

GLOBAL  
EDITION



# Critical Thinking and Communication

*The Use of Reason in Argument*

SEVENTH EDITION

Edward S. Inch  
Kristen H. Tudor



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# CRITICAL THINKING AND COMMUNICATION

## The Use of Reason in Argument

**EDWARD S. INCH**

*California State University, Sacramento*

**KRISTEN H. TUDOR**

*California State University, Sacramento*

**PEARSON**

Boston Columbus Indianapolis New York San Francisco Upper Saddle River  
Amsterdam Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montréal Toronto  
Delhi Mexico City São Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

## Balance

A productive, fair discussion of the issues in a dispute can result only when the topic of discussion is stated in a form with which both parties feel comfortable. Recipients can be drawn into a discussion and persuaded by the evidence an arguer offers only when they are convinced that the arguer has a balanced perspective on the topic. *Balance is the requirement that the issues for and against a proposition be included equally in the propositional field.* When the topic is specifically and clearly stated in neutral language, the field is left open for both its proponents and its opponents to discuss it freely. In fact, a neutral, dispassionate statement of the proposition is a convention in many forums of argument. In law, the charges brought against a defendant are stated neutrally and are agreed upon before the trial can begin (Ms. Jones committed libel against Ms. Davis; Mr. Smith is charged with driving while intoxicated). In business management, decision makers usually discuss a specific policy or course of action that has been recommended (Should we acquire the Widget Company as a subsidiary of our operation? Does the preliminary information we have on this product line indicate that it should be heavily promoted?).

When a proposition for discussion is stated in connotative or prejudicial language, however, the deck is stacked against the viewpoint that opposes the proposition because the issues available to the opposing arguers have been limited or tainted by the emotionally loaded language. Furthermore, speakers and writers who state their theses in ways that reveal personal biases cause their audiences to become suspicious. Consider, for example, the following propositions:

Space exploration is the world's biggest money waster.

Stupid and evil recidivists should be put away for life.

Propositions such as these overstate one's case and close off rather than promote open discussion because extraneous language serves to limit the issues available to the arguers. Propositions that avoid connotative language, superlatives, and stereotypes encourage all parties to the dispute to consider all available options and decision proposals. The propositions given above could be rephrased to be more neutral. As a general rule of thumb, the wording of the proposition should be agreeable to all parties of a dispute.

Funds invested in space exploration should be significantly reduced.

Repeat offenders should receive life imprisonment.

It is important to note that this requirement is for propositions and not all claims. When advocates build extended arguments in favor of propositions, the expectation is that other arguers will develop alternatives. Propositions are important and unique because they are the one statement that all advocates should agree with and because they frame the way a conversation develops and how it is focused.

## Challenge

One of the characteristics of an argument that we discussed in Chapter 1 is that it is an attempt to influence someone else. *Challenge means that an arguer's claim confronts recipients' existing values, beliefs, or behaviors.* Generally, the arguer who initiates the dispute by stating the initial claim expresses dissatisfaction with a prevailing belief or state of affairs.

The arguer tries to change the other's attitudes or behavior to something different from what the attitudes or behavior would be if no argumentation took place.

A proposition for argument or debate should, therefore, challenge what people already believe or do. This is more than the requirement of being controversial. Whereas controversy refers to how ready a recipient is to agree to or believe in a proposition or claim, challenge focuses on changing the recipient in some way. This convention is based on the principle that there is no reason to defend an already accepted practice or belief unless it is questioned or criticized. Richard Whately, a nineteenth-century educator and clergyman, described this convention and its implications for argument.<sup>15</sup> He observed that in most argumentation there was a presumption and a burden of proof. The presumption favors the position that, because it is already accepted, "preoccupies the ground" in a controversy until some challenge is made against it. The person initiating the dispute therefore has the burden of proof entailed in making such a challenge.

The metaphor of preoccupying ground that Whately uses is carried through in the associations we make when we hear the word *claim*. A land claim is a claim to a parcel of land owned or possessed by someone else. The agency or the institution against which the claim is made enjoys no other advantage than the prerogative to retain the land if the claim is not upheld and accepted.

Therefore, the implication of Whately's concepts is that arguers who advance claims should challenge existing beliefs, policies, and states of affairs. Those who put forward proposals or advocate new ideas assume the *burden of proof*, which *obligates arguers to provide good and sufficient reasons for changing what is already accepted*. Those who defend existing beliefs and practices enjoy the *presumption*, that is, *the predisposition to favor an existing practice or belief until some good reason for changing it is offered*. The following claims do not challenge existing beliefs and practices and thus do not fulfill the burden-of-proof requirement:

School desegregation is desirable.

