serious matters as who to support in an election, which career to pursue, which school to attend, whether to marry, whether to have children, where to live, and how to budget time and money. Virtually every aspect of our lives involves decisions, especially since we live in a "free" society in which these decisions are not made by authorities but are left to individual citizens.

Many methods exist to help people make life decisions. Usually, they are different ways to evaluate reasons on both sides of a difficult decision. The decision to be made can be seen as the issue—Should I vote for Candidate A, Candidate B, or Candidate C? Should I spend money on a car or save the money for future needs? Should I go to graduate school or take a job offer now?

To come to a reasoned conclusion about a decision, it helps to weigh the reasons on both sides. Often, however, people can see many reasons to support two or more choices, and they feel paralyzed by indecision as a result.

One method that can be useful in making decisions that should also help you clarify your reasoning involves listing and giving weights to various reasons and then weighing each of your choices against those reasons.

Let's look at one decision making method, using the example of the decision of whether to attend school X or school Y.

1. The first step in decision making is to define the dilemma in the form of an issue.

   Example:

   Should I attend School X or School Y?

2. The second step in decision making involves looking at your long-term objective. It answers the question: What do I want this choice to accomplish in my life?

   Example:

   I want to get a good education in my field without going into debt for more than two years.

   Note that in this step if either alternative does not meet your objective, the decision is already made. If you find that school X does not have the major that you want or that it would be too expensive to go to school X, then it no longer is an alternative to consider.

3. In the third step, you determine which factors are most important to you in a school. You list the factors and give an importance to each one (on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the highest).

   Example:

Strong department in my major	10 points
Affordable (low cost or scholarship)	10 points
Close to friends and family	6 points
Near a large city	5 points
Gives internship option	8 points
Campus is attractive	4 points
Good arts community nearby	7 points
Climate is mild	5 points
Feels like a good fit when I visit	9 points
Professors are accessible	8 points

   Note that the criteria in this example would be different for different people. That is why it is hard to receive advice about your decision or to give advice to others—other people may not weigh the factors the way you do. To one person, being in a large urban area is a major plus—to another it would be seen as a disadvantage. One person may value a close relationship with professors, while another prefers more formality and distance. One person may want to take advantage of cultural attractions nearby, while another is more interested in the sports scene.

4. The fourth step gets to the heart of the reasons for and against each choice and gives you clear criteria for your decision. In this step, you

take each factor and weigh it against your choices. The choice with the highest score is tentatively chosen.

Factor	*Weight*	*School X Score*	*School Y Score*
Example			
Strong department in my major	10 points x	8	10
Affordable (low cost or scholarship)	10 points x	9	5
Close to friends and family	6 points x	8	6
Near a large city	5 points x	5	9
Gives internship option	8 points x	7	9
Campus is attractive	4 points x	8	8
Good arts community nearby	7 points x	7	10
Climate is mild	5 points x	5	7
Feels like a good fit when I visit	9 points x	8	10
Professors are accessible	8 points x	9	7
Total: Weight of factor times score of choice		549	521

5. Step five involves choosing the highest scoring alternative tentatively. Doing this kind of decision analysis may confirm that the individual choice is the right one or that either choice would be acceptable.

   If School X is chosen, the individual has resolved his or her own issue. The "argument" for School X could be stated as follows:

   Issue: Should I choose School X or School Y?
   Conclusion: I should choose School X.
   Reasons: School X is affordable, it has a good department in my major with professors that I can talk to, is fairly close to my friends and family and might offer internship possibilities. School Y is good too and has an even better reputation, but just costs too much.

Often, this kind of critical analysis can clarify choices for an individual. If, on the other hand, the alternative chosen does not "feel right" to the person choosing, he or she may look at the criteria to determine why. It may be that the strength of the department and the location actually do factor higher for the individual and that the main reason for the low score for the option of School Y is the affordability. If that is the case, the individual making the decision could do more research about scholarships or about the option of getting a job to pay for School Y.

