
Questioning as we learn: An introduction to critical thinking

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Unit 3 - Snippet 59

What does 'argument' mean?

In the online 'Oxford Living Dictionaries' (1), the first two meanings of the word 'argument' are:

1. An exchange of diverging or opposite views, typically a heated or angry one

An example of this meaning is: *Mike and Anthony had a nasty argument over who was to blame for the failure of the plan to rescue the dog.*

In everyday life, you will quite often use this meaning when referring to 'argument'. Synonyms include 'quarrel' or 'fight'.

2. A reason or set of reasons given in support of an idea, action or theory

Example: His argument in favour of going on with the publication of the journal convinced most members of the board.

This meaning of argument is the one we will follow in the course.

In an online lecture called 'Critical Reasoning for Beginners' (2), Marianne Talbot, professor of philosophy in the Department for Continuing Education at University of Oxford, defines an argument as a set of sentences of which one is said to be true, and the other(s) offer reasons for proof. In an argument, the conclusion follows from the premise or set of premises. In other words, one or more premises are offered as reasons for believing the conclusion. This use of the term 'argument' is common in logic and philosophy.

References:

- (1) Oxford Living Dictionaries English, available at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/argument>
- (2) Talbot, M. (2010). 'The Nature of Arguments', <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/nature-arguments>, accessed 15 March 2018