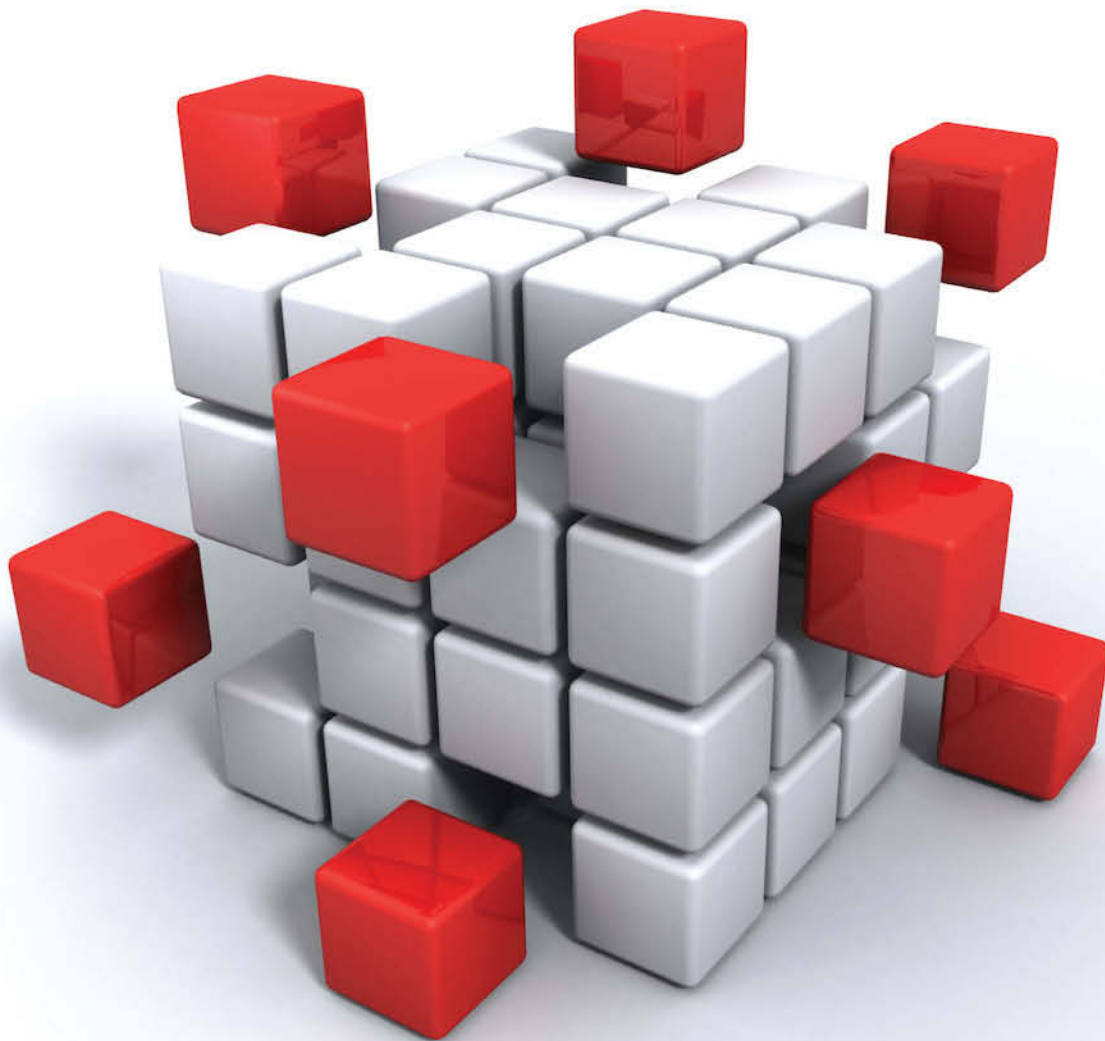


BECOMING A CRITICAL THINKER

A User-Friendly Manual

SEVENTH EDITION



Sherry Diestler

Becoming a Critical Thinker

A User-Friendly Manual

Seventh Edition

Sherry Diestler
Contra Costa College

In loving memory of Anne and Al Goldstein. And for John, Zachary, Nicole, Semaje, Stuart, Jenna, Travis, Laura, Amy, Isaiah, Abigail, and Noa. May we continue their legacy of discernment and compassion.

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About REVEL and this Course

You have the freedom to choose your actions; you don't have the freedom to choose the consequences of your actions.

Steven Covey

As human beings, we face numerous daily decisions affecting our personal and collective lives. We constantly have to choose one course of action over another. It is imperative that we think critically and choose wisely because we must deal with the consequences that follow the choices we make. In addition, we often want to influence and persuade others about social and political issues. Understanding effective argumentation is foundational to successful advocacy.

This **course** trains readers to become critical thinkers, thoughtful decision makers, and confident advocates for their beliefs. The purpose of this **course** is to enable students to:

- Effectively evaluate the many claims facing them as citizens, students, consumers, and human beings in relationships and make decisions based on careful consideration of both facts and values;
- Distinguish high-quality, well-supported arguments from arguments with little or no evidence;
- Come to thoughtful conclusions about difficult or controversial issues when both sides of a controversy seem to have reasonable arguments;
- Be alert to bias and misrepresentation in reporting and advertising;
- Discover their “points of logical vulnerability”;
- Work collaboratively with others to solve problems; and
- Become more effective advocates for their beliefs.

Becoming a Critical Thinker is designed to be interdisciplinary and to be useful in courses in critical thinking, philosophy, informal logic, rhetoric, English, speech, journalism, humanities, and the social sciences. It has also been used as either a required text or a supplement in nursing programs and in workshops on staff development and business management. There are important skills that distinguish critical thinkers across varied disciplines; the goal of this text is to present and teach these skills in a clear and comprehensive manner.