Going through this logical process and seeing which alternative "scores" higher will help you clarify your choice: If you feel satisfied with the choice, the factors listed were the important factors; if you are still uncomfortable with the choice, there may be some other, perhaps more emotionally based, factors that need to be entered into the equation.

EXERCISE

Purpose: To use reasoning to make a decision.

Choose a current decision that you are facing, and take it through the steps listed in the decision making model. You can use the model for two or more alternative choices. After you have listed your criteria and the importance (weight) of each factor, rate each of your alternatives.

After weighing the alternatives, use the one with the highest score as your conclusion. Then state the issue (the decision that needed to be made), your conclusion (the alternative with the highest score), and the reasons (all of the factors that lead to the high score). This exercise may be done individually or in groups. It would be helpful to share the results with the class as a further review of issues, conclusions, and reasons.

Ideas for the decision: A voting choice, school choice, career choice, relationship choice, or consumer choice.

Humor as Argument

Humor can also be viewed as argument—Humorists often make an argument in a disarming way, using irony and exaggeration. If you listen closely to what comedians say, you can isolate issues, conclusions, and reasons in their monologue. Read the following transcript from a Jackie Mason monologue to understand his position on Starbuck's coffee. See if you can identify issues, conclusions, and reasons in his commentary.

> If I said to you, "I have a great idea for a business. I'll open a whole new type of coffee shop. Instead of charging 60 cents for coffee I'll charge $2.50, $3.50, $4.50, and $5.50. Not only that, I'll have no tables, no chairs, no water, no free refills, no waiters, no busboys, serve it in cardboard cups, and have the customer clean it up for 20 minutes after they're finished."
>
> Would you say to me, "That's the greatest idea for a business I ever heard! We can open a chain of these all over the world!" No, you would put me right into a sanitarium.
>
> And it's burnt coffee! It's burnt coffee at Starbuck's, be honest about it. If you get burnt coffee in a coffee shop, you call a cop. You say, "It's the bottom of the pot. I don't drink from the bottom of the pot."
>
> But when it's burnt at Starbuck's, they say, "Oh, it's a special roast. It's a special bean from Argentina. . . ." The bean is in your head!!! I know burnt!!!
>
> . . . And I say this with the highest respect, because I don't like to talk about people.

EXERCISE

Purpose: To practice finding issues, conclusions, and reasons in humor.

Find an excerpt from a book of humor, a list of humorous quotations or a stand-up comedy routine. You might also look at articles or Web sites that feature humorous political commentary. Isolate the issue, conclusion, and reasons that the comedian covers. Share your findings with the class.

REMINDER

Since the reasons answer the question "Why do you believe what you believe?" a good trick in isolating the reasons is to write the conclusion and then add the word *because.*

Example

I believe student athletes should be paid (conclusion) *because:*

- They commit to certain hours and demands on their time.
- They make money for their schools.

EXERCISE

Purposes: To be able to use reasons to support a conclusion; to use knowledge gained in this chapter to both analyze and construct basic arguments.

1. Write a short rebuttal to the above example, using reasons to support your conclusion.
2. Take your conclusions from the exercise on conclusions and support each conclusion with at least three reasons. This exercise can be done alone or in classroom groups, in writing or as a short speech. You might also have one group present the "pro" side of an issue and another group the "con."
3. Get the editorial page of your favorite newspaper (including your campus paper), and list the issue, conclusion, and reasons given for each editorial. Use this format:

   The issue (question) is:
   The conclusion of this writer is:
   The reasons he or she gives are:

   Then evaluate the editorial by answering the following questions:

a. Was the writer clear about the reasons given for the conclusion?
b. Were there other reasons that could have been included in the argument?
c. Did the writer express any understanding for an opposing viewpoint? If so, how? If not, can you articulate an opposing viewpoint for the editorial?
d. Were you convinced by the editorial? Why or why not?

4. Read the following editorials, essays, letters, and writings. Then, isolate the issues discussed, the conclusions of the writers, and the reasons given for the conclusions. Answer the following questions:
   a. Are the reasons given adequate to support the conclusions? If not, what other reasons could have been given?
   b. Do you agree or disagree with the conclusions? If you disagree, what are your reasons for disagreeing?

