The following is a memorandum from the business manager of a listener-supported public radio station.

"For the past year, as part of an effort to broaden our supporter base, our Folk on the Air program has allocated less time to traditional American folk music and more time to Latino music and world music. In recent months, many long-term supporters of our station have written to complain about what they describe as the un-American bias of the program. In addition, the local newspaper has published a recent editorial critical to our shift in programming. Therefore, in order to forestall any further adverse publicity for the station and to avoid the loss of additional listener-supporters, we should discontinue our current emphasis on Latino and world music and restore the time devoted to traditional American folk music to its former level."

Respond by writing an essay in which you discuss the specific evidence you would need to judge the validity of the argument and explain how this evidence would weaken or strengthen the argument.

For media bodies like radio stations, taking consumer feedback into account when making decisions is essential for success. The memorandum states that many long-term supporters complained about an ‘un-American bias’ in the nature of the updated programming, and that a local newspaper also criticized it. The argument in favour of going back to the old schedule is based on the premise that through doing this, the bad publicity would cease, and that their core listener-base would stay. This argument is fallacious and has multiple lapses in its logic, with a conclusion wrongly drawn from the premises. There appears to be a representative flaw, with inadequate evidence provided in their reasoning. Any evidence that arises against the assumptions would falsify the argument's logic.

First, the argument claims that the decision was made to satisfy the 'many long-term supporters' who complained. 'Many' could mean a hundred, or a thousand; if the 'many' supporters do not form a significant fraction of the listener-supporters, then this does not warrant a regression in the radio programming. If, say, 2000 people called in to express their dissatisfaction with the changes made, one could argue that that is a lot of people, a significant amount. But if the average number of people who listen to the radio station regularly is 2 million, then the dissidents form 0.1% of the listeners; this is not something to reverse course over. Hence, the number of supporters whose criticism is being quelled by this reversal may not even be significant enough to warrant the business manager's decision.

Second, one may point to the local newspaper's criticism as a sign that the changes must be reverted. However, more evidence needs to be provided about the credibility of this newspaper. It may be a very small company, with writers known to write scathing opinion-pieces of companies that have taken any actions that resulted in criticism; the newspaper may be part of a bandwagon to define what they mean by 'American'. Being 'un-American' is very subjective, and having a local newspaper editorial write about how a company's actions are biased in this way is also not an indicator of 'Americanism'. Hence, the credibility and reputation of the local newspaper should be provided as evidence. If it was a well-respected newspaper, it could provide a valid reason to revert course.

Finally, the business manager seems to assume that criticism will decrease after the decision. But what if new listeners who joined in after the initial decision then proceed to express their dissatisfaction with this change? What if the potential new listener-base was bigger? If the radio station made the decision to diversify their music genres, they must have some statistics to show the number of new listeners, or the potential future numbers. If evidence is provided in favour of a huge potential for a more fast-growing listening base after the diversification, then the argument falls flat. The assumption that more listeners would be lost by the increase in genres, does not consider the number of listeners that could be gained. There is also the assumption that no other possibility exists to make their existing long-term supporters happy. It may be possible for them to schedule programming in such a way that their supporters don't greatly decrease. At hours when the long-term customers generally tune in with larger numbers, the programming could be left unchanged, while trying to have new genres at other time slots. If no evidence is provided that this kind of middle-ground solution is impossible, then the argument, yet again, would prove unwarranted.

Hence, the argument makes multiple jumps from its premises to conclusions, with incorrect reasoning and inadequate amounts of evidence reported. The arguments validity lies on some shaky assumptions, and these might be annihilated if any evidence, as discussed, is provided against them.