

| The Right Questions... | Critical Question Summary... |
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| What are the issues and the conclusions? | Before you can evaluate an author's argument, you must clearly identify the issue and the conclusion. How can you evaluate an argument if you don't know exactly what the author is trying to persuade you to believe? Finding an author's main point is the first step in deciding whether you will accept or reject it (p. 27). |
| What are the reasons? | Once you have identified the issue and the conclusion, you need to understand <i>why</i> an author has come to a certain conclusion. Reasons are the <i>why</i> . If the author provides good reasons, you might be persuaded to accept her conclusion. However, right now, we are simply concerned with identifying the reasons. Identifying reasons is the next step in deciding whether you should accept or reject the author's conclusion (p. 36). |
| Which words or phrases are ambiguous? | Once you have identified the author's argument, you need to identify key words or phrases within that reasoning that might have alternative meanings. More importantly, you need to determine whether the author explicitly uses one of those definitions. If she does not, and if one of those meanings alters your acceptance of the conclusion, you have identified an important ambiguity. Identifying ambiguous words and phrases is the next important step in determining whether you will reject or accept the conclusion (p. 52). |
| What are the value and descriptive assumptions? | When you identify assumptions, you are identifying the link between a reason and the author's conclusion as well as ideas that must be taken for granted for certain reasons to be believable. If the linkage assumptions are flawed, the reasons do not necessarily lead to the conclusion. Consequently, identifying the assumptions allows you to determine whether an author's reasons lead successfully to a conclusion. You will want to accept a conclusion only when there are reasons that are trustworthy and logically lead to the conclusion. Thus, when you determine that the link between the reasons and conclusion is flawed, you should be reluctant to accept the author's conclusion (p. 69). |
| Are there any fallacies in the reasoning? | Once you have identified the reasons, you will want to determine whether the author used any reasoning tricks or fallacies. If you identify a fallacy in reasoning, that reason does not provide good support for the conclusion (p. 88). |
| How good is the evidence? | When an author offers a reason in support of a conclusion, you want to know why you should believe that reason. By identifying the evidence offered in support of a reason, you are taking another step in evaluating the worth of the reason. If the evidence that supports the reason is good, the reason better supports the conclusion. Thus, you might be more willing to accept the author's conclusion if the author offers good evidence in support of a reason, which in turn provides good support for the conclusion (p. 121). |
| What reasonable conclusions are possible? | When you are deciding whether to accept or reject an author's conclusion, you want to make sure that the author has come to the most reasonable conclusion. An author often oversteps his reasoning when he comes to a conclusion. By identifying alternative reasonable conclusions, you can determine which alternative conclusions, if any, you would be willing to accept in place of the author's conclusion. This step is the final tool in deciding whether to accept or reject the author's conclusion (p. 166). |

