

Checklist for Analyzing & Evaluating Arguments

1. Identify the thesis
2. Identify the main supporting points and sub-points
3. For each point made, consider the type of point it is and the type of support offered:
 - Where there are observation/definition claims, or any kind of claim based on factual evidence, consider
 - How meaningful the evidence is. What does the evidence actually show? Are there vague words such as “a lot” or “few”?
 - How representative the evidence is. If examples are given, is there reason to think they are typical? Does the conclusion seem solid, or is it an overgeneralization? Are other interpretations possible?
 - The way evidence (especially numerical evidence) is presented. Percentage? Totals? What standard for comparison is provided (or not)?
 - How the evidence is derived. Does it come from direct observation, or is there some guesswork involved? How was the guessing done?
 - How reliable the evidence is. Does the writer say where it came from? Is it from an authoritative source? If not, how much do you trust the writer’s word?
 - Where there are causal claims, consider how plausible they are and whether other explanations are possible. Is a causal link is offered?
 - Where there are evaluative or proposal claims, be on the alert for warrants (especially unstated ones), which are the values or beliefs that make the argument work. Are these valid? Are they likely to be shared? Are they assumed, or stated and supported?
4. Observe any
 - Reliance on authority
 - Uses of analogy
 - Appeals to emotion (pathos)
 - Attempts to create confidence in the writer’s ethos
 - Terms that are used in a special sense, that others might define differently, or that seem particularly important to the argument. Are these terms defined? Is the definition reasonable?
 - Points that are not supported. How valid are they? Is it reasonable to simply assert them, or do they need support?
 - Awareness of other viewpoints and responses to arguments that others might make
 - Logical fallacies
 - Omissions (relevant points not discussed)