Content Highlights

As with previous editions, the seventh edition of *Becoming a Critical Thinker* has been updated with two priorities in mind. First, we wanted to retain and enhance the user-friendly format of the first six editions. Also, we wanted to update readings and activities so that readers are able to apply critical thinking principles to current issues.

New features in the seventh edition include:

- **Increased emphasis on practical application of critical thinking skills.** The focus on learning objectives for each section helps students understand exactly how they can apply the concepts to their personal, social, and political concerns.
- **Updated focus on the relationship between the many forms of social media and critical thinking,** featuring current research on how social media—including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Crowdsourcing, and Yelp—affect decision-making and relationships.
- **Updated research on how advertisers and marketers use different strategies to influence consumers,** including eye tracking, the use of sounds and scents, product placement, and neuro-marketing.
- **Updated checklist for distinguishing ‘fake news’ from ‘real news’ and tools for determining reliable sources of information.**
- **Clearer organization for enhanced comprehension,** with learning objectives featured at the beginning of each chapter section.
- **New articles and excerpts that cover current topics and issues.**
- Expanded exercises, with accompanying videos, to help students gain confidence in public speaking as an effective advocate for their ideas.
- **The Time-tested Revel design** featuring animations that enhance understanding of key critical thinking concepts, engaging chapter exercises, and relevant journal applications.
- Expanded chapter summaries that include all relevant concepts and learning objectives.

- **An updated and expanded instructor manual** with PowerPoint slides, revised tests and answer keys for each chapter, best practices for chapter exercises, and suggestions for teaching critical thinking concepts that incorporate instructional uses of social media and film.

UNIQUE FEATURES The process of becoming a critical thinker occurs when effective thinking concepts and skills are clearly understood and put into practice. For this reason, many aspects of the text have been chosen because of their practical application for the student:

- Each concept is explained with examples, and the examples progress from the personal to the social or political. In this way, students can see that the same skills used in understanding arguments in daily life are used in analyzing political and commercial rhetoric.
- Important concepts are illustrated through the use of graphics, animations, and cartoons, and definitions of key words are highlighted in the margins.
- Exercises of varying difficulty are given within and at the end of each chapter to help students practice critical thinking skills.
- Emphasis is placed on understanding and analyzing the vital impact of print and electronic media on arguments. Suggestions of films that illustrate critical thinking concepts are included in the instructor manual.
- Students are taught to construct and present arguments so that they can gain skill and confidence as advocates for their beliefs; they are also given tools for effective problem solving and decision-making.
- An emphasis on understanding conflicting value systems and on ethics in argumentation and decision making is included throughout the text.
- The articles and excerpts selected for the text are contemporary and express a variety of social and political viewpoints and ethical concerns.
- Multicultural perspectives are presented throughout the examples and articles. Many exercises and assignments encourage students to understand the perspectives of others and to broaden their own perspectives.
- A variety of writing and speaking assignments are included within and at the end of each chapter, and a chapter summaries provide guidelines for reviewing important concepts.

Specifically, the updates to the text include:

Chapter 1: Interactive animation videos highlight and clarify important concepts throughout the text. The activities and journals provide students immediate application of concepts, particularly concerning the process of decision-making.

Chapter 2: Ethical dilemmas are presented in an engaging, thought-provoking format so that students have the opportunity to evaluate arguments that are based on ethics and values. New article excerpts, animations, and activities highlight current ethics-based social and national issues.

Chapter 3: New exercises clarify deductive reasoning and emphasize the use of logic to combat prejudice and stereotyping. Arguments on legal and social matters highlight deductive reasoning in contemporary contexts.

Chapter 4: Interesting medical and legal issues are presented in animation videos to clarify the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning. The usefulness of statistics is shown across a variety of professions and applications, and students are given tools to help them discover exaggeration and distortion in statistical generalizations.

Chapter 5: New article excerpts highlight current research on topics of interest to students, such as the effects of social media on mental health and the need for personal connection in school and workplace settings. Activities help students distinguish quality research and true expert testimony from inadequate research design and biased testimony.

Chapter 6: New exercises help students clearly identify and challenge fallacies in social and political arguments as well as in pitches made to consumers. Chapter applications provide practice in distinguishing the various errors in reasoning.

Chapter 7: There is an expanded emphasis on language challenges in social, consumer, and political contexts to help students understand the power of language in managing, shaping, and ‘spinning’ narratives.

Chapter 8: Various platforms of social media and their influence in social, marketplace, and national issues are highlighted. The chapter also focuses on advances in digital and neuro-marketing techniques that are used to affect decision-making by consumers and citizens. We have expanded the section on storytelling as persuasion to influence audience perception so that students can see that even the shows they watch or attend have persuasive intent and power.

Chapter 9: Applications throughout the chapter help students uncover their own bias and ‘points of logical vulnerability’. We have expanded the sections on independent thinking and empathic listening to help students to express their own

viewpoints; in addition, the section on empathic listening is meant to enable students to hear and respond to differing perspectives. An article on rational approaches to political differences among friends and family encourages students to maintain and improve relationships across social and political divides.

Chapter 10: The importance of personal advocacy is essential for critical thinkers who wish to influence others. Chapter 10 adds new tools to help students overcome fears and gain confidence in their presentation skills. In addition, animations and exercises help students increase their ability to proactively negotiate positive outcomes when problems and challenges arise.

TO THE STUDENT Making decisions about issues large and small is an integral part of daily life; we decide how to spend our time and our money, the relationships we choose to explore and keep, the college we want to attend, the work we seek to accomplish, the places we want to live, and the candidates and policies we vote for or against. Sometimes, decisions are made rashly with little forethought. It is our contention, however, that the best decisions are made by carefully considering the various—and often complex—factors involved in a given circumstance.

