

the statement (based on how likely it is to be true). The strength of your belief will depend on the strength of the reasons in favor of the statement.

- In critical thinking an argument is not a feud but a set of statements—statements supposedly providing reasons for accepting another statement. The statements given in support of another statement are called the *premises*. The statement that the premises are used to support is called the *conclusion*. An argument then is a group of statements in which some of them (the premises) are intended to support another of them (the conclusion).
- Being able to identify arguments is an important skill on which many other critical thinking skills are based. The task is made easier by indicator words that frequently accompany arguments and signal that a premise or conclusion is present. Premise indicators include *for*, *since*, and *because*. Conclusion indicators include *so*, *therefore*, and *thus*.
- Arguments almost never appear neatly labeled for identification. They usually come imbedded in a lot of statements that are not part of the arguments. Arguments can be complex and lengthy. Your main challenge is to identify the conclusion and premises without getting lost in all the other verbiage.



## EXERCISES

Exercises marked with \* have answers in “Answers to Exercises” (Appendix B). Integrative exercises and writing assignments are not supplied with answers.

### Exercise 1.1

#### REVIEW QUESTIONS

- \* 1. What is critical thinking?
2. Is critical thinking primarily concerned with *what* you think or *how* you think?
3. Why is critical thinking systematic?
- \* 4. According to the text, what does it mean to say that critical thinking is done according to rational standards?
5. According to the text, how does a lack of critical thinking cause a loss of personal freedom?
- \* 6. What does the term *critical* refer to in critical thinking?
7. In what way can feelings and critical thinking complement each other?
- \* 8. What is a statement?

9. Give an example of a statement. Then give an example of a sentence that is not a statement.
10. According to the text, by what standard should we always proportion our acceptance of a statement?
- \* 11. What is an argument?
12. Give an example of an argument with two premises.
13. What is a premise?
- \* 14. What is a conclusion?
15. Why can't a mere assertion or statement of beliefs constitute an argument?
16. True or false: All disagreements contain an argument.
- \* 17. Does the following passage contain an argument? *Sample passage:* I couldn't disagree more with Olivia. She says that video games provoke young men to violence and other insensitive acts. But that's just not true.
18. Does the following passage contain an argument? *Sample passage:* Alonzo asserts that the government should be able to arrest and imprison anyone if they are suspected of terrorist acts. But that's ridiculous. Doing that would be a violation of basic civil liberties guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.
- \* 19. What are indicator words?
20. List three conclusion indicator words.
21. List three premise indicator words.
22. Give an example of a short argument that uses one or more indicator words.
- \* 23. What is probably the best strategy for trying to find an argument in a complex passage?
24. True or false: You can almost always find an argument in narrative writing.

## Exercise 1.2

For each of the following sentences, indicate whether it is or is not a statement.

- \* 1. Now that you're mayor of the city, do you still believe that the city government is a waste of time?
2. Do not allow your emotions to distort your thinking.
3. If someone wants to burn the American flag, they should be able to do it without interference from the police.
- \* 4. Do you think that I'm guilty?
5. Should our religious beliefs be guided by reason, emotion, or faith?
6. Stop driving on the left side of the road!
- \* 7. The Vietnam War was a terrible mistake.
8. The Vietnam War was not a terrible mistake.

9. I shall do my best to do my duty to God and my country.
- \* 10. Are you doing your best for God and country?

### Exercise 1.3

For each of the following passages indicate whether it constitutes an argument. For each argument specify what the conclusion is.

- \* 1. Rene hates Julia, and she always upsets him, so he should avoid her.
2. Rene hates Julia, and his feelings against her cause him tremendous pain.
3. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
- \* 4. Why do you think you have the right to park your car anywhere you please?
5. Drop your gun! You're under arrest.
6. If you smoke that cigarette in here, I will leave the room.
- \* 7. The *Titanic* sank, and no one came to save it.
8. Jesus loves me, for the Bible tells me so.
9. Spiderman is a better superhero than Superman because kryptonite can't hurt him, and he doesn't have a Lois Lane around to mess things up.
10. "Whether our argument concerns public affairs or some other subject we must know some, if not all, of the facts about the subject on which we are to speak and argue. Otherwise, we can have no materials out of which to construct arguments." [Aristotle, *Rhetoric*]
- \* 11. If guns are outlawed, then only outlaws will have guns. Don't outlaw guns.
12. If someone says something that offends me, I should have the right to stop that kind of speech. After all, words can assault people just as weapons can.
13. "Citizens who so value their 'independence' that they will not enroll in a political party are really forfeiting independence, because they abandon a share in decision-making at the primary level: the choice of the candidate." [Bruce L. Felknor, *Dirty Politics*]
14. If someone says something that offends me, I cannot and should not try to stop them from speaking. After all, in America, speech—even offensive speech—is protected.
- \* 15. "Piercing car alarms have disturbed my walks, café meals or my sleep at least once during every day I have lived in the city; roughly 3,650 car alarms. Once, only once, was the wail a response to theft. . . . Silent car alarms connect immediately to a security company, while the noisy ones are a problem, not a solution. They should be banned, finally." [Letter to the editor, *New York Times*]
16. "If history is a gauge, the U.S. government cannot be trusted when it comes to sending our children to war. It seems that many years after

