Evaluating Arguments: A Checklist

When evaluating the strength of an argument, ask yourself these questions. If the answers are mostly *yes*, it's a strong argument. If the answers are mostly *no*, it's a weak argument.

✔ Does the author support his or her claims with evidence?

✔ Are the claims and evidence relevant?

✔ Are facts and statistics used? If so, are they used properly?

✔ Does the author rely on facts and information rather than personal opinions?

✔ Does the author avoid manipulating or misinterpreting information?

✔ Does the author avoid unnecessarily biased or emotionally charged language?

✔ Is the argument well-reasoned—that is, does it make logical sense?

✔ Does the author refute opposing viewpoints with logic and relevant evidence?

Evaluating Arguments
Glossary of Terms

Ad hominem attack: an attack on a person rather than on his or her argument. An ad hominen attack is a fallacy (see definition) and weakens an argument.
Example:
Kristin: I think school should start later so kids will be more rested at school.
Steve: Of course you'd say that. You just want to sleep in.

Argument: a position or viewpoint along with the claims and evidence used to support that position

Claim: a statement that supports a position
Example: If school started later, kids would get more sleep.

Counterargument: a rebuttal, or argument against, an opposing viewpoint or claim
Example: Starting school start later won't actually help kids get more sleep because kids will just stay up later at night.

Emotional appeal: Writers rely on two means of persuasion: appealing to the reader's common sense and appealing to the reader's emotions. When writers use only emotional appeals, they do not provide facts or information to convince the reader to believe them. Instead, they hope to make the reader so upset, excited, or scared that the reader will just agree with them.
Example: Think of those poor, exhausted kids getting up at dawn every morning and shuffling to school half asleep!

Evidence: facts, statistics, examples, and comparisons that show why a claim should be believed
Example: A 2012 study by the National Sleep Institute found that 47 percent of kids aren't getting enough sleep.

Fallacy: a false or mistaken belief or claim, usually based on poor reasoning
Example: All kids are tired because the kids in my class are tired.

Opposing viewpoint: a position that is the opposite of another position

Position (or viewpoint): the central idea the author is trying to support in his or her argument; thesis
Example: School should start later.

Rebut: to claim or prove that something is untrue or false

Refute: to prove a statement, position, or claim is wrong or false

Relevant: having to do with the matter being considered; pertinent. When writers use claims and evidence that is irrelevant, or not relevant, they weaken their argument.

Tracing an argument: identifying and exploring how an argument is made in an essay, a speech, or other text