

Argument Diagramming Exercises: Discussion

1. Can students skip Logic class without harming their chances of leading successful, fulfilling lives? Consider the facts: over the last five years, 90% of the students who skipped more than four classes in Logic ended up unemployed, 80% wound up strung out on drugs, and 20% died. And we know other factors weren't to blame, since each of those students did fine in their other courses. Clearly, skipping Logic is a nearly fool-proof way of ruining your entire life.

Discussion: The first sentence is a question, and so won't appear in the argument diagram at all. But questions can still do some communicative work: rhetorical questions can point to their obvious but unspoken answers, and issue questions can point to the conclusion by asking a question which the conclusion answers.

The first sentence looks like an issue question. So we know already that the conclusion will either be "(Yes), students can skip Logic class..." or "(No), student cannot skip Logic class...." And in fact the last sentence of this passage

skipping Logic is a nearly fool-proof way of ruining your entire life

is giving a "No" answer to this question. So already we suspect that the last sentence of the passage is the (main) conclusion. The issue question did some work here; but it's still not going in the argument diagram, so we don't even need to bother numbering it.

The next sentence is marked as a premise with the phrase "**Consider the facts**".

Over the last five years, 90% of the students who skipped more than four classes in Logic ended up unemployed, 80% wound up strung out on drugs, and 20% died

This is one long “and” sentence, not a combo sentences. So we don’t break it into parts – just number it and add it to the diagram.

Consider the facts: (1) Over the last five years, 90% of the students who skipped more than four classes in Logic ended up unemployed, 80% wound up strung out on drugs, and 20% died.

(1)

The second sentence is a combo sentence, with premise marker “since”. We break the combo sentence into its two smaller sentences, numbering each.

And we know (2) other factors weren’t to blame, since (3) each of those students did fine in their other courses.

Since (3) is a premise in support of (2), we note this in the diagram with an arrow from (3) to (2).

(1)
(3) ==> (2)

The last sentence is not a combo sentence, so the whole sentence gets one number.

Clearly, (4) skipping Logic is a nearly fool-proof way of ruining your entire life.

(1)
(3) ==> (2)
(4)

We already suspected that Sentence (4) was the main conclusion, because of the issue question. It also comes in a likely place for a conclusion: the end of the whole passage. So we mark (4) as the main conclusion in the diagram.

$$\begin{array}{c} (1) \\ (3) ==> (2) \\ \therefore (4) \end{array}$$

Currently Sentences (1) and (2) would be counted as useless by the **No Useless Sentences Principle**: neither sentence is the main conclusion, and yet neither sentence is supporting anything else. So, following the No Useless Sentences Principle, we assume that Sentences (1) and (2) are supporting the main conclusion. We mark this in the diagram by joining (1) and (2) with a “+” sign.

$$\begin{array}{c} (1) \\ (3) ==> (2) \\ (1) + (2) ==> \therefore (4) \end{array}$$

That completes the diagram.

Final Note: as further evidence that (1) and (2) are both serving as premises for (4), note that Sentence (1) was clearly a premise, and that Sentence (2) followed it starting with the word “**and**”.

Consider the facts: (1) over the last five years, 90% of the students who skipped more than four classes in Logic ended up unemployed, 80% wound up strung out on drugs, and 20% died. And (2) we know other factors weren’t to blame, since (3) each of those students did fine in their other courses.

“And” can sometimes come in the *middle* of a sentence, linking together two or more smaller sentences. But at the *beginning* of a sentence, “and” marks that the sentence is **following up a previous premise** with **further** evidence.

Here is a list of such “follow up” phrases.

And

But

Yet

Moreover

What’s more

Furthermore

In addition

Besides

In fact

When a sentence follows a premise, and begins with such a “follow up” phrase, we assume that this sentence is providing *another* premise in support of the same conclusion.

So “and” at the beginning of (2) is *further* proof that (1) and (2) are joining together, to support (4).