**Example 1**

In surveys Mason City residents rank water sports (swimming, boating and fishing) among their favorite recreational activities. The Mason River flowing through the city is rarely used for these pursuits, however, and the city park department devotes little of its budget to maintaining riverside recreational facilities. For years there have been complaints from residents about the quality of the river's water and the river's smell. In response, the state has recently announced plans to clean up Mason River. Use of the river for water sports is therefore sure to increase. The city government should for that reason devote more money in this year's budget to riverside recreational facilities.

Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on the assumptions and what the implications are if the assumptions prove unwarranted.

**Essay Response — Score 6**

**While** it may be true that the Mason City government ought to devote more money to riverside recreational facilities, this author's argument does not make a cogent case for increased resources based on river use. It is easy to understand why city residents would want a cleaner river, but this argument is rife with holes and assumptions, **and thus,** not strong enough to lead to increased funding.

**Citing** surveys of city residents, the author reports city resident's love of water sports. It is not clear, **however**, the scope and validity of that survey. For example, the survey could have asked residents if they prefer using the river for water sports or would like to see a hydroelectric dam built, **which** may have swayed residents toward river sports. The sample may not have been representative of city residents, **asking** only those residents **who** live upon the river. The survey may have been 10 pages long, with 2 questions dedicated to river sports. We just do not know.  **Unless** the survey is fully representative, valid, and reliable, it cannot be used to effectively back the author's argument.

Additionally, the author implies that residents do not use the river for swimming, boating, and fishing, **despite** their professed interest, **because** the water is polluted and smelly. **While** a polluted, smelly river would likely cut down on river sports, a concrete connection between the resident's lack of river use and the river's current state is not effectively made. **Though** there have been complaints, we do not know if there have been numerous complaints from a wide range of people, or perhaps from one or two individuals **who** made numerous complaints. **To** strengthen his/her argument, the author would benefit from implementing a normed survey **asking** a wide range of residents why they do not currently use the river.

**Building** upon the implication that residents do not use the river due to the quality of the river's water and the smell, the author suggests that a river clean up will result in increased river usage. **If** the river's water quality and smell result from problems which can be cleaned, this may be true.  For example, if the decreased water quality and aroma is caused by pollution by factories along the river, this conceivably could be remedied. But if the quality and aroma results from the natural mineral deposits in the water or surrounding rock, this may not be true. **There** **are** some bodies of water which emit a strong smell of sulphur due to the geography of the area. This is not something **likely to be** affected by a clean-up. **Consequently,** a river clean up may have no impact upon river usage. Regardless of whether the river's quality is able to be improved or not, the author does not effectively show a connection between water quality and river usage.

A clean, beautiful, safe river often adds to a city's property values, leads to increased tourism and revenue from those who come to take advantage of the river, and a better overall quality of life for residents. For these reasons, city government may decide to invest in improving riverside recreational facilities. However, this author's argument is not likely significantly persuade the city government to allocate increased funding.

**Example 2**

*Nature's Way, a chain of stores selling health food and other health-related products, is opening its next franchise in the town of Plainsville. The store should prove to be very successful: Nature's Way franchises tend to be most profitable in areas where residents lead healthy lives, and clearly Plainsville is such an area. Plainsville merchants report that sales of running shoes and exercise clothing are at all-time highs. The local health club has more members than ever, and the weight training and aerobics classes are always full. Finally, Plainsville's schoolchildren represent a new generation of potential customers: these schoolchildren are required to participate in a fitness-for-life program, which emphasizes the benefits of regular exercise at an early age.*

*Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions and what the implications are for the argument if the assumptions prove unwarranted.*

In this memo the vice president of Nature's Way CNW), a chain of stores selling health food and health-related products, recommends opening a store in Plainesville. To support this recommendation the vice president cites the following facts about Plainesville: (1) sales of exercise shoes and clothing are at all-time highs; (2) the local health club is more popular than ever; and (3) the city's schoolchildren are required to participate in a fitness program. Close scrutiny of each of these facts, however, reveals that none of them lend credible support to the recommendation.

First, strong sales of exercise apparel do not necessarily indicate that Plainesville residents would be interested in NW's products, or that these residents are interested in exercising. Perhapsexercise apparel happens to be fashionable at the moment, or inexpensive compared to other types of clothing. For that matter, perhaps the stronger-than-usual sales are due to increasing sales to tourists. In short, without ruling out other possible reasons for the strong sales the vice president cannot convince me on the basis of them that Plainesville residents are exercising regularly, let alone that they would be interested in buying the sorts of food and other products that NW sells.

Secondly, even if exercise is more popular among Plainesville residents than ever before, the vice president assumes further that people who exercise regularly are also interested in buying health food and health-related products. Yet the memo contains no evidence to support this assumption. Lacking such evidence it is equally possible that aside from exercising Plainesville residents have little interest in leading a healthy lifestyle. In fact, perhaps as a result of regular exercise they believe they are sufficiently fit and healthy and do not need a healthy diet.

