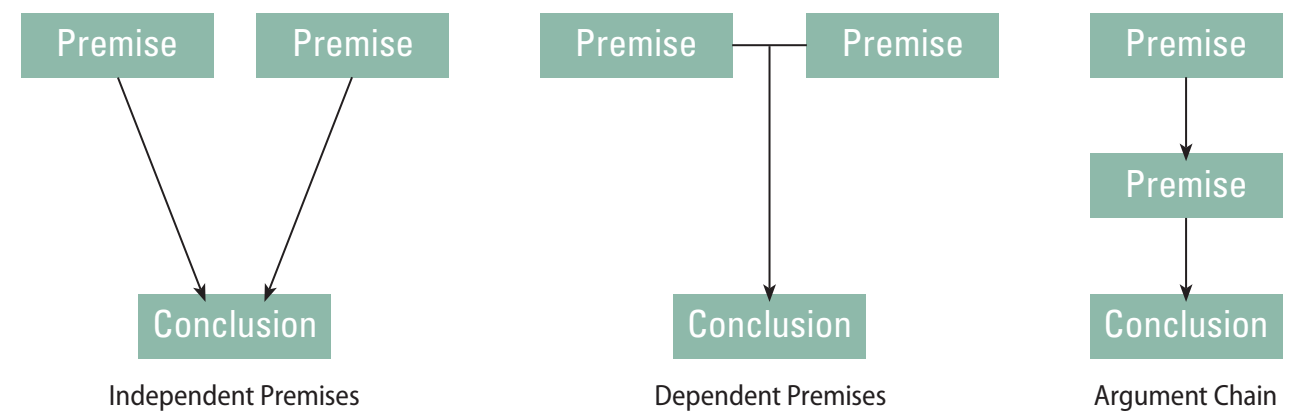


Notice that the claim that “philosophy involves a lot of reading” is both a premise and a conclusion in this argument. Therefore we call it a **sub-conclusion** in the argument. Since the claim that “philosophy is hard ” is not a premise and only a conclusion, we call it the **main conclusion** of the argument. An argument involving one or more sub-conclusions along with the main conclusion is called an **argument chain** because it involves the sequential linking from premise to sub-conclusion to sub-conclusion to . . . to the main conclusion. Most actual arguments have an element of this type of chaining.

Putting this together, you need to learn to recognize the difference between independent premises, dependent premises, and argument chains.



Each of these argument forms means something quite different, and so each requires a different approach if you are to critically assess it.

To sum up our answer to the question for today, an **argument** is a collection of propositions about which the claim is made that the truth of all the premises entails the truth of the conclusion. So an argument asserts that the conclusion can be inferred from the premises. That is, the claim is that *if* the premises are true, then the conclusion *must* be true as well.

Appendix: Indicator Words

Common Premise Indicators

because	in view of the fact	assuming that
since	given that	for the reason that
for	seeing that	inasmuch as
as	due to the fact that	as indicated by
follows from	being that	the reason being

Common Conclusion Indicators

therefore	which implies that	it must be that
thus	consequently	as a result
hence	it follows that	which means that
so	we can conclude that	ergo

# Introduction to Philosophy

## What is an Argument?

Informally, we may understand an argument as a certain set or collection of propositions.

**Proposition:** An assertion that something is or is not the case; a proposition is always either true or false.

Can you give some examples of propositions?

**Hypothetical Proposition:** A special proposition of the form “if . . . then . . .”; these are also either true or false.

An example of a hypothetical proposition:

*If you arrive after I have called your name, then you will be marked as tardy.*

How would you show that this claim is false?

A hypothetical proposition asserts that there is a special relationship between the *if* statement (called the **antecedent**) and the *then* statement (called the **consequent**). It claims that whenever the antecedent holds, then the consequent *must* hold as well. So the truth or falsity of a hypothetical is just the truth or falsity of this relationship, and it is *only* false when the antecedent (the “if” part) is true while the consequent (the “then” part) is false.