This **text** is intended to train you to be discerning about the messages you read or hear; to make decisions based on careful consideration of both facts and values; to be alert to bias and “spin” in reporting and advertising; and, to be able to effectively present your own viewpoints, even against powerful counter-arguments. The skills of critical thinking are aimed to help you in your decision-making as a citizen, consumer, and professional; in addition, by the end of this course, you should be able to manage and enjoy a holiday meal with friends and family members who may not agree with you on a variety of personal, social, or political issues.

People who are admired for their decision-making are often said to have wisdom or discernment. It is our hope that this text will empower you with the conviction and peace of mind that come from using principles of critical thinking to make wise and fulfilling decisions.

About the Author

Sherry Diestler serves as the Chair of the Communication Studies department at Contra Costa College, where she teaches Critical Thinking, Public Speaking, Interpersonal Communication, and Speaking in the Community. She founded the college's competitive Speech and Debate Team and also created the college's Communication Lab to help students across the curriculum prepare and present speeches for their classes. Her department won a POWER award for

Outstanding Program Outcomes Assessment (Student Learning Outcomes) from the Research Planning Group of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. She was awarded the Contra Costa Community College District Teacher of the Year for 2013–2014.

Sherry received Bachelor's degrees in English and Speech at The Pennsylvania State University and earned membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Her master's degree in Communication Arts and Sciences/Media Studies is from Queens College of the City University of New York, where she was fortunate to be trained under Joseph DeVito and Gary Gumpert. She has worked as a Communications Consultant for the Office of Personnel Management, Western Region, as well as for a number of private corporations. In addition to the six prior editions of *Becoming a Critical Thinker*, she also has edited three editions of her department custom text with Fountainhead Press entitled *Public Speaking for College, Competition, and Career*. Her online interpersonal communication text, *The Interpersonal Project: Tools for Building, Maintaining and Repairing Relationships* is being used across her department. She served as chair of the Professional Development Committee and is on the Board of Gateway to College and a member of the National Communication Centers Association and the National Communication Association.

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Above all, I am grateful to the Creator of the human mind.

Sherry Diestler
Contra Costa College

Chapter 1

Foundations of Arguments



Learning Objectives

1.1 Apply the basic structure of argument

1.2 Outline a decision process using the decision-making method

Introduction: Foundations of Arguments

Who Is a Critical Thinker, and When Do You Need to Be One?

- A critical thinker understands the structure of an argument, whether that argument is presented by a politician, a salesperson, a talk-show host, a friend, or a child.
- A critical thinker recognizes the issue under discussion and the varying conclusions about the issue.
- A critical thinker examines the reasons given to support conclusions.
- A critical thinker uses the structure of argument to make thoughtful decisions.

We live in what has been called the Information Age because of the many messages that we receive daily from television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, blogs, text messages, tweets, and the hundreds of millions of sites on the Internet.

Sometimes we turn to this information for its entertainment value, such as when we watch a comedy, listen to music, scan the sports page, or read an online movie review. But in a democratic society, in which the people are asked to vote on candidates and political propositions, we also need to use print and electronic sources to help us make decisions about our personal lives and about the direction our community, state, and nation will take.

We need to know how to understand and evaluate the information that comes our way. This course will give you tools for coming to rational conclusions and making responsible choices.

A **critical thinker** is someone who uses specific criteria to evaluate reasoning, form positions, and make decisions.

You can strengthen your critical thinking by becoming aware of and practicing certain skills. The skills will be covered in this text and include an understanding of

- The structure of arguments
- Value assumptions and reality assumptions that are foundational to arguments
- The quality of evidence used to support reasoning
- Common errors in reasoning
- The effect of language on perception
- The ways in which media frame issues

In addition, critical thinkers develop and exhibit personal traits, such as fair-mindedness and empathy. We will discuss how these qualities strengthen critical thinking and decision making. Finally, critical thinkers use their skills to solve problems and to advocate for causes in which they believe. This chapter covers the first skill: understanding the structure of arguments.

When people hear the word *critical*, they sometimes associate it with faultfinding. The field of critical thinking, however, uses the word *critical* to mean “discerning.” A film, art, dance, or music critic forms and expresses opinions on the basis of standards. The skills you will learn in this text will give you a set of standards with which to evaluate messages and make thoughtful decisions.

When you learn to communicate well in a formal situation, your skill usually transfers to informal situations as well. For example, if you learn to make an effective informative speech in the classroom, you will also feel better about introducing yourself at parties or making a spontaneous toast at your brother's wedding. This same principle applies to critical thinking skills.

When you can listen to a presidential debate and make good judgments about what each candidate has to offer, you may also be more thoughtful about less formal arguments that are presented, such as which breakfast cereal is best for you or which car you should buy. You will be better prepared to deal with sales pitches, whether written or presented in person.

The methods of discernment and decision making that you will learn apply to choosing a viewpoint on a political issue or to choosing a career, a place to live, or a mate.

In short, critical thinkers do not just drift through life subject to every message that they hear; they think through their choices and make conscious decisions. They also understand the basics of both creating and presenting credible arguments.

1.1 The Structure of Argument

OBJECTIVE: Apply the basic structure of argument

The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.

Joseph Joubert, *Pensees* (1842)

When most people hear the word *argument*, they think of a disagreement between two or more people that may escalate into name-calling, angry words, or even physical violence. In their book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss how our metaphors for argument often affect our perception and our behavior. They claim that the metaphor *Argument Is War* "is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions", including instances like "wiping out" one's opponent and "demolishing" an argument.¹

Similarly, Deborah Tannen, in her book *The Argument Culture*, notes that as a society, we frame our social issues in warlike terms, e.g., the war on drugs and the battle of the sexes. However, this may not be the best method to comprehend and interact with the universe.²

Our definition of **argument** is different. When, as critical thinkers, we speak about an argument, we are referring to a **conclusion** (often called a claim or position) that someone has about a particular **issue**. This conclusion is supported with **reasons** (often called *premises*). If an individual has a conclusion but offers no reasons supporting

that conclusion, then he or she has only made a statement, not an argument.

