

# Week 6

Comm 1234

Technical Writing Fundamentals

David Laing

# Business letters

- Informative
  - Mostly quite intuitive and straightforward, if you're mindful of formal and social conventions
- **Persuasive**
  - **Requires an understanding of rational argumentation**
  - **Far easier to fail at**

# Argument discussion

Should performance-enhancing drugs be  
allowed in sports?

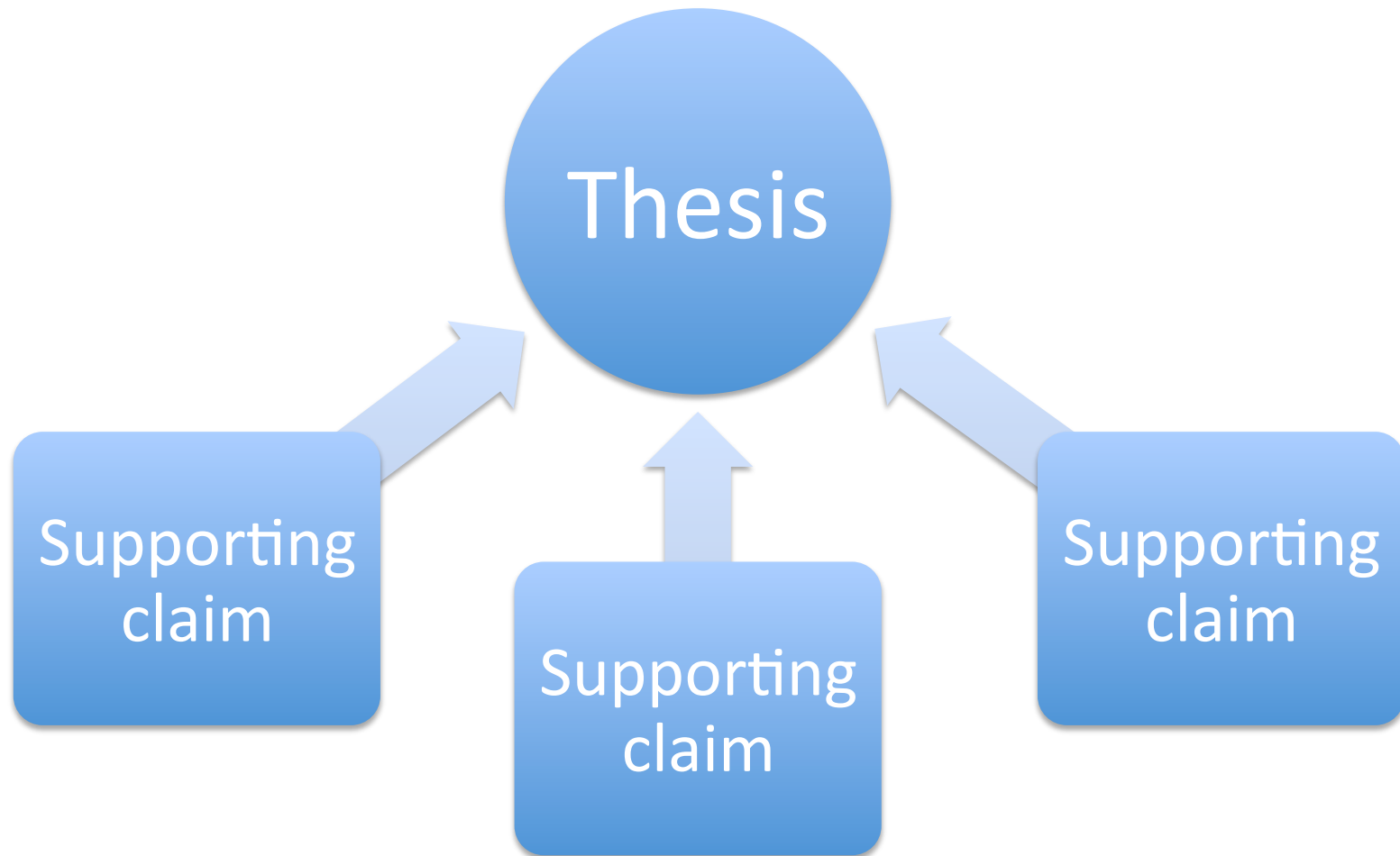
# Monty Python's argument argument

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnTmBjk-M0c>

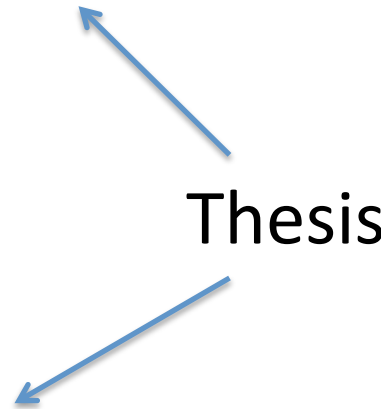
# Argument



# Argument



# Argument

- [Performance-enhancing drugs should be allowed] because...
    - Reason #1
    - Reason #2
    - Reason #3
  - [Performance-enhancing drugs should not be allowed] because...
    - Reason #1
    - Reason #2
    - Reason #3
- 
- The diagram consists of the word 'Thesis' in black text, centered between two blue arrows. One arrow points from the word 'Thesis' up and to the left towards the first bullet point, and the other arrow points from the word 'Thesis' down and to the left towards the second bullet point.

