What is an argument?

Argument: a group of statements, one or more of which (the premises) are claimed to provide support for, or reasons to believe, one of the others (the conclusion).

Statement: a sentence that is either true or false—in other words, typically a declarative sentence or a sentence component that could stand as a declarative sentence.

It is important to notice that of all the kinds of sentences we can construct in English, the subset that we are focusing on are sentences which have truth values. We are going to operate under the assumption that there are only two possible, and mutually exclusive, truth values: true and false. If you are unsure about whether a particular sentence is a statement, then you might find it useful to ask if the sentence is true or false. If it is true or false, then you know it is a statement; if it is not, then you know it is not.

Statements	Non-statements
Chocolate truffles are loaded with calories.	Where is Kabul? (question)
Melatonin helps relieve jet lag.	Let's go to a movie tonight. (proposal)
Political candidates always tell the complete truth.	I suggest you get contact lenses. (suggestion)
Tiger Woods plays golf **and** Maria Sharapova plays tennis.*	Turn off the TV right now. (command)
	Fantastic! (exclamation)

Premise(s): the statements that set forth the reasons or evidence,

Conclusion: is the statement that the evidence is claimed to support or imply.

Socrates is a person. (Premise)
All persons are mortal. (Premise)
Socrates is mortal. (Conclusion)

Premise Indicators	Conclusion Indicators
since, in that, seeing that, as indicated by, may be inferred from, for the reason that, because, as, in as much as, for, given that, owing to	therefore, accordingly, entails that,wherefore, we may conclude, hence, thus, it must be that, it follows that, consequently, for this reason, implies that, we may infer, so, as a result

Arguments are used to *prove* something. In the above argument, I proved that Socrates is (was) mortal. Each premise, and the conclusion, are all statements. Note, however, that simply being a statement is not sufficient for being an argument. Warnings, pieces of advice, statements of belief or opinion, reports, loosely associated statements, expositions, and illustrations might seem argument-ish since they can be true or false. However, they do not - on their own - constitute an argument. The important skill to acquire is to be able to recognize an argument, rather than being able to distinguish between the many kinds of non-argument.

One final note on statements. There is a very interesting kind of statement in English known as a **conditional statement**. As the name indicates, conditionals state that one thing happens/occurs/exists given a particular condition. For example, 'If the Huskers lose, then there will be a riot,' is a conditional. The part to the right of the comma will happen when (is conditioned upon) the Huskers losing.

Conditionals are (at least for this part of the class) structured as follows:

If (antecedent), then (consequent).

or

(consequent) if (antecedent).

Later in the semester we will see just how fascinating conditionals are, but for now there are three things to keep in mind about them:

1. A **single** conditional statement is **not** an argument.

2. A conditional statement **may** serve as either the premise or the conclusion (or both) of an argument.

3. The inferential content of a conditional statement **may** be reexpressed to form an argument.[1]

[1] These three rules will hold true in this chapter, though the reasons why are still opaque. They will be explained later in the semester.