Political slogans, often found on billboards or in television advertisements, are good examples of conclusions (opinions) that should not be relied upon because supporting reasons are not offered. If you see a billboard that proclaims, "A vote for Johnson is a vote for the right choice," or if you hear a politician proclaiming, "Education has always been a priority for me," you are encountering conclusions with no evidence; conclusions alone do not constitute an argument.

Critical thinkers withhold judgment on such claims until they have looked at evidence both for and against a particular candidate.

Can you think of a slogan, perhaps from an advertisement or a bumper sticker, that is a statement without supporting reasons?

 **By the end of this module, you will be able to:**

- 1.1.1 Identify issues in an argument
- 1.1.2 Identify the conclusions of an argument
- 1.1.3 Analyze a discussion to discover each side's reasons
- 1.1.4 Outline the argument in a humorous article

1.1.1 The Issue

OBJECTIVE: Identify issues in an argument

As we have discussed, an argument has three parts: the issue, the conclusion, and the reasons. The *issue* is what we are arguing about; it is the question that is being addressed. It is easiest to put the issue in question form so that you know what is being discussed. When you listen to a discussion of a political or social issue, think of the question being addressed.

Examples of Issues

- Should energy drinks be regulated?
- Should air-traffic controllers be given periodic drug tests?
- Should the minimum wage be raised?
- Are the salaries paid to professional athletes too high?

The same method of "issue detection" will be useful in understanding commercial appeals (ads) and personal requests.

More Examples of Issues

- Is Alpo the best food for your dog?
- Should you marry Taylor?
- Should you subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*?

Another way to isolate the issue is to state, “The issue is whether ____.”

- The issue is whether aspirin can prevent heart disease.
- The issue is whether reproductive cloning should be banned.
- The issue is whether our community should create 200 new homes.

It is important to distinguish issues from topics. Topics are ideas or subjects. Topics become issues when a question or controversy is introduced. In the previous examples, the topics would include Alpo, Taylor, the *Wall Street Journal*, aspirin, and cloning. The issues are questions about the topics.

Types of Issues

When we can identify the kind of issue, we can better understand the goal of the writer or speaker. The writer or speaker making a statement on a factual issue is aiming to establish or define a truth about a given topic. When someone speaks or writes on an issue of value, she or he is taking a stand on what is right or wrong about an issue. A policy issue is concerned with action; the writer or speaker advocates that a specific action should be supported.

Factual issues—*Factual issues*, sometimes called *descriptive issues*, concern whether something is true or false, as in the following examples:

- Does zinc prevent common colds?
- Are smog-control devices effective in preventing pollution?
- Do we have enough money to buy a new car?

Factual issues can also involve definitions, whether something or someone fits into a certain category:

- Is digital photography a fine art?
- Is drug addiction a disease?
- Is a platypus a mammal?

Prescriptive issues—Issues about *values*, sometimes called *prescriptive issues*, deal with what is considered good or bad or right or wrong, as, for example:

- Is there too much violence on television?
- Is marriage better than living together?
- Are salaries of executives of major corporations too high?

Policy issues—*Policy issues* involve specific actions; often, these issues emerge from discussions of facts and values. If we find that, in fact, smog-control devices are effective in

preventing pollution, and if we value clean air, then we will probably continue to support policies to enforce the use of these devices. If aspirin prevents heart disease, and we value a longer life, then we might ask a doctor whether we should take aspirin. If we do have enough money for a new car, and we value a car more than other items at this time, then we should buy the new car.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES RELATED TO A TOPIC

We can best understand an argument if we can identify the type of issue being discussed; factual issues claim that something is true or false, value issues claim that something is good or bad, and policy issues identify an action that should be taken.

Example topic: Opioid addiction

Sample issues:

Is opioid addiction becoming worse in the United States? (Factual issue)

Is opioid addiction worse than addiction to alcohol? (Value issue)

Should more programs be created to deal with opioid addiction? (Policy issue)

Possible issues:

Homelessness: Has homelessness significantly increased in our city? (Factual)

College tuition: Is college tuition too high? (Value)

Drinking age: Should the drinking age be lowered? (Policy)

MAKING DECISIONS As we have seen, all issues involve decisions about how to think about a topic or what action to take. We deliberate about issues from our earliest years. For example, children think about how to spend allowance money, what games to play, and what books to choose from the library. Teenagers consider what to wear; how much to study; what sports, musical instruments, and hobbies to pursue or languages to learn; and how best to spend the time and money they have. Adults make life choices concerning careers, spouses, children, friends, and homes; they also decide how to think about social and political issues and which causes, organizations, and candidates they will support.

Every decision we need to make, whether it involves public or private matters, will be made easier if we can define exactly what it is we are being asked to believe or do. Discourse often breaks down when two or more parties get into a heated discussion over different issues. This phenomenon occurs regularly on talk shows.

For example, a talk show featured the general topic of spousal support, and the issue was “Should the salary of a second spouse be used in figuring alimony for the first spouse?” The lawyer who was being interviewed kept reminding the guests of this issue as they proceeded to argue instead about whether child support should be figured from the second spouse’s salary, whether the first

spouse should hold a job, and even whether one of the spouses was a good person.

A general rule is that the more emotional the reactions to the issue, the more likely the issue will become lost. The real problem here is that the basic issue can become fragmented into different sub-issues so that people are no longer discussing the same question.

