

**HOW TO**

# **ARGUE**

**POWERFULLY  
PERSUASIVELY  
POSITIVELY**

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# How to Argue

premise. There may be other conclusions that could be reached. Ask the person you are arguing with why it is they reach their conclusion, rather than an alternative. Consider this example:

### **Getting it right**

Bob: 'Your child is constantly yawning in my class. He clearly needs more sleep.'

Mary: 'Well, he could be yawning because he's bored, rather than tired. No other teachers report his yawning in their classes. If he was tired you would expect him to be yawning in all his classes.'

In this example Mary has effectively shown that several conclusions could flow from Bob's premise (Mary's son is yawning in class). Bob has concluded that it's because the son is tired. However, as Mary has pointed out there are a number of other conclusions that could result from the premise (the son may be bored or may be tired). Mary has gone on to introduce evidence to suggest that Bob's conclusion is less likely to be correct than Mary's.

## **Challenging with other factors**

It's very helpful in an argument to be clear about whether you're rejecting the worth of the other person's argument or whether you're suggesting that their point is outweighed by other factors. Consider, for example, two people arguing over whether having a new supermarket in their town is going to improve the town's life. The pro-supermarket person might say:

‘This is excellent news, because it will mean we'll have a far wider range of goods available in the town than we do at the moment.’

The other person has two choices. One would be to reject the argument:

‘I don’t think that’s right because the opening of the supermarket will force many of our specialist shops to close and we will end up with a narrower choice.’

Or he can accept the point but draw his opponent’s attention to other factors that need to be taken into the balance:

‘You’re quite right that there will be a wider range of goods. But there will be a lot more traffic in the town. We need to decide which is more important: having a wide range of goods or having a peaceful town.’

Try to be as clear as possible whether you are agreeing with the other person’s point or not. Otherwise you will find they are likely to state their point again.

Compare the following two examples of the same argument.

### Getting it wrong

Max: ‘We should go to my Mum’s for Christmas because she’ll be very sad if we don’t.’

Susan: ‘We’ll have much more fun if we go to my sister Beth’s.’

Max: ‘I don’t think you’re quite seeing it from Mum’s point of view.’

Susan: ‘We need to think about what’s best for us.’

### Getting it right

Max: 'We should go to my Mum's for Christmas because she'll be very sad if we don't.'

Susan: 'That's a good point. She loves it when we visit. But we have gone to her for the past three years, and it would be such fun if we went to my sister Beth's.'

Max: 'You're right, we always have a great time at Beth's, she's a great hostess. Is there any way we can get to see them both over Christmas?'

The second argument is much better because both are acknowledging that the other has made a good point and making it clear they accept the strength of what is said.

Another common technique in argument is to form an alliance with the listener by emphasizing common ground. Consider this point:

'We all want to make the decision that is best for the company and we must therefore accept this plan.'

The message is given that those who don't support the plan are not seeking the best for the company. Similarly this argument:

'We're all Muslims in this room and therefore we must combat immorality and oppose this plan.'

Again the listener is given the impression that support for the plan will be being disloyal to Islam. The impression may, of course, be incorrect, but it is a technique that makes the argument sound more attractive.

## Summary

So remember that in working through an argument, you can accept the opponent's facts and initial conclusions, but still find points that outweigh the argument and make your conclusion attractive. By presenting other ways of looking at the situation, or bringing in other material that might not have been considered, you can get the argument to go your way. Think outside the box, and don't limit yourself to a prescribed way of looking at a situation. Imaginative arguing can win the day, as you find points that outweigh your opponent's.

## In practice

Listen very carefully to the person you're arguing with. Check whether they have understood your points. What issues are really troubling them? What kinds of arguments will be most persuasive for them?



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**Chapter**