Congress sends our children to war, we find out that the basic premise for the war was an intentional lie." [Letter to the editor, *L.A. Daily News*]

### Exercise 1.4

For each of the following passages indicate whether it constitutes an argument. For each argument specify both the conclusion and the premises.

- \* 1. Faster-than-light travel is not possible. It would violate a law of nature.
2. You have neglected your duty on several occasions, and you have been absent from work too many times. Therefore, you are not fit to serve in your current capacity.
3. Racial profiling is not an issue for white people, but it is an issue for African Americans.
- \* 4. The flu epidemic on the East Coast is real. Government health officials say so. And I personally have read at least a dozen news stories that characterize the situation as a "flu epidemic."
5. Communism is bunk. Only naïve, impressionable pinheads believe that stuff.
6. "Current-day Christians use violence to spread their right-to-life message. These Christians, often referred to as the religious right, are well known for violent demonstrations against Planned Parenthood and other abortion clinics. Doctors and other personnel are threatened with death, clinics have been bombed, there have even been cases of doctors being murdered." [Letter to the editor, *Arizona Daily Wildcat*]
- \* 7. "I am writing about the cost of concert tickets. I am outraged at how much ticket prices are increasing every year. A few years ago, one could attend a popular concert for a decent price. Now some musicians are asking as much as \$200 to \$300." [Letter to the editor, *Buffalo News*]
8. "Homeland security is a cruel charade for unborn children. Some 4,000 per day are killed in their mother's womb by abortion. This American holocaust was legalized by the Supreme Court in an exercise of raw judicial power." [Letter to the editor, *Buffalo News*]
9. Witches are real. They are mentioned in the Bible. There are many people today who claim to be witches. And historical records reveal that there were witches in Salem.
- \* 10. Stretched upon the dark silk night, bracelets of city lights glisten brightly.
11. Vaughn's car is old. It is beat up. It is unsafe to drive. Therefore, Vaughn's car is ready for the junkyard.

### Exercise 1.5

For each of the following conclusions, write at least two premises that can support it. Your proposed premises can be entirely imaginary. To concoct the

premises, think of what kind of statement (if true) would convince you to believe the conclusion.

#### EXAMPLE

Conclusion: Pet psychics can diagnose a dog's heartburn 100 percent of the time.

Premise 1: In the past fifty years, in hundreds of scientific tests, pet psychics were able to correctly diagnose heartburn in dogs 100 percent of the time.

Premise 2: Scientists have confirmed the existence of energy waves that can carry information about the health of animals.

1. What this country needs is more family values.
2. All animals—rodents, dogs, apes, whatever—have moral rights, just as people do.
- \* 3. Every woman has the right to abort her fetus if she so chooses.
4. When I looked into your eyes, time stood still.
5. All medical patients have the right to end their own lives.
- \* 6. When it comes to animals, Vaughn doesn't know what he's talking about.
7. Suspicion has arisen regarding the financial dealings of Governor Spendthrift.
8. The Internet is the most dangerous tool that terrorists have in their arsenal.
- \* 9. The Internet is the best tool that law enforcement officials have against terrorists.
10. Pornography is good for society because it educates people about sexuality.
11. Pornography is bad for society because it misleads people about sexuality.
- \* 12. *The Sopranos* is the greatest series in the history of TV.
13. It is the duty of every student to prevent this arbitrary tuition increase.
14. Ling cannot hold her liquor.