When you listen to televised debates or interviews, note how often a good speaker or interviewer will remind the audience of the issue. Also notice how experienced spokespersons or politicians will often respond to a direct, clearly defined issue with a preprogrammed answer that addresses a different issue, one they can discuss more easily.

If a presidential candidate is asked how he is going to balance our federal budget, he might declare passionately that he will never raise taxes. He has thus skillfully accomplished two things: He has avoided the difficult issue, and he has taken a popular, vote-enhancing stand on a separate issue.

JOURNAL

Staying on Track

Assume you are a moderator for a campus panel on whether extreme hazing in university fraternities should be outlawed. In response to your question on whether the proposed bans on types of hazing would be effective, one panelist says, "I believe there is too much underage drinking in fraternity houses." How could you respond to keep the topic back on track?

► The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

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1.1.2 The Conclusion

OBJECTIVE: Identify the conclusions of an argument

Once an issue has been defined, we can state our *conclusion* about the issue. Using some examples previously mentioned, *we can say yes or no to the issues presented*: Yes, I believe air traffic controllers should be tested for drug usage; yes, I want to subscribe to the *Wall Street Journal*; no, I will not marry Taylor at this time; and so on. We take a stand on the issues given.

The conclusion can also be defined as the position taken about an issue. It is a claim supported by evidence statements. These evidence statements are called *reasons* or *premises*.

We often hear the cliché that "Everyone has a right to his or her opinion." This is true, in the legal sense. North Americans do not have "thought police" who decide what can and cannot be discussed. When you are a critically thinking person, however, your opinion has

substance. That substance consists of the reasons you give to support your opinion. Conclusions with substance are more valuable and credible than are conclusions with no supporting evidence.

Critical thinkers who strive to have opinions with substance exhibit two important qualities as they try to understand the truth of a matter:

1. They realize their own personal limitations. They know that they have a lot to learn about different areas and that they may need to revise their thoughts on issues as new information comes to light. This trait is also called *intellectual humility*.
2. They make an effort to be discerning about what they read and hear. They look for good evidence and are open to hearing all sides of an issue. When they make up their minds about something, they have solid reasons for their decisions.

The term *conclusion* is used differently in different fields of study. The definition given here applies most correctly to the study of argumentation. In an argumentative essay, the thesis statement will express the conclusion of the writer. Philosophers use a related definition of *conclusion* in the study of deductive and inductive reasoning. In addition, the term *conclusion* is used to describe the final part of an essay or speech.

Other words used to mean conclusions are *claims*, *viewpoints*, *positions*, *opinions*, and *stands*. We use the term *conclusion* because most people who teach argumentation use the term. The other words listed can mean the same thing.

LOCATING THE CONCLUSION How can we locate the conclusion of an argument? Try the following methods when you are having trouble finding the conclusion:

1. Find the issue, and ask what position the writer or speaker is taking on the issue.
2. Look at the beginning or ending of a paragraph or an essay; the conclusion is often found in either of these places.
3. Look for conclusion indicator words: *therefore*, *so*, *thus*, *hence*. Also, look for indicator phrases: *My point is*, *What I am saying is*, *What I believe is*. Some indicator words and phrases are selected to imply that the conclusion drawn is the right one. These include *obviously*, *it is evident that*, *there is no doubt* (or *question*) *that*, *certainly*, and *of course*.
4. Ask yourself, "What is being claimed by this writer or speaker?" When you can identify the viewpoint that is being expressed, you have found the conclusion.
5. Look at the title of an essay; sometimes the conclusion is contained within the title. For example, an essay might be titled, "Why I Believe Vitamins Are Essential to Health."

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Finding the Issue and Conclusion

Consider this short speech, and identify the issue and the conclusion (position, stand) of the speaker.

“A high speed rail would be useful to travelers, but I think the disadvantages outweigh the advantages at this point. Building the rail would cost billions of dollars of taxpayer money, and there are just more important needs for funding in our state right now.”

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You may hear people discussing an issue and someone says, “I don’t know anything about this, but ...” and proceeds to state an opinion about the issue. This comment is sometimes made as a means of continuing a conversation. Critical thinkers take a stand only when they know something about the issue; they give reasons why they have come to a certain conclusion. Of course, a critical thinker is open to hearing new evidence and may change his or her opinion on issues, as new information becomes available.

1.1.3 The Reasons

OBJECTIVE: Analyze a discussion to discover each side’s reasons

Everything reasonable may be supported.

Epictetus, *Discourses* (second century)

Reasons are the statements that provide support for conclusions. Without reasons, you have no argument; you simply have an assertion, a statement of someone’s opinion, as evidenced in the following classic limerick:

I do not like you, Doctor Fell
The reason why I cannot tell
But this I know, I know full well
I do not like you, Doctor Fell.

Reasons are also called *evidence*, *premises*, *support*, or *justification*. You will spend most of your time and energy as a critical thinker and responsible writer and speaker looking at the quality of the reasons used to support a conclusion.

Here are some ways to locate the reasons in an argument:

1. Find the conclusion, and then apply the “because trick.” The writer or speaker believes ____ (conclusion) because _____. The reasons will naturally follow the word *because*.

2. Look for other indicator words that are similar to *because*: *since*, *for*, *first*, *second*, *third*, *as evidenced by*, *also*, *furthermore*, *in addition*.
3. Look for evidence supporting the conclusion. This support can be in the form of examples, statistics, analogies, research studies, and expert testimony.

There is a world of difference between supporting a political candidate because his or her policies make sense to you and supporting the same candidate because he or she seems like a charismatic person. Information in this course will give you the skills to help you decide whether a reason supports a conclusion.

Critical thinkers focus their attention on the issue being discussed, the conclusions drawn, and the reasons given to support or justify the conclusions.

As a listener: Be able to hear the issue, conclusion, and reasons given for an argument.

