

Ethics of Leadership

What is an Argument?

As you do the reading for this class throughout the semester, you will need to look for two basic kinds of information:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Of course, before you can do this, you need to understand some general points about arguments and their structure. The reading below will get us started on this and the questions will help you understand what I expect you to get out of it. Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Vaughn, *The Power of Critical Thinking* (PDF on webpage).

Questions

1. What do people commonly mean by the word “argument”? How is this similar to and different from how Lewis Vaughn define an “argument”? What role do premises and conclusions play in an argument? What purpose do inferences have within an argument? How is an inference related to premises and conclusions?
2. For the following arguments: (1) circle and denote with a C the argument’s *main* conclusion; (2) underline and number each premise supporting that conclusion; (3) underline any conclusion indicator words; and (4) circle any premise indicator words. Once this is done, assemble the argument’s diagram, putting the statements in boxes and using arrows to indicate the inferences. Be sure that your diagram clearly indicates whether multiple premises provide dependent or independent support.
 - a. The defendant must go to jail because he is guilty of stealing the jewels.
 - b. The defendant signed a confession, thus he is guilty of stealing the jewels. Furthermore, we know he was present at the scene of the crime.
 - c. The jewels were found in the defendant’s pockets, and they would only be there if he stole them. Therefore, he is guilty of stealing the jewels.
 - d. The defendant was present at the scene of the crime because his fingerprints were on the safe. We know about these fingerprints because the forensic report confirms it.
3. Can you combine the four argument diagrams from the previous question into one main argument?