

Effective Argumentation

To ensure you are being critical/ analytical in your interpretations, it is important that you “take an angle” or “take a stance”, i.e. you need to make an argument and be careful that you are not simply providing description or exposition. See the table below.

	Definition + Function	Example
Description	A detailed and informative account of an observed object or phenomenon.	<i>The planet named Earth is the third planet from its sun.</i>
Exposition (Explanation)	A detailed account of the causality of a phenomenon made valid by statements that carry the strength of natural law.	<i>Earth is exactly the correct distance from its sun to sustain life for the human inhabitants.</i>
Analysis (Argumentation)	A proposed resolution for a dilemma, a problem, or an inquiry, which uses a series of statements intended to prove validity (of premise) and which is based on evidence. In academia, the resolution is primarily, but not exclusively, contingent on establishing significance.	<i>The perception of time for the inhabitants of Earth is specific to the planetary orbit of the sun only, proving that the human construct of time is anthropocentric. Thus, assuming that construct applies to any other part of the universe is erroneous and hubristic.</i>

Logical Fallacies to Avoid in Arguments

- **Slippery slope:** An argument that insists that one course of action will inevitably lead to a chain reaction (even when this is not supported by evidence), e.g. *If we ban Hummers because they are bad for the environment, eventually the government will ban all cars. Therefore, we should not ban Hummers.*
- **Post hoc ergo propter hoc:** The argument that one event must have been the cause of another exclusively because it happened earlier, e.g. *The patient drank bottled water and is now sick, so the bottled water must have made the patient sick.*
- **Genetic fallacy:** A claim based exclusively on origin, rather than merit, e.g. *The Volkswagen Beetle is an evil car because it was originally designed by Hitler's army.*
- **Begging the question:** An argument that does not question if an assumption is correct/ assuming something is true without questioning if it is, e.g. *Romance novels are popular because many people enjoy them.*
- **Circular Reasoning:** A claim that requires one of its parts to answer another part, e.g. *It is time to go to class because it is class time. A cat is an animal that has catlike features.*
- **Tautology:** A repetitive argument that presents the same idea more than once using different words, e.g. *Martin Luther King, Jr. was a good communicator because he spoke very effectively.*
- **Either/or scenarios:** A claim that presents 2 options as the only solutions, e.g. *We must either stop using cars, or we will destroy the earth.*
- **Ad hominem attack:** A claim that relies on personal attacks, rather than the merit of the argument, e.g. *Green Peace's strategies are not effective because its champions they are all lazy hippies.*
- **Ad populum appeal:** An argument that relies exclusively on popular belief, rather than empirical evidence, e.g. *Many people use yoga to limit stress. Therefore, yoga limits stress.*
- **Red herring:** A claim that distracts from the central argument, e.g. *The level of mercury in seafood may be unsafe, but fishers are experiencing tremendous financial pressures.*
- **Appeal to authority:** a claim that cites a qualification, rather than the merit/evidence of the argument, e.g. *I have a BA in this subject, so I am correct in my argument.*