As a speaker: Be able to clearly articulate your own conclusion and the reasons you have come to that conclusion about an issue.

When people engage in formal arguments, they usually present their conclusions about issues first and then give reasons to support their conclusions. In decision making, however, people often struggle with reasons on both sides of an issue in order to reach a conclusion (decision).

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Weighing Reasons to Make a Decision

Try to list the reasons to go and the reasons not to go that the friends came up with before making their decision. Note that even routine daily decisions involve the process of weighing pros and cons (reasons) in order to come to a conclusion. Think of a recent “argument” you had with someone. What reasons did the other person state to back up his or her conclusion, and what reasons did you give to support your conclusion?

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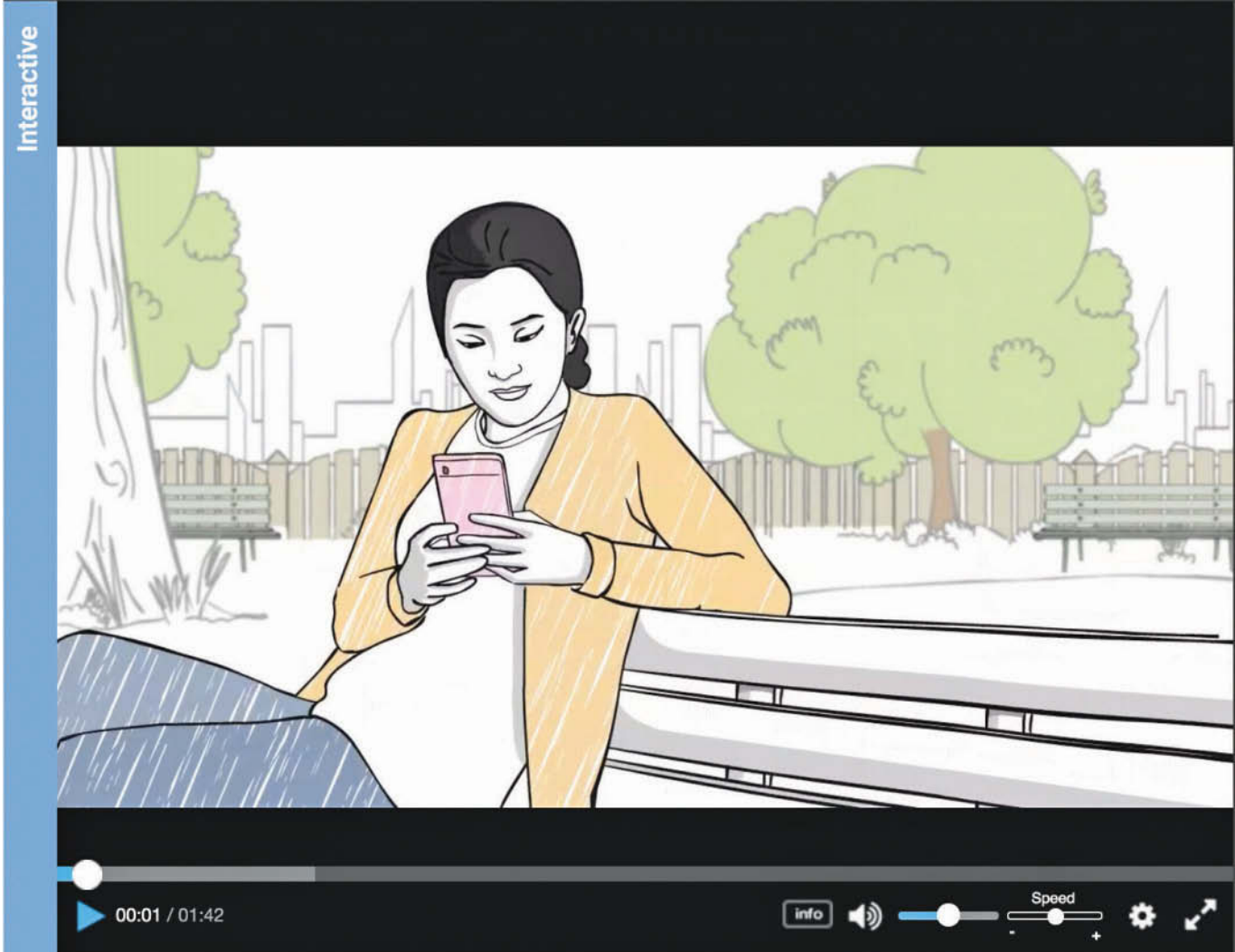
1.1.4 Humor as Argument

OBJECTIVE: Outline the argument in a humorous article

Humor can also be viewed as argument—humorists often make an argument in a disarming way, using irony and exaggeration. If you listen closely to what comedians and comic writers say, you can isolate issues, conclusions, and reasons in their commentaries. An *Onion* magazine article wrote about people’s desires to have the latest technological device. Go through the following paraphrased sentences from that article and try to identify issues, conclusions, and reasons.

Watch USING REASONS TO MAKE DECISIONS

Consider the following text conversation between two friends, jointly deciding on the issue of whether to go to a water park. Note that the conclusion (the decision to go or not to go) does not become clear until they go over the reasons on both sides.



The holiday shopping season is upon us. Thus millions of consumers have descended on various commercial centers so that they can acquire the newest and most coveted electronic device for personal use.

According to a spokesperson of the large new device manufacturer, the new device is better than the older device. Thus, it is desirable and should be bought by all Americans. According to him, customers no longer covet or want to own the older electronic device.

According to a new customer, the higher price of the new device indicates that it is better than the older device, even though he had bought the older device less than two years ago.

