

Identifying the arguments within reading texts

Glossary

components
The components of something are the parts that it is made of.

It is helpful to begin reading with an open mind. Once you have a good understanding of the text on its own terms, you can then apply the same approach that you use to critically examine your own thinking.

The first stage is to clarify the main components of the argument: the author's position, reasoning, evidence and assumptions.

1

Read the text below which summarizes a well-known experiment investigating helping behaviour. Answer questions 1–4.

- 1 What do you think the experimenters' position might be on the question of whether or not generosity is innate?
- 2 What reason or reasons might they give?
- 3 What evidence could they offer to support their view?
- 4 What assumptions do you think they have made?

'Working from a social learning perspective, Bryan and Test (1967) devised the following experiment. In one condition, motorists witnessed a model of helping behaviour staged by the experimenters: a woman motorist stranded by the side of the road was receiving assistance from a man. In another condition, motorists were presented with a woman stranded by the side of the road, but this time receiving no assistance. For both conditions, the experimenters placed another woman motorist several hundred metres further down the road who clearly required help with a punctured tyre. Bryan and Test found that of the 4000 passing cars, 50% more drivers stopped to assist the woman requiring help if they had passed the model helper.'

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infer
If you infer that something is the case, you decide that it is true on the basis of information that you already have.

Sometimes it is easy to identify the components of the author's argument. The author's position, for example, may be signposted with expressions such as: 'we conclude that ...', 'it is our belief that ...', 'in our view ...'. The author's reasoning and evidence may also be signalled by words such as: 'because', 'since', 'as', and 'given that'. However, in many instances, you need to infer these elements.

2

Look at one of the abstracts about social media use that you studied earlier. Label the sections of the abstract that best summarize the authors' position, reasoning, evidence, and assumptions. Then, underline any signpost expressions that help you identify these elements.

assumptions

The social network site Facebook is a rapidly expanding phenomenon that is changing the nature of social relationships. [...]

The objectives of the present study were to explore the role of Facebook in the experience of jealousy and to determine if increased Facebook exposure predicts jealousy above and beyond personal and relationship factors. Three hundred eight undergraduate students completed an online survey that assessed demographic and personality factors and explored respondents' Facebook use.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis, controlling for individual, personality, and relationship factors, revealed that increased Facebook use significantly predicts Facebook-related jealousy.

We argue that this effect may be the result of a feedback loop whereby using Facebook exposes people to often ambiguous information about their partner that they may not otherwise have access to and that this new information incites further Facebook use.

Our study provides evidence of Facebook's unique contributions to the experience of jealousy in romantic relationships.