California should continue to rely on sales and property taxes for revenue.

The legal drinking age in the United States should be twenty-one.

Propositions such as these do not advocate change, and if arguments supporting them were not made, the policies and conditions they advocate would continue anyway. The following propositions, on the other hand, assume a burden of proof for the person who defends them because they challenge beliefs and policies that are presently accepted.

A nationwide system of magnet schools is desirable.

Washington State should implement an income tax.

The U.S. legal drinking age should be set at eighteen.

Because they raise the possibility of innovations and new policies, such propositions challenge the present system. They also fulfill our expectation that attempts at influence be necessary and justified. Box 4.2, "Apply the Theory," guides you through each of these requirements for developing claims.

BOX 4.2

APPLY THE THEORY: WRITING CLAIMS

This section focused on the four requirements for writing claims: clarity, challenge, controversy, and balance. Based on what you have read, write three claims and answer the following questions:

	Claim 1:	Claim 2:	Claim 3:
Is this claim clear? Double-barreled? Ambiguous terms?			
If this were a proposition, is it balanced? How do you know?			
Is this controversial? What, exactly, makes it generally unaccepted by your recipients?			
Does this claim challenge? What does it ask your recipients to do or believe that they do not do now?			

CLASSIFICATION

Generally, claims can be classified using three continua. These are illustrated in Figure 4.5 and include type, expression, and emergence. The concept of a continuum is useful here because it suggests that claims are interconnected—they “fit” into ways of thinking and knowing, they carry assumptions about the types of issues an arguer needs to address, and they help us understand an arguer’s goals and direction. Knowing how a claim functions using each continuum in any given argument or situation can help the arguer decide what issues or questions need to be addressed. Some claims are stated expressly and refer to sources or conditions that can be readily checked for verification. Yet, other claims and propositions may not be stated directly and depend on the recipient to consider the supporting material and then draw the conclusion the arguer sought. Advertising often uses this form of argument. Abercrombie

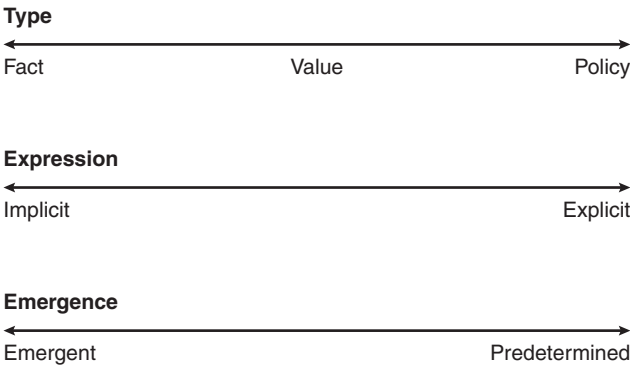


FIGURE 4.5 Classifying Claims

and Fitch ads, for instance, have been criticized for sexual images and no clear message about what the company expects the consumer to purchase. Of course, there is a clear message—it is implicit in the ad, but there is a message.

Sometimes arguers do not know what the proposition is until the end of the argument is reached—claims emerge as the argument develops. Other claims, such as those involving social values or policies, require more complex forms of support. For example, in Figure 4.2, the claim restating the Hippocratic Oath can be verified merely by referring to the text of the oath itself. If the group discussing euthanasia were to question whether “prolongation of death, dying, and pain demeans life,” however, it would have to spend some time defining the terms of the claim and generating criteria to decide whether certain practices “demean life.” This section will explore each of the three continua of claim classification and examine how these concepts influence the way we argue.

## Types of Claims

Many category schemes for classifying claims have been proposed.<sup>16</sup> Some are very complex and suggest dozens of types, whereas others are much simpler and argue that it is impossible to divide claims into subtypes. However, the simplest and most frequently used scheme divides claims into the categories of fact, value, and policy. We will use this scheme here because it includes the major recognized types of claims used as subjects of argument and because the sets of issues each type generates can be distinguished from the sets of issues generated by the other two.<sup>17</sup>

### Factual

*Factual claims make inferences about past, present, or future conditions or relationships.* They are described in Box 4.3. If a statement is about a condition or relationship that is already known and readily apparent to participants in the argumentation, it functions as *evidence*, or, in a network of claims, as a sub-sub-claim used as a starting point for argument. Remember from Chapter 1 that previously established claims could be used as evidence in new arguments that build on them.

Some statements of fact are straightforward and easily established, therefore not disputable. For example:

Mary weighs more than John.

The flight cannot leave because of heavy fog.

