

“Unpacking” Enthymemes: A Quick Study Guide

“Unpacking” enthymemes (searching for implicit or unstated premises or claims) can seem tricky; however, the following guide is designed to help you become even better at uncovering and then assessing what’s implied or assumed in an enthymeme or micro-argument.

Remember that although we almost never present an argument—whether it’s spoken or written—in the following way, the structure of a deductive syllogism is a model that can be used when we “unpack” an enthymeme:

MP:	All goldfish	are	mortal.
mp:	Blue	is	a goldfish.
C:	So, Blue	is	mortal.

Notice, too, how the terms (the individual items or concepts) are distributed in that syllogism:

MP:	All goldfish	are	mortal.
mp:	Blue	is	a goldfish.
C:	So, Blue	is	mortal.

Here’s how we might see that argument actually appear:

“I know you’re sad, honey, but Blue died because all goldfish eventually die.”

Here’s one way to “unpack” a sample statement/enthymeme from King’s “Letter”:

“But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.” (§ 3)

MP:	Injustice	is	in Birmingham.
mp:	I am	where	injustice is.
C:	So, I am	in	Birmingham.

MP:	Where injustice	is	I am.
mp:	Birmingham	is	where injustice is.
C:	So, Birmingham	is	where I am.