

## Basics of Argument and Rhetoric

Although arguing, speaking our minds, and getting our points across are common activities for most of us, applying specific terminology to these activities may not seem so familiar. Below is a collection of terms and concepts applicable to both classical notions of rhetoric and our own everyday arguments.<sup>1</sup>

- I. **Claim:** a concise summary, stated or implied, of an argument's main idea, or point. Many arguments will present multiple claims.

### Types of Claims:

- **Factual:** states that certain circumstances or conditions exist beyond doubt. The validity of a factual claim can be definitively shown. Example: Mobile, Alabama receives the most annual rainfall, on average, of any U.S. city. This claim asserts that a certain circumstance is true (Mobile receives the most annual rainfall on average). This circumstance can be proven through a historical analysis of weather data.
- **Causal:** states that one thing, or event, is causally linked to another thing, or event. Causal claims often deal with effects, results, consequences, products, and, of course, causes. Example: The Panther's terrible season was the result of ineffective coaching (ineffective coaching was the cause of a terrible season). Causal claims may also include predictions for the future. Example: if we continue to rely upon internal combustion engines, our air quality will continue to decrease (internal combustion engines cause air pollution). Causal claims often use phrases like *because*, *since*, *as a result*, *therefore*, and *if/then*.
- **Evaluative:** makes a judgment about the quality of something. Evaluative claims are often found in reviews of movies (*Monster's Ball* is profound, but endlessly depressing), restaurants (Baja Grill serves the best Tex-Mex in

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the terms and concepts presented here are adapted from Katherine J. Mayberry's *Everyday Arguments: A Guide to Writing and Reading Effective Arguments* and *The Little, Brown Handbook, Eighth Edition*.

town), and books (the plot was too convoluted to appreciate). Evaluative claims always use evaluative words: *terrible, unjust, splendid, enjoyable, spectacular, obscene, etc.*, and are usually limited to statements of personal opinion or preference.

- **Recommendation:** A recommendation claim attempts to convince an audience to take a certain course of action and suggests what should or should not happen in the future. Example: you should work on this paper over the weekend. Recommendations often combine with evaluative and causal claims. Example: You should eat at The Baja Grill because their food is terrific; we must seek alternative energy sources or our air quality will continue to suffer. Words like *should, must, need, necessitates, obliges, and demands* give away recommendation claims.

Most arguments use a combination of these claims. When analyzing an argument look for wordings that identify what types of specific claims are being made.

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**II. Support:** Any information or technique that strengthens the credibility of a claim. Different types of support usually belong to the following categories:

- **Secondary Claims:** Almost all primary claims are in turn supported by additional secondary claims. For instance, a primary recommendation claim of “we need stricter gun control laws” might be supported by a secondary causal claim of “because fewer guns on our streets would save lives.” Secondary claims themselves need support, preferably factual evidence.
- **Comparisons:** This method of support compares a situation or scenario with a similar situation or scenario. For example, a recommendation that President Bush establish an international coalition before invading Iraq might compare his administration’s situation to his father’s during the Gulf War.
- **Appeals to Authority:** Uses the opinion of an expert(s) in the pertinent field as support. For appeals to authority to be effective, the authority must truly be

an expert on the topic you're debating. Celebrity spokespersons are often mistaken for legitimate "authorities."

- **Appeals to Audience Needs and Values:** Support targeted toward a specific audience's needs, concerns, and values. This type of support may also include emotional appeals.
- **Addressing the Counterargument:** An acknowledgement of opposing ideas or viewpoints. Addressing the counterargument allows you to respond to objections point by point, and demonstrates your own fair-mindedness.
- **Definition:** Definitions can serve as support by clarifying unfamiliar terminology, making abstract words more accessible, and manipulating controversial terms.
- **Example:** Specific examples of larger, more abstract claims give your argument more credibility. Examples can be real or hypothetical. Examples that refer to real people and events can connect emotionally with your audience.

Notes:

**III. Fallacies:** Errors in argument, intentional or accidental, that misrepresent the nature of an argument and mislead listeners/readers. Most fallacies either evade the argument or oversimplify it. Here is a partial list of some of the most common fallacies:

- **Begging the question:** assumes a debatable part of an argument is already agreed upon. Example: the heavily polluted Cape Fear River can't provide adequate drinking water for Wilmington (assumes river is heavily polluted).
- **Non sequitur:** occurs when a conclusion doesn't logically follow its premises. Example: because you borrowed my psyche notes, I flunked my Spanish test (no connection between premise and conclusion).
- **Red herring:** introduces unrelated information to distract the audience's attention. Example: you should just extend the due date since the

Panthers are playing tonight (the Panthers' game is an unrelated distraction from the real issue).