Central Airlines has the worst record for losing baggage in the United States.

Such statements are unlikely to serve as propositions for extended arguments because they are relatively easy to verify or prove. Some propositions of fact are difficult to prove because the information we need may not be available or because such information is subject to varying interpretations.

One type of factual claim is the relational claim. *A relational claim attempts to establish a causal relation between one condition or event and another.*

Capital punishment deters crime.

Smoking marijuana harms your health.

Violence on television affects children’s behavior.

## BOX 4.3

## FACTUAL CLAIMS

Definition: *Factual claims make inferences about past, present, or future conditions or relationships.*

- Factual claims are relatively easy to prove because the needed information is generally available and clear. Example: Mary weighs more than John.
- Some factual claims require clear definitions and strong supporting material because they include terms that may be ambiguous. Example: Capital punishment deters crime.
- Factual claims are generally one of three types: relational, predictive, and historical.

Definition: *Relational claims attempt to establish a causal relation between one condition or event and another.*

Example: A diet high in fat will harm your health.

Definition: *Predictive claims are based on the assumption that past relationships and conditions will be repeated in the future.*

Example: Every home in the United States and Canada will have an Internet connection by 2020.

Definition: *Claims of historical fact rest on the strength of probable evidence to which we have access.*

Example: There was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Researchers have completed many studies on each of these topics, and their results do not agree. Sifting through and comparing information on such topics is worthwhile because the inferences made in the claims are so controversial.

A second type of factual claim that makes an argumentative statement about what will happen is the predictive claim. *A predictive claim is based on the assumption that past relationships and conditions will be repeated in the future.* Because information that might prove such claims is often not available, predictive claims often serve as the subject of argumentation. For example:

A staffed space mission will reach Mars by 2020.

The world economy is headed for a massive depression by 2018.

A severe shortage of teachers will occur by the year 2025.

Such claims are usually supported by descriptions of long-term trends and statistically based projections; they also involve studying causal relationships that may be affected by unanticipated developments and events.

A third type of factual claim is the *claim of historical fact*, which *rests on the strength of probable evidence to which we have access.* Because historical records and artifacts may be damaged, destroyed, or lost as time passes, evidence supporting historical claims may be as unavailable as that supporting predictive claims. Extensive controversy has surrounded the following claims:

The Shroud of Turin was worn by Jesus in the tomb.

Aliens visited ancient human cultures more than 5000 years ago.

Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin of John F. Kennedy.

Supporters of such claims collect and describe as much circumstantial evidence as possible to convince skeptics that their claims are true. Historical claims cannot be positively proven because direct evidence to support them is unavailable.

The three types of factual claims that can serve as the subject of argument, then, are relational claims, predictive claims, and historical claims. Relational claims connect two conditions and infer that one of them has brought about or will bring about another. Predictive claims are grounded in the assumption that past events will be repeated in the future and make a claim about some future occurrence. Historical claims are descriptive and informational and are usually based on a preponderance of evidence that a particular account or interpretation of past events is the correct one. All three deal with matters that are disputable because the information we would need to establish them conclusively is insufficient or unavailable. They describe how or why something has come about or will come about in ways that are controversial and subject to argument.

## Value

In Chapter 3 we described values as desirable, transsituational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives. They represent fundamental positive or negative attitudes toward certain end states of existence or broad modes of conduct.<sup>18</sup> Such fundamental attitudes influence our conceptions of what is desirable or undesirable in a given situation. Joseph W. Wenzel has noted that "values exist in an intersubjective realm of agreements that are the fabric of a community; they exist in the actions and discourse of persons constructing, sustaining, testing, and revising the rules by which we will live and act together."<sup>19</sup> Examples of values expressing fundamental conceptions of desirable end states are equality, salvation, self-fulfillment, and freedom; those regarding models of conduct are courage, honesty, and loyalty.

*Value claims, then, assess the worth or merit of an idea, object, or practice according to standards or criteria supplied by the arguer.* They are described in Box 4.4. Value claims help shape our choice making and indicate to us what we ought believe and do. When we make value

### BOX 4.4

#### VALUE CLAIMS

*Definition: Value claims assess the worth or merit of an idea, object, or practice according to criteria supplied by the arguer.*

- Values are fundamental positive or negative attitudes toward certain end states of existence or broad modes of conduct such as equality (end state) and honesty (mode of conduct).
- Value claims focus on the values held by the participants in a dispute.
- Values govern our choices and indicate what we *ought* to do.

Examples:

Stem-cell research is beneficial to society.

Grading undermines the quality of education.

Censorship of Internet pornography is justified.