

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