# Intro to argumentation

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEhdsnKKHs>



# Examples of arguments

- If you want to find a good job, you should work hard. You do want to find a good job. So you should work hard.
- Cutting the interest rate will have no effect on the stock market this time round as people have been expecting a rate cut all along. This factor has already been reflected in the market.

Lau, J. & Chan, J. (2014). What is an argument? *Critical thinking web*. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg/arg.php>

# How to recognize arguments

- Premise (assumption) indicators:
  - Because
  - Since
  - Firstly, secondly, etc
  - After all
- Conclusion (thesis) indicators:
  - Therefore
  - So
  - It follows that
  - This demonstrates that

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# Which of these is an argument?

- So it is raining heavily and this building might collapse. But I don't really care.
- Bill will pay the ransom. After all, he loves his wife and children and would do everything to save them.

# Is this an argument?

Most mornings, Park Chang Woo arrives at a train station in central Seoul, South Korea's capital. But he is not a commuter. He is unemployed and goes there to kill time. Around him, dozens of jobless people pass their days drinking soju, a local version of vodka.

# The key to strong argumentation

- Assess its strength
  - Write the argument in *standardized form*
  - Evaluate each premise based on three criteria
    - Acceptability
    - Relevance
    - Sufficiency

# Standardized form:

- P1: If you want to find a good job, you should work hard.
- P2: You do want to find a good job.
- C3: So you should work hard.

# How to standardize an argument

- Separate the *conclusion* of the argument (or the *thesis*) from the *premises* (or the *assumptions* or the *reasons*)
- If you want to find a good job, you should work hard. You do want to find a good job. So you should work hard.
  - Premise 1: If you want to find a good job, you should work hard.
  - Premise 2: You do want to find a good job.
  - Conclusion: So you should work hard.

Lau, J. & Chan, J. (2014). What is an argument? *Critical thinking web*. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg/arg.php>

# Standardize this argument:

- Cutting the interest rate will have no effect on the stock market this time round as people have been expecting a rate cut all along. This factor has already been reflected in the market.
- P1:
- P2:
- C3:

Lau, J. & Chan, J. (2014). What is an argument? *Critical thinking web*. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg/arg.php>



# Standardize this argument:

- We should not inflict unnecessary pain on cows and pigs. After all, we should not inflict unnecessary pain on any animal with consciousness, and cows and pigs are animals with consciousness.

# Cogency

- What does it mean for an argument to be *cogent*?
  - It's logical, clear, and convincing.
- Cogent:
  - You're tired, you've finished all your work, and you need to be well rested for tomorrow. So you should go to bed.
- Not cogent:
  - It's 2pm, you're wearing a hat, and you have an assignment to finish. So you should go to bed.

# Evaluation of Cogency

- Are the premises:
  - **Acceptable?**
  - **Relevant** to the conclusion?
  - **Sufficient** to establish the conclusion?

# Acceptability

- **Can we accept each premise as true?**
- Marijuana is far less harmful than alcohol. In fact, marijuana can be used for medicinal or therapeutic purposes. Moreover, if marijuana were legalized, the government could simultaneously generate tax revenue and create jobs. Lastly, marijuana has never caused even a single death. Thus, the drug should be legalized.

# Relevance

- **Is each premise relevant to the conclusion?**
- American adults should have the right to carry guns. After all, they already have this right. Furthermore, if law-abiding citizens were denied this right, then the only people in possession of guns would be criminals. For law-abiding citizens, guns provide a means of self-defense, which is necessary because police response time is often so slow.

# Sufficiency

- **When taken together, are the premises sufficient to establish the conclusion?**
- Voting should not be mandatory. In almost every election, there are many citizens who feel that none of the political candidates are worthy of being elected.

# Argument discussion

Should performance-enhancing drugs be  
allowed in sports?

# Business letter assignment

- Due next Friday at 4:30pm in my mailbox
- Scenario response, posted on Blackboard
- Write a cogent argument for your chosen conclusion (thesis)
- Address the strongest counterargument and show how it is flawed
- Next week we'll discuss the formal elements of business letters, and we'll further our discussion of persuasion/influence