According to another customer, the fact that the new device is the latest trend will inform everyone around

her that she is successful and trendy. The new device's attractiveness is almost an extension of the customer's attractiveness.³

JOURNAL**Finding the Issue, Conclusion, and Reasons in Humor**

Identify the elements of argument in the *Onion* article. Find the issue, conclusion, and reasons given by the writer.



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1.2 A Decision-Making Method

OBJECTIVE: Outline a decision process using the decision-making method

If you don't know where you're going, you might wind up somewhere else.

Yogi Berra

If you don't have a plan for yourself, you'll be a part of someone else's.

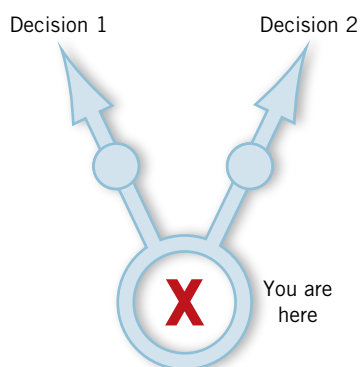
African American Proverb

A **decision** is a choice between two or more alternative actions. We face dilemmas daily in small and big ways. Virtually every aspect of our lives involves decision making, especially since we live in a “free” society in which most decisions are not made by authorities but are left to individual citizens. Decisions need to be made about a variety of matters such as whom to support in an election, which career to pursue, which school to attend, whether to marry, whether to have children, where to live, and how to budget time and money.

Many methods exist to help people make life decisions. There are different ways to evaluate reasons on both sides of a difficult decision. The question to be decided can be seen as the issue—Should I vote for Candidate A, Candidate B, or Candidate C? Should I spend money on a car or save the money for future needs? Should I go to graduate school or take a job offer now? The dilemma for the decision maker is that the future consequences of choosing one path over another are not known in the present time; the person making the decision has to choose without knowing the full implications of the choice. He or she must do what seems best with the information available in the present. (See Figure 1.1.)

Figure 1.1 Pathways

A decision usually involves a dilemma between two alternatives. The decision maker must imagine the future consequences of each alternative.



✓ **By the end of this module, you will be able to:**

- 1.2.1 Recognize a decision as a conclusion about an issue
- 1.2.2 Assess a decision based on prioritized reasons
- 1.2.3 Re-evaluate a decision

1.2.1 The First Steps in Decision-making

OBJECTIVE: Recognize a decision as a conclusion about an issue

Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.

Napoleon, *Maxims* (1804)

To come to a reasoned conclusion about a decision, it helps to weigh the reasons on both sides. Often, however, people can see many reasons to support two or more choices, and they feel paralyzed by indecision as a result.

One method that can be useful in making decisions that should also help you clarify your reasoning involves listing and giving weights to various reasons and then weighing each of your choices against those reasons.

Let's look at this decision-making method, using the example of the decision of whether to attend School X or School Y.

The first step in decision making is to define the dilemma in the form of an issue.

Example: Should I attend School X or School Y?

The second step in decision making involves looking at your long-term objective. It answers the question: What do I want this choice to accomplish in my life?

Example: I want to get a good education in my field without going into debt for more than two years.

Note that in the second step, if either alternative does not meet your objective, the decision is already made. If you find that School X does not have the major that you want or that it would be too expensive to go to School X, then it no longer is an alternative to consider.

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Personal Decision-making

What is a decision that you need to make in the near—or distant—future? Try to specify your long-term objective for the decision. What outcome would you like the decision to achieve in your life?

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1.2.2 Weighing Your Priorities

OBJECTIVE: Assess a decision based on prioritized reasons

In the third step of decision making, you determine which factors are most important to you concerning your desired outcome (in this case the factors in a school). As shown in Table 1.1, you list the factors and give an importance to each one (on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the highest).

Table 1.1 Factors to Consider

Strong department in my major	10 points
Affordable (low cost or scholarship)	10 points
Close to friends and family	6 points
Near a large city	5 points
Gives internship option	8 points
Campus is attractive	4 points
Good arts community nearby	7 points
Climate is mild	5 points
Feels like a good fit when I visit	9 points
Professors are accessible	8 points

Note that the criteria in this example would be different for different people. That is why it is hard to receive advice about your decision or to give advice to others—other people may not weigh the factors the way you do. To one person, being in a large urban area is a major plus—to another it would be seen as a disadvantage. One person may value a close relationship with professors, whereas another prefers more formality and distance. One person may want to take advantage of cultural attractions nearby, whereas another is more interested in the sports scene on campus.

The fourth step of decision making gets to the heart of the reasons for and against each choice and gives you clear criteria for your decision. In this step, you take each factor and weigh it against your choices. The choice with the highest score is tentatively chosen. Table 1.2 builds on our third step by incorporating two choices of potential schools. You will build your own decision-making table in Assignment 1d.

1.2.3 Troubleshooting Your Decision

OBJECTIVE: Re-evaluate a decision

The fifth and final step in our method of decision making involves tentatively choosing the highest scoring alternative. Doing this kind of decision analysis may confirm that the individual choice is the right one or that either

Table 1.2 Weighting the Alternatives

Factor	Weight	School X Score	School Y Score
Strong department in my major	10 points ×	8	10
Affordable (low cost or scholarship)	10 points ×	9	5
Close to friends and family	6 points ×	8	6
Near a large city	5 points ×	5	9
Gives internship option	8 points ×	7	9
Campus is attractive	4 points ×	8	8
Good arts community nearby	7 points ×	7	10
Climate is mild	5 points ×	5	7
Feels like a good fit when I visit	9 points ×	8	10
Professors are accessible	8 points ×	9	7
Total: Weight of factor times score of choice		549	521

choice would be acceptable. Often, this kind of critical analysis can clarify and solidify choices for an individual. If, on the other hand, the alternative chosen does not “feel right,” he or she may look at the criteria to determine why.

