

Argument Diagramming Exercises: Discussion

3. Ace and Rex are fighting, so we can't invite both of them to dinner on Sunday. And since Janice won't want to come without Rex, we'd better not invite Ace.

Discussion: The first sentence in this passage is a combo sentence.

(1) Ace and Rex are fighting, **so** (2) we can't invite both of them to dinner on Sunday.

“So” marks sentence (2) as a conclusion, with (3) as a supporting premise.

(1) ==> (2)

The second sentence is also a combo sentence.

And since (3) Janice won't want to come without Rex, (4) we'd better not invite Ace.

“Since” is a premise marker – making (3) a premise, in support of conclusion (4).

(1) ==> (2)

(3) ==> (4)

But a diagram for a single argument *can't* just have two parallel, disconnected chains like this. For the diagram then violates the **No Useless Sentences Principle**. As it stands, no matter *which* conclusion – (2) or (4) – is the *main* conclusion, there would still be an entire chain of sentences totally unconnected to that conclusion, not serving as any kind of support for that conclusion.

So: if one of these two conclusions is the main conclusion, we assume the other needs to be a *sub-conclusion*, supporting that main conclusion.

Which sentence – (2) or (4) – will be the **main conclusion** (leaving the other a mere supporting role, as a sub-conclusion)?

(1) ==> (2)

(3) ==> (4)

Another look at the original English argument makes this quite clear.

(1) Ace and Rex are fighting, so (2) we can't invite both of them to dinner on Sunday. And since (3) Janice won't want to come without Rex, (4) we'd better not invite Ace.

Of the two competitors, (4) is in the **likelier place** to be the main conclusion, since it comes at the end of the passage. (Sentence (2), by contrast, comes near the middle of the passage.)

And with (4) as the main conclusion, (2) must be a sub-conclusion.

However, since (2) isn't the main conclusion, but isn't (so far) supporting anything, it would count as a **useless sentence** in the argument.

Following the *No Useless Sentences Principle*, we know that can't be right. So our diagram needs to be patched up to avoid this: we assume (2) is supporting the main conclusion, (4).

Hence (2) teams up with (3) to provide support for the main conclusion – yielding the following diagram.

(1) ==> (2)

(2) + (3) ==> ∴ (4)