

# Think Again: How to Untangle an Arguments

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# 1 Argument Markers

To spot an argument, we need to understand how language indicates that some sentences are intended as reasons for others. Certain words, which we will call **argument markers**, signal the presence of an argument by clarifying the relationship between premises and conclusions.

## 1.1 Identifying Intent

The difference between simply stating two facts and presenting an argument lies in the speaker's intent, which is revealed through word choice.

- **Conjunction:** In the sentence, "I am tall, and I am good at sports," the word "and" simply conjoins two separate statements. The order can be reversed without changing the meaning.
- **Argument:** In "I am tall, so I am good at sports," the word "so" indicates a rational connection. The order matters greatly; reversing it ("I am good at sports, so I am tall") creates a different argument.

## 1.2 Types of Argument Markers

Argument markers fall into two main categories based on what they signal.

### 1.2.1 Conclusion Markers

These words indicate that the statement immediately following them is the conclusion of an argument.

- **Examples:** so, therefore, thus, hence, accordingly.
- **Structure:** [Premise], so [Conclusion].
- **Example:** "I am tall, *therefore* I am good at sports."

### 1.2.2 Reason Markers (Premise Markers)

These words indicate that the statement immediately following them is a reason (a premise) for a conclusion.

- **Examples:** because, for, as, since, for the reason that.
- **Structure:** [Conclusion] because [Premise].
- **Example:** "I am good at sports *because* I am tall."

## Argument Markers

### Conclusion Markers

so  
therefore  
thus  
hence  
accordingly

### Reason (Premise) Markers

because  
for  
as  
since  
for the reason that

## 1.3 The Importance of Context

A word that functions as an argument marker in one context may not in another. You must analyze the role the word is playing.

- **Example with “since”:**

- *As a reason marker:* “I’m good at sports **since** I am tall.” (Here, being tall is the reason for being good at sports).
- *As a temporal marker:* “It has been raining **since** my vacation began.” (This indicates timing, not a causal or rational link).

- **Example with “so”:**

- *As a conclusion marker:* “I am tall, **so** I am good at sports.”
- *As an intensifier:* “You don’t need to eat **so** much.” (This does not indicate a conclusion).

## 1.4 The Substitution Test

To determine if a word is being used as an argument marker, try substituting it with a clear, unambiguous marker like “therefore” (for conclusions) or “because” (for reasons).

- **Rule:** If the substitution can be made without changing the fundamental meaning of the sentence, then the original word was likely being used as an argument marker.
- **Example 1:** “Since he failed out of college, he’s unemployed.”
  - *Substitute with “because”:* “**Because** he failed out of college, he’s unemployed.” The meaning is preserved.
  - *Conclusion:* “Since” is used as a reason marker here.
- **Example 2:** “He’s so cool!”
  - *Substitute with “therefore” or “because”:* “He’s therefore cool” or “He’s because cool.” Both are nonsensical and change the meaning.
  - *Conclusion:* “So” is not used as an argument marker here.

## 1.5 A Special Case: The Word “If”

The word “if,” often found in “if...then” statements (conditionals), is **not** an argument marker.

- An “if-then” statement by itself does not make an argument because it does not assert that the “if” clause (the antecedent) is true.
  - **Conditional Statement (Not an Argument):** “If I am rich enough, then I can buy a baseball team.” This doesn’t claim I am rich, nor that I can buy a team.
  - **Full Argument:** “If I’m rich enough, I can buy a baseball team. I am rich enough. Therefore, I can buy a baseball team.”
  - Because the word “if” alone does not assert a premise, we do not count it as an argument marker.
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## 2 Arguments and Argument Markers: Worked Examples

### Question 1

**Statement:** Charles went bald because most men his age go bald.

**Correct Answer:** Is an argument

**Reason:** This sentence claims that the fact that most men his age go bald is a reason that explains why Charles went bald. According to this claim, his age helps us understand why he went bald and makes it less surprising that he went bald.

### Question 2

**Statement:** Charles went bald, and most men his age go bald.

**Correct Answer:** Is not an argument

**Reason:** This sentence says only that both facts are true and does not explicitly say that one is a reason for the other.

### Question 3

**Statement:** My roommate likes to ski, so I do, too.

**Correct Answer:** Is an argument

**Reason:** This sentence claims that the fact that my roommate likes to ski is a reason that explains why I like to ski. According to this claim, my roommate’s likes help us understand why I like to ski and make it less surprising that I like to ski.

## Question 4

**Statement:** My roommate likes to ski, and so do I.

**Correct Answer:** Is not an argument

**Reason:** This sentence says only that both facts are true and does not explicitly say that one is a reason for the other. The word “so” here is simply short for “also” and does not function as an argument marker.

## Question 5

**Statement:** I have been busy since Tuesday.

**Correct Answer:** Is not an argument

**Reason:** The sentence says only that I have been busy after the time or day when it was Tuesday. It does not say that I have been busy *because* that day was Tuesday. The sentence states a single fact and does not contain both a premise and a conclusion. Since an argument requires at least one premise and a conclusion, this sentence is not an argument.

## Question 6

**Statement:** I am busy, since my teacher assigned lots of homework.

**Correct Answer:** Is an argument

**Reason:** This sentence claims that the assignment of lots of homework is a reason why I am busy.

## Question 7

**Statement:** He apologized, so you should forgive him.

**Correct Answer:** Conclusion marker

**Reason:** The word “so” indicates that the sentence following it is a conclusion. The meaning does not change if we replace “so” with “therefore”:

He apologized. Therefore, you should forgive him.

## Question 8

**Statement:** In view of the fact that he apologized, you should forgive him.

**Correct Answer:** Premise marker

**Reason:** The phrase “In view of the fact that” introduces a premise. The meaning does not change if we substitute “because” for the phrase:

Because he apologized, you should forgive him.

### Question 9

**Statement:** He apologized. Accordingly, you should forgive him.

**Correct Answer:** Conclusion marker

**Reason:** The word “*accordingly*” signals that what follows is a conclusion. This is shown by the fact that the meaning remains the same if we replace it with “*therefore*”.

### Question 10

**Statement:** After he apologizes, you should forgive him.

**Correct Answer:** Neither

**Reason:** The word “*after*” indicates only a temporal relationship, not a logical relationship of premise to conclusion. Replacing it with “*because*” or “*therefore*” changes the meaning of the sentence.

### Question 11

**Statement:** Seeing as he apologized, you should forgive him.

**Correct Answer:** Premise marker

**Reason:** The phrase “*seeing as*” introduces a premise. The meaning remains unchanged if we substitute “*because*”:

Because he apologized, you should forgive him.