Reading and Evaluating Arguments
Learning Objectives:

- To recognize the elements of an argument
- To recognize types of arguments
- To evaluate arguments
- To recognize errors in logical reasoning
An argument presents logical reasons and evidence to support a viewpoint.
Parts of an Argument

- ISSUE - problem or controversy about which people disagree
- CLAIM - the position on the issue
- SUPPORT - reasons and evidence that the claim is reasonable and should be accepted
- REFUTATION - opposing viewpoints
Types of Claims

- **CLAIM OF FACT** - statement that can be proven or verified by observation or research

- “Within ten years, destruction of rain forests will cause hundreds of plant and animal species to become extinct.”
Types of Claims

- CLAIM OF VALUE - states that one thing or idea is better or more desirable than another.

- “Requiring community service in high school will produce more community-aware graduates.”
Types of Claims

- **CLAIM OF POLICY** - suggests what should or ought to be done to solve a problem.

  “To reduce school violence, more gun and metal detectors should be installed in public schools.”
Types of Support

- **REASON** - a general statement that supports a claim.

- **EVIDENCE** - consists of facts, statistics, experiences, comparisons, and examples that show why the claim is valid.

- **EMOTIONAL APPEALS** - ideas that are targeted toward needs or values that readers are likely to care about.
Inductive and Deductive Arguments

- **INDUCTIVE** - reaches a general conclusion from observed specifics.
- “By observing the performance of a large number of athletes, you could conclude that athletes possess physical stamina.”
Inductive and Deductive Arguments

- DEDUCTIVE - begins with a major premise and moves toward a more specific statement or minor premise.
  
  “Athletes possess physical stamina. Because Anthony is an athlete, he must possess physical stamina.”
Strategies for Reading an Argument

Think Before You Read

- What does the title suggest? Preview!
- Who is the author, and what are his or her qualifications?
- What is the date of publication?
- What do I already know about the issue?
Strategies for Reading an Argument

Read Actively

- Read once for an initial impression.
- Read the argument several more times.
- Annotate as you read.
- Highlight key terms.
- Diagram or map to analyze structure.
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- Evaluate Types of Evidence - Is it sufficient to support the claim?
- Personal Experience - may be biased, so do not accept it
- Examples - should not be used by themselves
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- **Statistics** - can be misused, manipulated or misinterpreted.
- **Comparisons and Analogies** - reliability depends on how closely they correspond to the situation.
- **Relevancy and Sufficiency of Evidence** - is there enough of the right kind to support the claim?
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- **Definition of Terms** - should be carefully defined and used consistently
- **Cause-Effect Relationships** - evidence that the relationship exists should be present
- **Implied or Stated Value System** - are they consistent with your personal value system?
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- Recognizing and Refuting Opposing Viewpoints
  - Question the accuracy, relevancy or sufficiency of the opponent’s evidence.
  - Does the author address opposing viewpoints clearly and fairly?
  - Does the author refute the opposing viewpoint with logic and relevant evidence?
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- Unfair Emotional Appeals
  - Emotionally Charged or Biased Language
  - False Authority
    - athletes endorsing underwear
    - movie stars selling shampoo
  - Association
    - a car being named a Cougar to remind you of a sleek animal
    - a cigarette advertisement featuring a scenic waterfall
Strategies for Evaluating Arguments

- Unfair Emotional Appeals
  - Appeal to “Common Folk”
    - an ad showing a product being used in an average household
    - a politician suggesting he is like everyone else
  - Ad Hominem - attack on the person rather than his/her viewpoint
  - “Join the Crowd” Appeal or Bandwagon
For Each Argument:

- Identify the claim.
- Outline the reasons to support the claim.
- What types of evidence are used?
- Evaluate the adequacy and sufficiency of the evidence.
- What emotional appeals are used?
- Does the author recognize or refute counter arguments?