#### Exercise 1.6

For each of the following sets of premises, write a conclusion that would be supported by the premises (your conclusion should depend on both premises). Neither the conclusion nor the premises need to be statements that are true. To formulate an appropriate conclusion, try to think of a statement (conclusion) that could reasonably be supported by the premises.

#### EXAMPLE

Premise 1: The price of your shares in the stock market will continue to decline for at least a year.

Premise 2: Anyone with shares whose price will continue to decline for at least a year should sell now.

Conclusion: You should sell now.

1. Premise 1: You are afraid of heights.  
Premise 2: Anyone who is afraid of heights will fall if he or she climbs a tree.

- \* 2. Premise 1: School vouchers are being used in four states.  
Premise 2: School vouchers have decreased the quality of education in every state where they've been used.
- 3. Premise 1: School vouchers are being used in four states.  
Premise 2: School vouchers have improved the quality of education in every state where they've been used.
- \* 4. Premise 1: All married people are happier than unmarried people.  
Premise 2: You are married.
- 5. Premise 1: If stem-cell research is banned, Edgar will be very happy.  
Premise 2: Stem-cell research is banned.
- 6. Premise 1: If there is no God, then there is no morality.  
Premise 2: There is no God.
- 7. Premise 1: There is a God.  
Premise 2: If there is a God, then life has meaning.
- \* 8. Premise 1: There is a great deal of pornography of all kinds on the Internet.  
Premise 2: The government has essentially established a hands-off policy toward pornography on the Internet.  
Premise 3: Kids everywhere have access to pornography of all kinds on the Internet.
- 9. Premise 1: People in favor of capital punishment have a complete disregard for human life.  
Premise 2: Anyone who has a complete disregard for human life cannot be trusted.  
Premise 3: Nancy favors capital punishment.

### Exercise 1.7

For each of the following passages, determine if there is an argument present. If so, identify the premises and the conclusion.

- \* 1. "[T]he Religious Right is *not* 'pro-family'. . . . Concerned parents realize that children are curious about how their bodies work and need accurate, age-appropriate information about the human reproductive system. Yet, thanks to Religious Right pressure, many public schools have replaced sex education with fear-based 'abstinence only' programs that insult young people's intelligence and give them virtually no useful information." [Rob Boston, *Free Inquiry Magazine*]
- 2. "[Francis Bacon] is the father of experimental philosophy. . . . In a word, there was not a man who had any idea of experimental philosophy before Chancellor Bacon; and of an infinity of experiments which have been made since his time, there is hardly a single one which has not been pointed out in his book. He had even made a good number of them himself." [Voltaire, *On Bacon and Newton*]

- \* 3. "Is there archaeological evidence for the [Biblical] Flood? If a universal Flood occurred between five and six thousand years ago, killing all humans except the eight on board the Ark, it would be abundantly clear in the archaeological record. Human history would be marked by an absolute break. We would see the devastation wrought by the catastrophe in terms of the destroyed physical remains of pre-Flood human settlements. . . . Unfortunately for the Flood enthusiasts, the destruction of all but eight of the world's people left no mark on the archaeology of human cultural evolution." [Kenneth L. Feder, *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries*]
4. "Subjectivism claims that what makes an action [morally] right is that a person approves of it or believes that it's right. Although subjectivism may seem admirably egalitarian in that it takes everyone's moral judgments to be as good as everyone else's, it has some rather bizarre consequences. For one thing, it implies that each of us is morally infallible. As long as we approve of or believe in what we are doing, we can do no wrong. But this cannot be right. Suppose that Hitler believed that it was right to exterminate the Jews. Then it was right for Hitler to exterminate the Jews. . . . But what . . . Hitler did was wrong, even if [he] believed otherwise." [Theodore Schick, Jr., *Free Inquiry Magazine*]



### Field Problems

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1. Obtain the "Letters to the Editor" section of any newspaper (including student newspapers and online newspapers). Select a letter that contains at least one argument. Locate the conclusion and each premise.  
Next go through the letters again to find one that contains no argument at all. Rewrite the letter so that it contains at least one argument. Try to preserve as much of the original letter as possible. Stay on the same topic.
2. Go to [www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com) or [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com) and select an opinion essay on any issue. Identify its premises and conclusion, and decide whether you think the argument is a good one, providing reasons for your judgment.



### Self-Assessment Quiz

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Answers appear in "Answers to Self-Assessment Quizzes" (Appendix C).

1. What is an argument?
2. Name at least three premise indicators and three conclusion indicators.