Going through this logical process and seeing which alternative “scores” higher will help you clarify your choice: If you feel satisfied with the choice, the factors listed were the important factors; if you are disappointed or uncomfortable with the choice, there may be some other, perhaps more emotionally based, factors that need to be entered into the equation.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENT

When you are listening to a discussion in class or at a meeting, consider the issue being discussed, the claims being made, and the reasons given for the claims. If you have an opinion to share, frame it in terms of your position and your reasons.

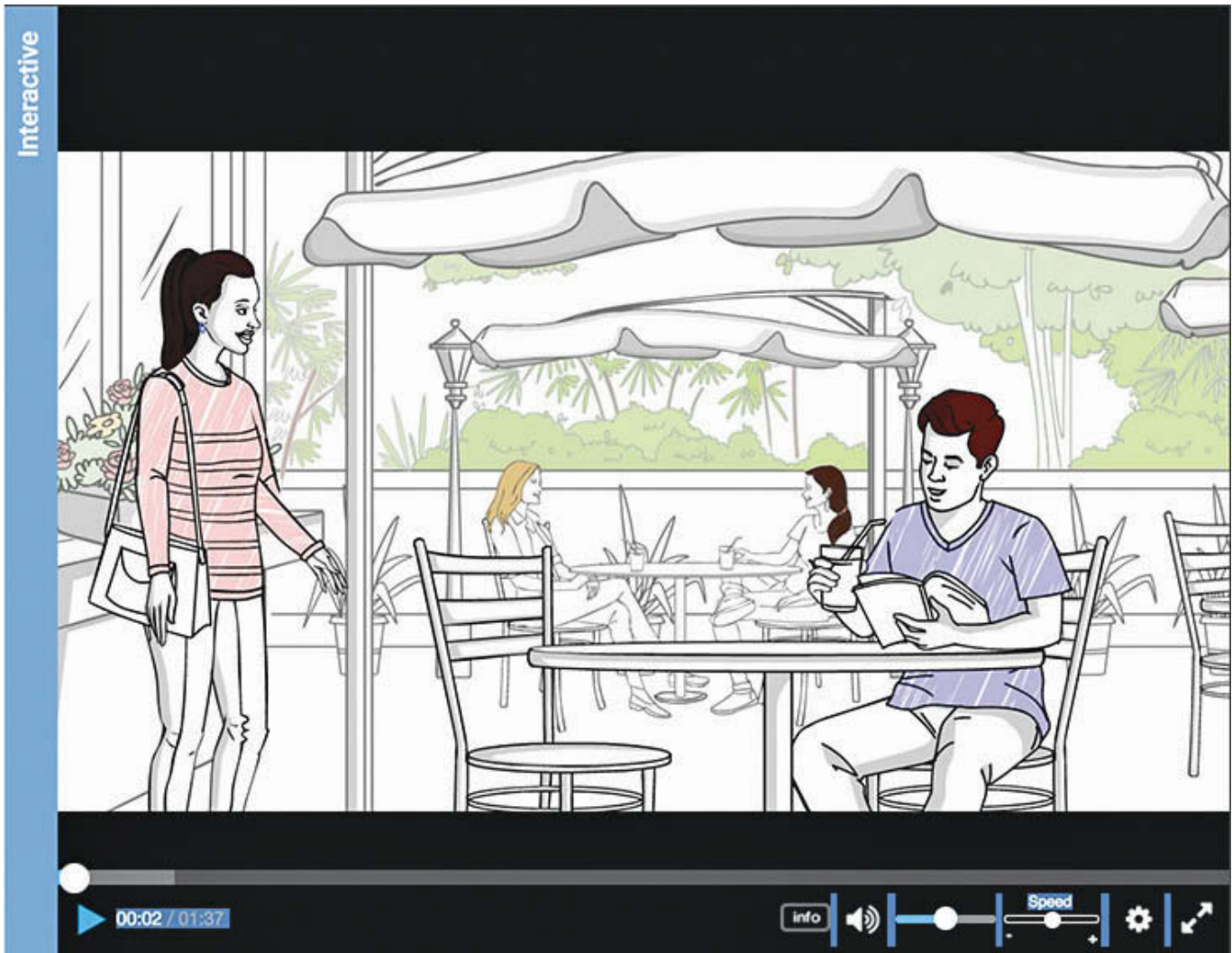
When writing an essay or report, clarify your conclusion about the issue and support it with several reasons.

If you are called upon to make a speech without much time to prepare, use the same format of taking a stand on an issue and supporting it with reasons. For example, if you are asked to make a speech at your grandparent’s retirement, you might say something like, “My grandmother has been wonderful to me [conclusion]. She has always encouraged my dreams, she has been there for all of my important events, and she has been a great role model [reasons].” You can then elaborate on each reason with examples.

If you are trying to get a group to come to consensus about a decision, try using the method outlined in this chapter. Help the group members define the issue that

Watch RETHINKING A DECISION

Psychologist Daniel Goleman believes that “the wisdom of the emotions is a real thing.” In the following video, we see that Gabe has made a logical decision, but his emotions—his “gut” reaction to the decision—are causing him to rethink his choice.



needs to be resolved and the desired outcome and have them weigh each possibility against specific criteria.

JOURNAL**Decision Analysis**

As we have discussed, there are good frameworks that help us make decisions in a logical manner. Decision making also involves our emotions, and we often don't know how we really feel about a

decision until the decision is made. Think about a decision you've made in the past that you regretted. What factors could you have considered beforehand that would have helped your decision-making process?

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Summary: Foundations of Arguments

1.1 The Structure of Argument

In our current age, when we are flooded with information—and with a variety of opinions about how to

interpret that information—critical thinking is necessary in order for us to make clear decisions as citizens, consumers, and relational human beings. We need to be able