

The Bad Argument Assignment

Use this worksheet to frame your Bad Argument Assignment. It will help you organize your thinking and avoid common mistakes. To get an idea of how this might look when you are done, see the examples on the Assessment page of the classes.vole.org website.

Authors:

List all *and only* those people who made substantive contributions. State each person's contributions. (Neither just being present nor merely typing what others say is a substantive contribution.)

Name	Contribution
Ruth Barcan Marcus	Found the argument we used and had a draft prepared. Helped discussion.
Dorothy Edgington	Contributed to analysis and identifying problems. Edited for readability.
Emmy Noether	Contributed to analysis. Clarified presentation of the problems.

Source:

Give the URL for the original source. If it is a video or audio source, give the timestamp for the relevant portion.

http://www.acl.org.au/national/browse.stw?article_id=11535

For your convenience, here's the full text of the original source...

When it comes to adultery, it's 90 percent the woman's responsibility. Why? Because a woman owns the weapon of seduction. It's she who takes off her clothes, shortens them, flirts, puts on make-up and powder and takes to the streets, God protect us, dallying. It's she who shortens, raises and lowers. Then, it's a look, a smile, a conversation, a greeting, a talk, a date, a meeting, a crime, then Long Bay jail. Then you get a judge, who has no mercy, and he gives you 65 years.

But when it comes to this disaster, who started it? In his literature, writer al-Rafee says, if I came across a rape crime, I would discipline the man and order that the woman be jailed for life. Why would you do this, Rafee? He said because if she had not left the meat uncovered, the cat wouldn't have snatched it.

If you get a kilo of meat, and you don't put it in the fridge or in the pot or in the kitchen but you leave it on a plate in the backyard, and then you have a fight with the neighbour because his cats eat the meat, you're crazy. Isn't this true?

If you take uncovered meat and put it on the street, on the pavement, in a garden, in a park, or in the backyard, without a cover and the cats eat it, then whose fault will it be, the cats, or the uncovered meat's? The uncovered meat is the disaster. If the meat was covered the cats wouldn't roam around it. If the meat is inside the fridge, they won't get it.

Commented [MG1]: You do not have to do this as your source is accessible and it's clear which passage you are referring to.

Conclusion

State the conclusion of the argument you are targeting. Many passages contain more than one bad argument – pick one and don't get distracted by other stuff. If your conclusion is more than a short, precise sentence, something's probably gone wrong. If you use words like 'because' or 'since', you are probably packing in more than the conclusion.

If a man rapes an immodestly dressed woman, it is mostly the woman's fault.

State whether the conclusion is explicitly stated in your source or is implicit / unstated. If it is unstated, justify your interpretation of the conclusion and be very careful not to exaggerate what the author is committing to.

Unstated: the conclusion about adultery being mostly the woman's fault is explicit, but I'm focusing on the specific argument about blame for rape – the above is the corresponding conclusion for this specific argument.

Commented [MG2]: Note that the full passage has more than one argument to more than one conclusion. It is a target rich environment for the Bad Argument Assignment. Your first task is to home in on one target.

Relevant Text:

Transcribe, or copy and paste, the relevant text (and only the relevant text) of your target argument. Cut any irrelevance, repetition, and window-dressing from the original source.

Al-Rafee says, if I came across a rape crime, I would discipline the man and order that the woman be jailed for life. Why would you do this, Rafee? He said because if she had not left the meat uncovered, the cat wouldn't have snatched it...

If you take uncovered meat and put it on the street, on the pavement, in a garden, in a park, or in the backyard, without a cover and the cats eat it, then whose fault will it be, the cat's, or the uncovered meat's? The uncovered meat is the disaster. If the meat was covered the cats wouldn't roam around it. If the meat is inside the fridge, they won't get it.

Kind of Argument:

State whether your target argument is intended to be purely deductive (like a mathematical proof) or something else. Perhaps it's an inductive argument (identifying trends or extrapolating from empirical evidence), an analogy (if A and B are relevantly similar, then what goes for A should also go for B), an inference to the best explanation (the best explanation of the paw prints on the counter and the tooth marks in the chicken is that the cat dunnit), a preponderance of evidence (there are considerations both ways, but on balance...), or some other kind of argument.

Argument by analogy

The Essence:

Explicitly set out each step of your target argument: Assumptions, connecting moves, and conclusion.

- Add lines if needed. If you need more than a couple extra, be suspicious that you don't have a clear argument.
- For each assumption, state whether it is explicit in the source or is a hidden assumption. If it is hidden, justify reading it into the argument.
- For each connecting move and the conclusion, state which prior steps the move relies on and what (if anything) is supposed to justify the move. If a move has no justification, flag it as such. Remember, for non-deductive arguments, it's unlikely the author is claiming full-blown proof: more likely they are claiming considerations that 'give some evidence for', or 'are a reasonable explanation of', or something cautious along those lines.

Commented [MG3]: Three column tables are a clear way to explicitly set out an argument. The numbering makes it easy to refer back to previous steps of the argument. The middle column lists each assumption, each connecting move, and then the conclusion. The right column states the justification for each move (or states that it is an assumption and, if so, whether it is a hidden assumption.)

1.	If a cat eats uncovered meat, it is mostly the meat's fault.	Assumption
2.	Cats eating uncovered meat is relevantly like men raping immodestly dressed women.	Assumption
3.	If a man rapes an immodestly dressed woman, it is mostly the woman's fault.	Conclusion: 1 & 2 by analogy between rape and cats eating meat, with men being like cats, and immodestly dressed women being like meat.

The Problem:

If your argument is deductive:

Is it valid or invalid? State and justify your answer. (If it's invalid, the faulty step should have been flagged in The Essence – you will explain the error of reasoning here.)

NA

If your argument is valid, you must think it is unsound because it relies on a faulty assumption. State which assumption(s) you are attacking and justify your answer.

NA

If your argument is not deductive:

Explain the problem.

Arguments by analogy have the form:
 A is relevantly like B; X is true of A; therefore X is true of B.
 For an argument by analogy to work, it has to be true that A is relevantly like B, and that X is true of A. This argument fails dismally on both counts: rapists are not relevantly like cats – cats are not moral agents, for a start; and it's not true that the meat is to blame for being eaten – meat is not a moral agent, for a start.

Commented [MG4]: The argument's author might try to fix up the 'not the meat's fault' problem by redirecting blame to whoever left the meat uncovered and claiming that that is relevantly like the woman who decides to be immodestly dressed. We should apply the principle of philosophical charity and anticipate this amendment. The leaving meat uncovered analogy is still a bad one – but the point is more complicated. For this reason, the analogy according men the moral agency of cats probably gives the clearest refutation of the 'argument'