- **False authority:** using a non-authority in an appeal to authority.  
Example: Britney Spears recommends we give end-of-year tests to all school children (Britney Spears isn't an education expert).
- **Bandwagon:** appeals to people's desire to conform to the larger group.  
Example: you should try marijuana because over 50% of Americans have tried it (the fact that many people have done something doesn't automatically make that something justifiable).
- **Ad populum:** inappropriately appeals to people's general feelings of love, hate, patriotism, fear, etc. Example: if you're a true-blooded American you won't criticize my ideas (doesn't address the merits of the ideas).
- **Ad hominem:** distracts from argument by attacking the person or persons making the argument. Example: don't listen to Bill Clinton's advice on economic policy because he cheated on his wife (personal attack distracts from merits of suggestion).
- **Hasty generalization:** reaching a generalized conclusion from too little evidence. Example: Susie didn't say hello to me when we passed in the hallway. She hates me! (there isn't enough evidence to reach the conclusion).
- **Post hoc:** assuming that since *A* happened before *B*, *A* must have caused *B*. Example: After eating a cheeseburger, I wrecked my car. The cheeseburger must have made me wreck my car (no clear connection between *A* and *B*).
- **False analogy:** making implausible comparisons to prove a point.  
Example: Teachers are like doctors; so don't grade my paper, just heal it (not sufficient evidence to support comparison).
- **Either/or:** assuming there are only two conclusions that can be reached.  
Example: I'll either get an A in this class, or I'll flunk (doesn't acknowledge other possibilities).

**IV. Ethos, Pathos, and Logos:** The three areas of rhetorical appeal that describe how arguments persuade us. Most often these appeals appear in some combination of mutual support.

- **Ethos:** Mainly refers to the image of a writer or speaker as an ethical, trustworthy person. Writers and speakers will attempt to promote such an image to increase their credibility and influence. Also refers to how some arguments appeal to our sense of morality and justice, often in conjunction with *pathos*.
- **Pathos:** The ability of an argument to touch our emotions. *Pathos* appears frequently in rousing political speeches and can appeal to any combination of emotions, from envy to greed, love to hate.
- **Logos:** The appeal of an argument to our rational, logical side. This appeal lends the credibility of science to any argument by presenting objective facts for an audience's consideration. *Logos* also often uses formal (deductive) reasoning, as well as statistical or mathematical information.

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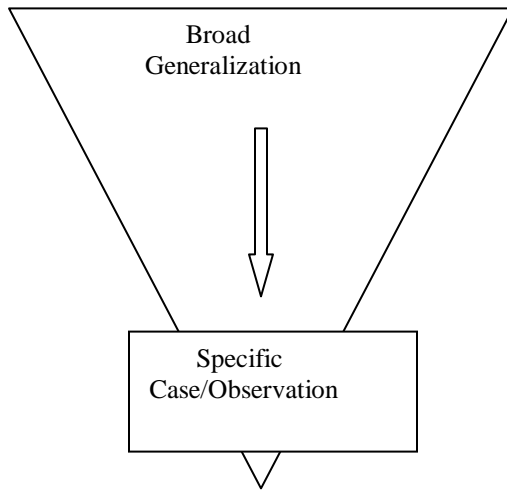
**V. Deductive and Inductive Reasoning** represent the two basic ways of presenting an argument. Deductive reasoning begins with a generalization and progresses to a specific case. Inductive reasoning begins with a specific case or observation and progresses toward a generalization. Since the type of reasoning used determines how claims are made and supported, understanding the differences between inductive and deductive reasoning is necessary for reading and responding critically to written arguments.

**Deductive Reasoning Example:** When it rains, John's old car won't start. It's raining. Therefore, John's old car won't start. (Applies a broad generalization to a specific case.)

