

- w. There is no way that anyone can ever deserve to live better than her or his neighbors, so capitalism is an immoral economic system.
- x. If an expectant mother drinks, smokes, takes drugs, or fails to get proper rest, she may damage her unborn child. Therefore, if an expectant mother does these things and her child is born with a defect or ailment that can be traced to them, the mother should face criminal charges.
- y. Custom is a form of folk wisdom. In some parts of the world, it is customary for "bride buyers" to buy (or sometimes kidnap) young women from their parents and sell them to men looking for wives. Even though we might find this practice distasteful, it would be morally wrong for us to object to others' practicing it.
- z. Critical thinking has no application to movies because movies are an art form rather than an attempt to persuade.
- aa. Conservatism is based upon hatred of the poor and I challenge anyone to disprove this fact.
- bb. We shouldn't talk about religious differences lest some people be offended.
- cc. Sociologists are social scientists. Psychologists are social scientists. Therefore, sociologists are psychologists.
- dd. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you cannot convict my client of the brutal murder with which he has been charged. He has fought all his adult life to protect endangered species and received awards for his charitable contributions.
- ee. If I win the lottery, I'll pay all my bills. Therefore, if I pay all my bills, I'll win the lottery.
- ff. You ask whether I will vote to repeal the Affordable Health Care Act. There is no vote more important at this time than that very vote. Our fiscal welfare for years to come, not to mention the security of our elder citizens, will depend on every member of Congress taking a stand based on his or her beliefs.

12.3.

Identify, investigate (as necessary), and resolve each of the following issues. Be sure you do not just accept your reasoning uncritically. Evaluate it by using the approach explained on pages 197-198. Then modify your argument as necessary and decide how you could most effectively demonstrate its soundness.

- a. Radar detectors give speeders a warning so that they can slow down in time to avoid getting a ticket. Some people believe the detectors should be banned because they help people break the law. Others disagree, arguing that they should be able to protect themselves from the sneaky practices of highway patrols.
- b. One proposal for combating the drug problem is government seizure of the property (cars, homes, etc.) of convicted drug dealers. One objection to this proposal is that such seizure

Pick 2
a-e
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- could violate the rights of innocent parties, such as spouses and children.
- c. Since smoking is not permitted at one's desk in many companies, significant time is presumably lost in unauthorized smoking breaks in restrooms or outside of buildings. A company could save itself that time, and the money it represents, by establishing a policy of hiring only nonsmokers. Of course, some people would consider such a policy discriminatory.
- d. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz wrote: "If he who breaks the law is not punished, he who obeys it is cheated. This, and this alone, is why lawbreakers ought to be punished; to authenticate as good, and to encourage as useful, law-abiding behavior. The aim of the criminal law cannot be correction or deterrence; it can only be the maintenance of the legal order." Is this viewpoint reasonable?¹ Consider other possibilities, make your decision, and then explain your view and your reasons for holding it, taking care to anticipate and respond to possible objections to it.
- e. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was created not long after 9/11. At first a division of the Department of Transportation, it was later transferred to the Department of Homeland Security. Its function is to ensure the safety of U.S. travel, particularly air travel. Airports can elect to use private firms to conduct screening, but the great majority use TSA. At first, TSA banned all knives, fingernail clippers and liquids, including water not purchased in a secure area. Then they permitted small knives, but soon changed their minds and banned them, even though they allowed hockey sticks, and golf clubs on board. They also spent tens of millions of dollars on full-body scanners, but then responded to public pressure and removed them. Should TSA be abolished and its function performed by private contractors?

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Chapter 1
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Expressed

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At first glance, only one premise may seem to be missing from this argument. Actually, it is a complex argument, and more is missing. Here is how it would be expressed if nothing were omitted:

The agency that has the greatest influence on young people's attitudes and values bears the greatest responsibility for the behavior caused by those attitudes and values. The media now have a greater influence than parents and teachers do. In addition, the messages disseminated by the media tend to lead to impulsiveness and the demand for instant gratification and to create or aggravate such problems as teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and academic deficiency. Therefore, the communications and entertainment media bear greater responsibility than parents and teachers for these problems.

Here are two more examples of complex arguments. In each case, the argument is first expressed in the abbreviated form often used in everyday conversation and then in its complete logical form.

1. **Abbreviated:** The government wastes billions of tax dollars, so I'm not obligated to report all my income.