EDUCATIONAL TICKET

Dr. Y. Huda

Some bicycle riders complain about getting tickets for running stop signs, especially when they are "just kids." Those kids who get tickets should be grateful for the important lesson to not run stop signs. If they learn from the tickets, they will live longer.

Running stop signs and red lights hurts the bicycle riders and it also hurts other people. It scares motorists, and if a motorist accidentally hit and hurt a cyclist, the motorist would feel terrible. It also hurts bicycle activists who don't want to anger motorists—if motorists are angry, they won't support measures to improve cycling, such as getting wider roads so motorists and cyclists can share the road more safely.

The following essay has been circulated widely on the Internet since April 2000, but it is filled with inaccuracies and outdated information. It is very important for critical thinkers to check the facts when strong claims are made against a person or a group. When you receive an e-mail that sounds credible and authoritative, check it out on one of the Internet sites that debunks urban legends, such as www.snopes.com.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Author unknown—circulated on the Internet through e-mail

Perhaps we are asking the wrong questions during election years. Our Senators and Congressmen do not pay into Social Security and, of course, they do

not collect from it. Social Security benefits were not suitable for persons of their rare elevation in society.

They felt they should have a special plan for themselves. Many years ago they voted in their own benefit plan. In more recent years, no Congress person has felt the need to change it. After all, it is a great plan.

For all practical purposes their plan works like this: When they retire, they continue to draw the same pay until they die, except it may increase from time to time for cost of living adjustments.

For example, former Senator Byrd and Congressman White and their wives may expect to draw $7,800,000.00 (that's Seven Million, Eight-Hundred Thousand), with their wives drawing $275,000.00 during the last years of their lives. This is calculated on an average life span for each.

Their cost for this excellent plan is $00.00. Nada. Zilch. This little perk they voted for themselves is free to them. You and I pick up the tab for this plan.

From our own Social Security Plan, which you and I pay (or have paid) into—every payday until we retire (which amount is matched by our employer)—we can expect to get an average $1,000 per month after retirement.

Social Security could be very good if only one small change were made. And that change would be to jerk the Golden Fleece Retirement Plan from under the Senators and Congressmen. Put them into the Social Security plan with the rest of us and then watch how fast they would fix it.

WAR ON DRUGS FAILS: WE NEED NEW APPROACH

Daryl A. Bergman

The war on drugs is an abysmal failure. A fresh and bold approach is needed—beginning with the legalization of marijuana and the registration of drug addicts. It's also necessary to look to other countries that have been successful. The legalization of pot would:

- Eliminate the stepping stone to harder drugs.
- Eliminate the crime associated with large dollar street transactions.
- Provide taxes to step up law enforcement efforts (meth labs, heroin smuggling)—and rehab programs.
- Free space in jails housing non-violent criminals, saving incarceration costs.

The registration of addicts would:

- Eliminate the use of dirty needles, decreasing victims of AIDS and associated health care costs.
- End warehouse rehabilitation programs.

Let's move forward to save our children.

DRUGGED DRIVING

Lavelle Washington

Like alcohol, marijuana and other drugs can impair many of those skills that are imperative to good driving, such as alertness, the ability to concentrate and to read signs, coordination and reaction time. These effects can last up to 24 hours after smoking marijuana. If you combine drug use with teens' inexperience on the road and risk-taking behavior, we have a recipe for disaster. In 2002, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that 10 to 22 percent of drivers involved in all vehicle crashes have recently used an illegal drug, often in combination with alcohol.

- The Department of Transportation has published two studies examining the impact of marijuana on driving performance. Marijuana—the most widely abused illegal drug—slows a driver's perception of time, space, and distance, and it leads to drowsiness and distraction.
- Research indicates that cocaine causes drivers to speed, change lanes without signaling and puts other innocent people at risk of a deadly accident.
- While it is illegal in all states to drive a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, drugs other than alcohol, or a combination of alcohol and other drugs, there is no consistent method across states for identifying drug impairment. As a result, we do not know the full impact of illegal drug use on public safety.
- According to the *National Commission Against Drunk Driving,* impaired driving is the most frequently committed violent crime in America and every 30 minutes, someone in this country dies in an alcohol-related crash, equating to approximately 17,000 deaths per year.