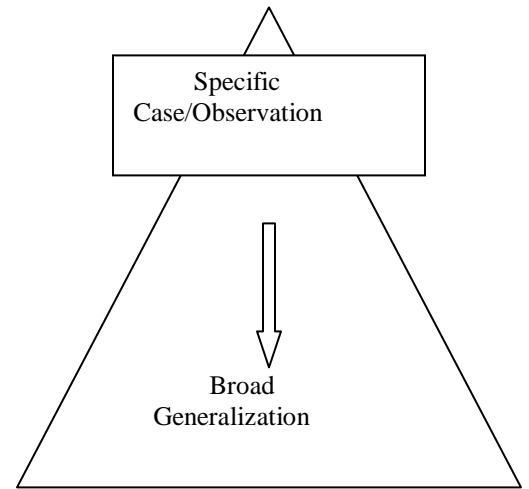
**Inductive Reasoning Example:** John's old car won't start. It's raining. Therefore, John's old car won't start when it's raining. (Uses a specific case to reach a broad generalization.)

What we think of as formal logic is typically deductive. In our everyday reasoning, however, we more often use inductive reasoning: “An inconsiderate driver just cut me off! The driver is from New Jersey. Therefore, all drivers from New Jersey are inconsiderate drivers.” To better visualize the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning imagine each as a triangle. The deductive pyramid is upside down, while the inductive pyramid is right side up:

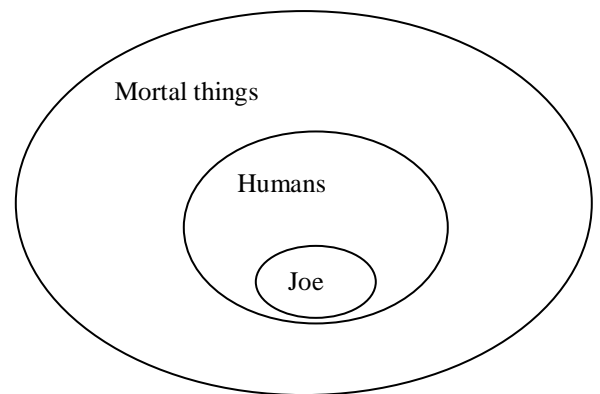
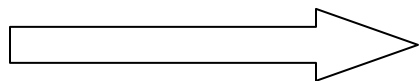
**Deductive Reasoning**



**Inductive Reasoning**



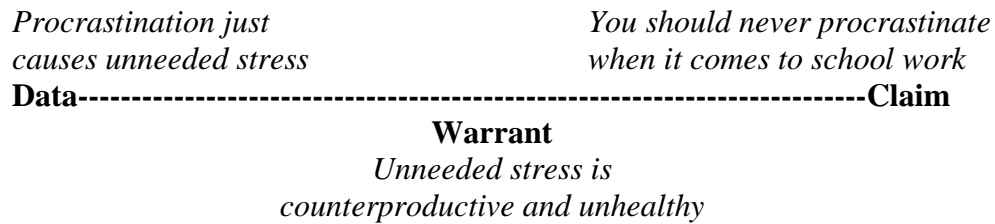
**Deductive reasoning** can also be illustrated in terms of larger and smaller classes. Compare this example to the graphic at the right: All humans are mortal. Joe is a human. Therefore, Joe is mortal.



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Although inductive and deductive reasoning give form to simple arguments and help us understand how basic arguments work, they are difficult to apply to more complex arguments. You may find the **Toulmin Method** more effective for interpreting and critiquing written arguments. The Toulmin Method breaks arguments down into the basic components of **claims, data, and warrants**. Claims represent conclusions (think of primary claims), data represents evidence and support, while warrants explain how data supports the claim.

Here is an example of the Toulmin Method applied to a visual model:



As a written argument, the above example might read simply, “You should never procrastinate when it comes to school work, because procrastination just causes unneeded stress.” The warrant here is merely implied, yet easily identifiable when placed within the Toulmin model.

**Writing Tip:** *When developing a thesis statement for an argumentative essay, try sketching it out using a Toulmin model like the one shown above. This will help you recognize how effectively your evidence supports your primary claim.*

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Reference

Cape Fear Community College. *Basics of argument and rhetoric*. [PDF document] Retrieved from Lecture Notes Online Website:  
<http://www2.cfcc.edu/wp-content/themes/CFCC2014/searchresults.html?cx=004637514235636343015%3Ayhzbksku25vo&cof=FORID%3A11&q=Basics+of+Argument+and+Rhetoric&submit.x=0&submit.y=0>