Now an argument is a collection of propositions that are connected in a certain way. In particular, propositions in an argument are linked together by inferences. An **inference** affirms one proposition on the basis of one or more other supporting propositions. These supporting propositions provide the *reasons* or *evidence* for believing the proposition being affirmed.

An example of an argument:

Philosophy is hard because it involves a lot of reading.

Why is this an argument?

What is the proposition being defended?

What reason is offered to defend that claim?

Philosophy is hard **because** it involves a lot of reading.

This argument involves two propositions:

1. Philosophy is hard, and
2. Philosophy involves a lot of reading.

The word “because” indicates that the second proposition is supposed to provide a *reason* or *evidence* for us to believe that the first one is true. Do not treat this argument like a single proposition. There are independent claims in this sentence that are connected by an inference (“because”); they are not connected in a way that is hypothetical (“if . . . then . . .”) in nature. Arguments and hypothetical propositions are different things.

The propositions of an inference are distinguished as being either premises or conclusions.

**Premise:** A proposition in an argument that is used to support another proposition; it is the basis on which an inference is made.

“Philosophy involves a lot of reading” is the premise of the above inference.

**Conclusion:** A proposition in an argument that the other propositions support; it is the proposition being affirmed by an inference.

“Philosophy is hard” is the conclusion of the above inference.

There are many words in English that help us (both as readers and as writers) to distinguish between the premises and conclusions of an argument. See the end of this handout for a list of some of these common indicator words.

Argument diagrams provide us with a way to visualize the inferential structure of an argument, which makes an argument easier to understand. The basic idea is that each individual proposition goes inside a box while each inference is represented with an arrow, like so:



Here is the argument diagram for the argument that philosophy is hard because it involves a lot of reading:

When reading an argument, take note of all the propositions the text is making. Try to classify them as premises and conclusions, and figure out how they are connected together by inferences. Here is a step-by-step procedure to help you when analyzing an argument:

1. Watch for the thesis or main conclusion, asking yourself:
  - At what conclusion is this passage, paragraph, or work directed?
  - What question in the author attempting to answer?
  - What claim would this portion of the text support?
2. Look for premises, asking yourself:
  - What propositions does the author admit as facts?
  - Are any claims advanced as evident, obvious, or true?
3. Look for the way in which premises are taken to support (infer) conclusions.

Support is often indicated with keywords:

- *X* “therefore” *Y* usually means that *X* is a premise supporting *Y*.
- *Y* “because of” *X* usually means that *Y* is a conclusion supported by *X*.
- Any other words that indicate inference (see p. 30–31 in the Copi handout or the list at the end of this handout).

Mark each type of proposition as you read.

- Indicate premises, and
- Indicate conclusions, but
- Beware that some propositions may not be actually part of the argument! They could simply be examples or claims giving the argument context.

Next to each conclusion, indicate which premises support it.

4. Construct an argument diagram for the argument.

Let’s practice this process. For the following argument, (i) underline any conclusion indicators, (ii) circle any premise indicators, (iii) circle its main conclusion and mark it with a C, (iv) underline and number each premise.

Philosophy involves a lot of reading. It also requires a lot of writing. Therefore, philosophy is hard.

Here is the argument diagram (you may use the C and premise numbers as labels to make things easier):

As the diagram shows, this argument uses two independent premises to justify the conclusion. An **independent premise** is one that does not depend on other premises to provide support for a conclusion. So denying or removing an independent premise does *not* undermine the support that the conclusion receives from any other premises.

Let’s practice argument analysis on this argument:

I am scared of philosophy because it is hard and if philosophy is hard then I am scared of it.

Here is the argument diagram (again, you may use the C and premise numbers as labels to make things easier):

As the diagram shows, this argument has two dependent premises justifying the conclusion. A **dependent premise** is one that does depend on at least one other premise to provide joint support for a conclusion. So denying or removing an dependent premise *does* undermine the support that its linked premises give to the conclusion.

Let’s practice argument analysis one more time on this argument:

Philosophy involves a lot of reading because philosophers talk a lot, and so philosophy is hard.

Here is the argument diagram (again, you may use the C and premise numbers as labels to make things easier):