Complete: The government wastes billions of tax dollars. Wasting tax dollars increases every individual's tax burden unnecessarily. I am a taxpayer, so the government is increasing my tax burden unnecessarily. Furthermore, when the government increases the taxpayers' tax burden unnecessarily, the taxpayers are not obligated to report all their income. Therefore, I'm not obligated to report all my income.

2. **Abbreviated:** People who lack control over their sexual urges are a threat to society, so homosexuals should be banned from the teaching profession.

Complete: People who lack control over their sexual urges are a threat to society. Homosexuals lack control over their sexual urges. Therefore, homosexuals are a threat to society. Furthermore, people who are a threat to society should be banned from the teaching profession. Therefore, homosexuals should be banned from the teaching profession.

Recognizing that an argument is complex and, where necessary, expressing it more completely is a necessary step in argument analysis. But such recognition and expression do not complete the analysis. In other words, in each of our three examples, we now know what the complete argument is, but we do not yet know whether it is sound—that is, whether its premises are true and the reasoning from premises to conclusion is valid.

STEPS IN EVALUATING AN ARGUMENT

The following four steps are an efficient way to apply what you learned in this chapter—in other words, to evaluate your argument and overcome any errors in validity or truth that it may contain:

1. State your argument fully, as clearly as you can. Be sure to identify any hidden premises and, if the argument is complex, to express all parts of it.
2. Examine each part of your argument for errors affecting truth. (To be sure your examination is not perfunctory, play devil's advocate and *challenge* the argument, asking pointed questions about it, taking nothing for granted.) Note any instances of either/or thinking, avoiding the issue, overgeneralizing, oversimplifying, double standard, shifting the burden of proof, or irrational appeal. In addition, check to be sure that the argument reflects the evidence found in your investigation (see Chapter 8) and is relevant to the pro and con arguments and scenarios you produced earlier (see Chapter 9).
3. Examine your argument for validity errors; that is, consider the reasoning that links conclusions to premises. Determine whether your conclusion is legitimate or illegitimate.
4. If you find one or more errors, revise your argument to eliminate them. The changes you will have to make in your argument will depend on the kinds of errors you find. Sometimes, only minor revision is called for—the adding of a simple qualification, for example, or the substitution of a rational appeal for an irrational one. Occasionally, however, the change required is more dramatic. You may, for example, find your argument so flawed that the only appropriate action is to abandon it altogether and embrace a different argument. On those occasions, you may be tempted to *pretend* your argument is sound and hope no one will notice the errors. Resist that hope. It is foolish as well as dishonest to invest time in refining a view that you know is unsound.

To illustrate how you would follow these steps, we will now examine two issues.

THE CASE OF PARENTS PROTESTING TV PROGRAMS

You have read a number of articles lately about protests over television commercials and programming. The protesters are mostly parents of school-aged children. They have spoken out either individually or through organizations they belong to, expressing concern that the values taught by school and home are being undermined by television. Specific complaints include the emphasis on sex and violence in television programming, the appeal to self-indulgence and instant gratification in commercials, and the promotion of “if it feels good, do it” in both programs and commercials. The protesters are urging concerned citizens to write to the companies that sponsor programs and threaten to boycott their products unless these offenses are eliminated.

Let's say you identify the main issue here as “Are parents justified in making such demands on companies?” After considering the matter and producing a

number of ideas, you decide that and state your argument as follows:

Only those who pay for television are entitled to have a say about the companies alone are entitled to have a say.

You examine your argument and find it is not sound. Then you examine it for validity errors. As devil's advocate, you ask, “Do the companies handle the sponsorship of television programs properly?” Not being sure, you look at the product budget. You also learn about the materials, manufacturing, packaging, and the price of the product.

“Wait a minute,” you reason. “The prices of television shows and every other consumer product are reflected in the price of the products.” And so you revise your argument.

Those who pay for television are entitled to have a say about the companies alone are entitled to have a say.

In elaborating this argument, you ask questions that flow from it, and suggest consumers follow in related questions should also be asked.

THE CASE OF THE M

This case is one we encountered in the last chapter. It involves three girls with severe mental disabilities who are taking legal action seeking the legal right to marry. The larger issue here continues to be: “Should anyone have the right to marry another person?”

*Such a formal, logical ($a + b = c$) argument is not the best way of writing your reasoning. However, it is a good way to check your writing. In this case, your central claim is that television programming and commercials, etc.