SAVE FAMILY BUSINESSES

z. haakon

There is a need to voice the concerns about our unsung family businesses. Over the last few years, they have endured the monopoly of "Big Businesses" like Starbucks and Blockbuster. These animal industries have bulldozed their way into our streets and taken over "Mom and Pop Video" and "Joe Schmoe's Java Hut" to make way for their chain mega-stores. And people flock to them. This is how our family businesses, our unsung little people, get their face pushed in the mud until they give up and declare bankruptcy. We cannot allow this to happen. I witnessed the closure of my favorite video store that I had spent hours in since I was a little boy. It had the new releases for

the brainwashed general public, but for me, it was a haven for independent and classic greats. I don't think I ever spent so much time in such a little store, but you couldn't drag me away from the hundreds of forgotten classics without renting at least two of the four tapes I had picked up—choosing which two became one of the most excruciating dilemmas of my life. My video store closed after continuing sales drops from trying to hold its own against the competition, Blockbuster. People from all over the county came in on its closing day to tell stories of how it was their favorite family video store, and how much they looked forward to seeing what new releases they'd pick up, and how much their kids loved the children's section. And yet, the place still went under! It's too late for my favorite video store, but something should be done about the other suffering "little stores"—whether it be video or coffee or local grocery stores.

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CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

1. Critical thinking about information is necessary in order for us to make clear decisions as citizens, consumers, and human beings.
2. An argument consists of issues, conclusions, and reasons.
3. The issue is the question that is raised; our decisions are made easier if we can define the issues on which we are asked to comment or act.
4. The conclusion is the position a person takes on an issue.
5. Reasons, often called premises, provide support for conclusions; reasons are acceptable or unacceptable on the basis of their relevance and quality.
6. Critical thinkers carefully consider reasons on all sides of an issue when they make important decisions.

CHAPTER CHECKUP

Short Answer

1. What is the difference between a topic and an issue?
2. What are some indictor words for a conclusion?
3. Cite three ways to discover the reasons used to support a conclusion.

True-False

4. Everyone's opinion about an issue, though different, has equal substance.
5. Traits such as fair-mindedness and empathy are helpful to critical thinkers.

6. A critical thinker is someone who uses specific criteria to evaluate reasoning, form opinions, and make decisions.

Sentence Completion

7. The question that is being addressed is called the _____.
8. You will spend most of your time and energy as a critical thinker and responsible speaker looking at the quality of the _____ used to support a conclusion.
9. Since the reasons answer the question "Why do you believe what you believe?," a good trick in isolating the reasons is to write the conclusion and then add the word _____.
10. When we say yes or no to the issues presented, we are stating our _____.

ARTICLES FOR DISCUSSION

The following articles give differing viewpoints on the same issue. Read both and then consider the questions that follow.

TALK-SHOW HOST ANGERS DISABLED COMMUNITY

Hand Deformity Inherited from Mom Sparks L.A. Dispute

Michael Fleeman

LOS ANGELES—Aaron James Lampley, all 7 pounds, 14 1/2 ounces of him, was only a few hours old when a local radio station dedicated a show for the second time to the circumstances and controversy surrounding his birth.

In addressing the matter again, KFI-AM last week refueled a dispute that pitted the station against activists for the disabled and raised questions about freedom of speech and society's treatment of the disabled.

Aaron Lampley was born Wednesday morning, with ectodactyly, which leaves the bones in the feet and hands fused. His mother, local TV anchorwoman Bree Walker Lampley, also has the condition and knew the child had a 50 percent chance of inheriting it.

Her other child, a daughter, has the condition as well.