Thirdly, the popularity of the local health club is little indication that NW will earn a profit from a store in Plainesville. Perhaps club members live in an area of Plainesville nowhere near feasible sites for a NW store. Or perhaps the club's primary appeal is as a singles meeting place, and that members actually have little interest in a healthy lifestyle. Besides, even if the club's members would patronize a NW store these members might be insufficient in number to ensure a profit for the store, especially considering that this health club is the only one in Plainesville.

Fourth, the fact that a certain fitness program is mandatory for Plainesville's schoolchildren accomplishes nothing toward bolstering the recommendation. Many years must pass before these children will be old enough to make buying decisions when it comes to food and health-related products. Their habits and interests might change radically over time. Besides, mandatory participation is no indication of genuine interest in health or fitness. Moreover, when these children grow older it is entirely possible that they will favor an unhealthy lifestyle--as a reaction to the healthful habits imposed upon them now.

Finally, even assuming that Plainesville residents are strongly interested in eating health foods and health-related products, the recommendation rests on two additional assumptions: (1) that this interest will continue in the foreseeable future, and (2) that Plainesville residents will prefer NW over other merchants that sell similar products. Until the vice president substantiates both assumptions I remain unconvinced that a NW store in Plainesville would be profitable.

In sum, the recommendation relies on certain doubtful assumptions that render it unconvincing as it stands. To bolster the recommendation the vice president must provide clear evidence--perhaps by way of a local survey or study--that Plainesville residents who buy and wear exercise apparel, and especially the health club's members, do in fact exercise regularly, and that these exercisers are likely to buy health foods and health related products at a NW store. To better assess the recommendation, I would need to know why Plainesville's health club is popular, and why Plainesville does not contain more health clubs. I would also need to know what competition NW might face in Plainesville.

Score 6

The marketing director of the Classical Shakespeare Theatre (CST) of Bardville asserts that by instituting a program similar to Avon Reporatory Company’s “Free Plays in the Park”, the CST will be able to attract new audience members and increase its profits. The marketing director seems to believe that because Avon has had a 10% increase in profits since it instituted a program in which they perform plays in the park for free, that the Classical Shakespeare Theatre will experience a similar increase in profits if it institutes a “Shakespeare in the Park” program. However, this conclusion assumes not only that the “Free Plays in the Park” program caused Avon’s increase in profits for Avon, but also that the CST would be able to replicate Avon’s success. Before the management of the Classical Shakespeare Company implements the marketing director’s recommendation, they need to answer several important questions that will help them determine whether this plan likely to have the predicted result.

One of the most obvious questions they need to ask is whether Avon’s increased profits were the result of its “Free Plays in the Park” program. In order to answer this question, they would need to know whether Avon’s increased profits came from increased ticket sales at Avon’s regular shows and whether the rise in ticket sales came from new customers who had a good experience at the “Free Plays in the Park” program. It’s possible that Avon’s increased profits were the result of factors other than increased ticket sales that happened to coincide with the “Free Plays” program (e.g., lowering operating costs or increasing revenue from concessions). If Avon’s increased profits are actually the result of increased attendance, CST would still need to determine if increased ticket sales resulted from an increase in the quality of shows or actors performing at Avon or some other factor besides the “Free Plays in the Park” program.

Another question that could shed light on the marketing director’s recommendation is whether what worked for Avon will work for the Classical Shakespeare Theatre. This is an extremely complex question since there are a huge number of variables at play. For example, if Avon specializes in affordable, family-friendly shows with simple sets and costumes, they may not only have an easier ( and cheaper ) time than CST in adapting their plays for performance in the park, but their target audience may also be more likely to attend both the “ Free Plays in the Park” and their regular performances. On the other hand, if CST typically produces lavish productions with big-name actors and high ticket prices, it’s possible that it will be difficult and expensive to stage their plays outdoors. It’s also possible that CST’s target audience consists largely of people who are unlikely to attend an outdoor performance. If this is the case, the program is much less likely to be successful in increasing CST’s profits.

Also, even if both theatres’ park programs are free, it is still important to consider each theatre’s usual ticket prices. If CST’s usual ticket prices are much higher than Avon’s, they may also have much less success than Avon in translating attendance at their park performances into attendance at regular CST performances. If Avon’s tickets are relatively inexpensive, people who enjoy the free performances in the park may be willing to buy ticket to other Avon performance. In contrast, if CST’s “Shakespeare in the Park” performances are free (like Avon’s “Plays in the Park”) but their usual ticket prices are very high, the program could have little positive affect on ticket sales. Even if people who attend the “Shakespeare in the Park” performances have a great experience there and want to see more plays, they may not be able to afford tickets to CST performances. The program could even result in a decreased sales of tickets to their regular performances if some CST audience members decide to save money by attending the free performances instead of the paid ones. Considering the potentially high costs of launching the program and staging plays in the park, the program could actually be a financial disaster for CST. Without clear answers to these questions and other questions, it is impossible to evaluate the director’s recommendation.