

GUIDE TO TERMINOLOGY

PREMISES

A premise is the part of an argument that serves as a reason for a conclusion that is drawn from it. For example, in the argument *'The price of wheat is very high. So the price of bread will increase'*, the price of wheat being high is the premise (or reason) from which the conclusion about the increase in the price of bread is drawn.

INFERENCE

This is what is drawn (or concluded) from at least one premise (or reason). For example, in the argument *'The price of wheat is very high. So the price of bread will increase'*, the prediction that the price of bread will rise is inferred (drawn, concluded) from the claim that *'The price of wheat is very high'*. In this way, an inference is always something that is drawn from at least one premise.

EVIDENCE

In critical thinking, the term 'evidence' can mean anything that would normally fit with the everyday use of the term. Thus, it will include statistical and other research claims, scientific claims, historical claims, and can also be reports of what has been said or happened. For example, the term would fit with *'The price of wheat is higher than it was last year'* as well as *'Jupiter has many hurricane-type storms hundreds of kilometres across'* as well as *'The only time that nuclear weapons have been used was in August 1945'* as well as *'The Prime Minister of Singapore is the highest paid prime minister in the world'* as well as *'Richard Branson has said that "critical thinking is the key to creative problem solving in business".'*

ANALOGY

When an author uses an analogy, they are taking one thing as, in important respects, sufficiently similar to another to be able to use it in their argument. For example, *'Arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity, so we just need to embrace it as an inevitability'*. As you can see, given that people aren't going to argue against the existence of the laws of gravity, the author argues that, *in the same way*, they shouldn't disagree about the inevitability of globalization. As can be seen, crucially, an analogy works only to the extent that it has sufficient similarities to what it's been compared with.

SIGNIFICANCE

In the assessment, the terms 'significance' or 'significant' are used to refer to the possible impact that a claim or claims can have. If a claim is seen as significant, then it will be seen as making a difference to a position. (This could be either strengthening or weakening this position.)

HYPOTHESIS

A hypothesis is an 'if...then' statement. For example, *'if drivers are shown pictures of serious traffic accidents, then they will take fewer risks when driving'*. As can be seen, this hypothesis is not equivalent to demonstrating that the claim about drivers taking fewer risks is true. For this, we would need supporting evidence on risks taken to enable us to draw the inference that drivers should be shown pictures of serious traffic accidents. It can be seen that hypotheses can extend beyond simple if...then positions: if A, then B; if B, then C, and so on.

CONSEQUENCE

The term 'consequence' refers to what would (or might) follow from something (such as an action, a policy, a situation, and so on). For example, once again, the wheat and bread argument fits here: *'The price of wheat is very high. So the price of bread will increase'*. The increase in the price of bread is given as a consequence of the high price of wheat.

CORRELATION/CAUSATION

Evidence can sometimes show that, when there is one thing, there will be another. For example, *'children who watch a lot of TV tend to have high blood pressure'*. Here we have two separate categories of evidence: the amount of time children spend watching TV, and blood pressure. As it is presented, the author is doing no more than reporting that the two categories have a positive connection (a positive correlation). But, if someone then argued that *'therefore children should not watch a lot of TV'*, then this connection is seen to be linked *causally*: watching a lot of TV *causes* high blood pressure. This shift from taking a correlation to a causal link can be very problematic. In this example, there could be lots of different ways in which the correlation could be explained without making it a causal relationship. For example, perhaps the link is the other way round: children with high blood pressure watch a lot of TV.