Before the boy's birth, KFI outraged the KCBS-TV anchorwoman and advocates for people with disabilities with a July 22 call-in show in which host Jane Norris asked whether it was fair for Walker Lampley to give birth when the child had a "very good chance of having a disfiguring disease."

Critics of the show said it smacked of bigotry and illustrated societal prejudice and lack of understanding toward the disabled. KFI said the matter

was handled properly and that radio talk shows are appropriate forums for controversial issues.

In KFI's second visit to the subject, this time with Norris acting as guest on Tom Leykis' afternoon show, Norris accused Walker Lampley of orchestrating a campaign to discredit her and contended she had a First Amendment right to discuss the matter.

"I was supportive of Bree's decision," Norris said on the show. "All I did, and have done, is voice my opinion of what would be right for me. I thought I handled the topic sensitively, but all [Walker Lampley has] seen fit to do is slander me."

Norris' statements did nothing to cool the situation.

"They came on the air supposedly to set the record straight. In our view, she set the record even more crooked," said Lillabeth Navarro of *American Disabled for Access Power Today.*

"This is like a bunch of thugs ganging up on the disability community. It just rained forth what caused us to be outraged to begin with."

Navarro said activists planned a protest at KFI studios.

The demonstration is part of a grass-roots campaign organized in part by a media consulting firm hired by Walker Lampley and her husband, KCBS anchorman, Jim Lampley.

The company, EIN SOF Communications, gives the disability rights community a public voice. The firm has sent tapes of the Norris show to disability rights groups and is helping to file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission.

In the original show, Norris said she wasn't intending to dictate what Walker Lampley should have done. But she said she couldn't have made the same decision if she were in Walker Lampley's position.

Norris said there were "so many other options available," including adoption and surrogate parenting, and "it would be difficult to bring myself to morally cast my child forever to disfigured hands."

Throughout the show, Norris seemed to take issue with people who disagreed with her.

After a caller named Jennifer from Los Angeles said, "I don't really see why it's your business," Norris responded, "Well, I think it's everybody's business. This is life. These things happen in life. What's your problem? Do you have a problem talking about deformities?"

Norris also repeatedly referred to Walker Lampley's condition, ectodactyly, as a disease, even though it is a genetically caused disability.

Walker Lampley and her husband, in interviews before their child was born, said Norris' first program was an attack on the handicapped and Walker Lampley personally, and was full of errors and poorly chosen remarks.

"I felt assaulted and terrorized," Walker Lampley said. "I felt like my pregnancy had been robbed of some of its joy."

She added, "I felt disappointed that someone would be so insensitive."

RADIO SHOW ON RIGHTS OF DISABLED DEFENDED

Crippled Woman's Pregnancy Debated

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES—The chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said a local radio station shouldn't be disciplined for a talk show that debated whether a disabled TV anchorwoman should give birth.

Chairman Evan J. Kemp, who is disabled and confined to a wheelchair, said he was "appalled and sickened" by the majority of callers to the KFI program who said KCBS anchor Bree Walker Lampley had no right to become pregnant and should abort if she did.

However, Kemp said the right of free speech should protect KFI from any Federal Communications Commission action.

Kemp's statements were published in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Lampley, who was pregnant at the time of the July, 1991, broadcast, lodged a complaint to the FCC and asked for an investigation. The newswoman, her husband, co-anchor Jim Lampley, and more than 20 organizations for the disabled asked the agency to examine whether the station and its owner, Cox Broadcasting Corp., should lose their license, be fined or reprimanded.

The couple charged the broadcast was not a thorough discussion, but rather an attack on Lampley's integrity without inviting them to appear and harassed callers who attempted to express contrary views.

Lampley gave birth five weeks after the broadcast to a boy who had the same genetic condition as his mother—ectrodactylism, in which the bones of the hands and feet are fused. There was a 50 percent chance that the baby would have the condition.

Kemp said he was not speaking out as chairman of the Washington, D.C.-based EEOC, but as a "severely disabled person" with a rare polio-like disease—Kugelberg-Welander—that may be inherited.

He said he plans to write to the FCC to defend grass-roots discussions and radio talk shows such as the KFI program as necessary forums.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The author of the first article states that this controversy "raised questions about freedom of speech and society's treatment of the disabled." What were the questions—that is, issues—that were raised?
2. Take one of the issues raised by the talk-show controversy, and discuss how well those mentioned in the articles defended it.
3. Comment on the following excerpt from the first article: What is your opinion of the host's response to the caller?

After a caller named Jennifer from Los Angeles said, "I don't really see why it's your business," Norris responded, "Well, I think it's everybody's business. This is life. These things happen in life. What's your problem? Do you have a problem talking about deformities?"

4. Are there any issues discussed by radio and television talk shows that you consider inappropriate? Are certain groups targeted for criticism and others left alone, or is every topic fair game? Give examples to support your answer.
5. Each article used a different subheading to explain the controversy. The first article's subheading reads: "Hand Deformity Inherited from Mom Sparks L.A. Dispute." The second article's subheading says: "Crippled Woman's Pregnancy Debated." How do these different subheadings frame the issue? To what extent do you think they are fair and accurate statements about the controversy?

IDEAS FOR WRITING OR SPEAKING

1. Consider the following quote from the first article: "Critics of the show said it smacked of bigotry and illustrated societal prejudice and lack of understanding toward the disabled. KFI said the matter was handled properly and that radio talk shows are appropriate forums for controversial issues."

   The framers of our Bill of Rights did not anticipate the phenomenon of broadcast media. Based on your understanding of the freedom of speech, are there any issues that should not be discussed in a public forum? Does sensitivity to the feelings of a particular group make some topics less desirable for public discussion? State your conclusion and support it with reasons.
2. Take a stand on one of the issues involved in these articles. Write an essay or give a short speech, expressing your viewpoint and supporting it with reasons.
3. Imagine that you are a program director for a radio talk show. What guidelines would you give your talk show hosts? Give reasons for each guideline. Share your guidelines in a group, or write them in essay form.
4. Write or speak on the following: Given the power of talk show hosts to influence large numbers of people, do you believe there should be stricter licensing requirements for this profession, as there are for doctors, lawyers, and accountants, in order to ensure a uniform code of journalistic conduct? If so, why? If not, why not?

MORE IDEAS FOR WRITING OR SPEAKING

1. Think about an issue that really interests you; it might be an issue currently being debated on your campus, or a community or national problem. The editorial pages of campus, community, or national newspapers may give you more ideas to help you choose your issue.

In the form of an essay or a brief speech, state the issue and your conclusion and give at least three reasons to support your conclusion.

In the classroom, take a few minutes for each person to share his or her essay or speech, and see if the rest of the class understands the issue, conclusion, and reasons of the speaker. Don't use this exercise to debate issues (that will come later). At this point, strive only to make yourself clear and to understand the basic arguments of others.

2. Letter or speech of complaint: Practice using your knowledge about the structure of argument by writing a letter of complaint or doing a classroom "complaint speech," such as the following one devised by Professor Lee Loots.

   Constructive complaining is an important life skill. Use this letter or speech to express your dissatisfaction. Choose the most relevant aspects of the problem to discuss. A clear statement of the issue, your conclusion, and reasons distinguishes complaining from "whining." Whereas whining could be characterized as a long string of feelings expressed vehemently about random aspects of a problem, a true complaint describes the nature of the problem in an organized fashion. Sincerely expressed feelings then add richness to the clear and organized content.

   To make the complaint clear, be sure to support your ideas with examples, illustrations, instances, statistics, testimony, or visual aids. To make your feelings clear, you can use vivid language, humor, sarcasm, understatement, exaggeration, irony, and dramatic emphasis.

   Examples of topics for the complaint letter or speech: a letter or speech to a city planning commission about excessive airport noise, a letter to a supervisor about a change in salary or working conditions, a complaint to neighbors about reckless driving in the neighborhood, a complaint to housemates about sharing the work load, or a letter or speech to insurance agents about rates for college students.