

Evaluating Assumptions

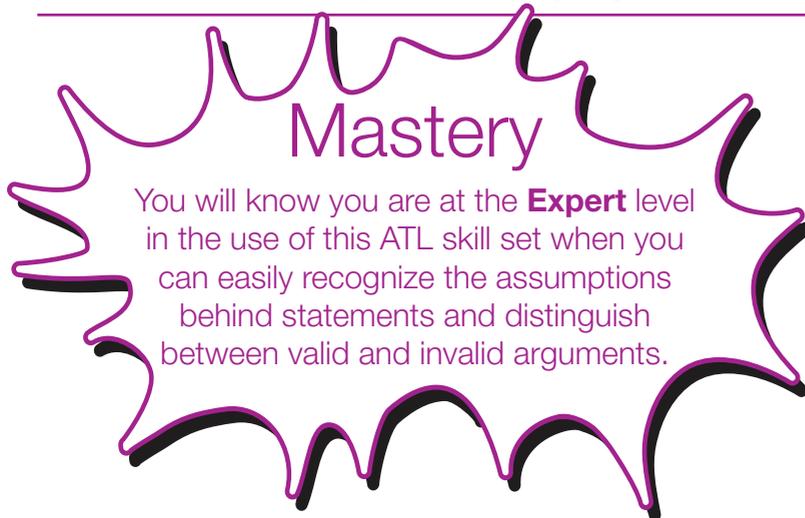
8c – Recognize unstated assumptions and bias.

8e – Evaluate evidence and arguments.

8g – Draw reasonable conclusions and generalizations.

8h – Test conclusions and generalizations.

8m – Develop contrary or opposing arguments.



Assumptions are beliefs upon which we base the logic of our argument. They are the things we presume to be true without evidence. Our assumptions depend on our particular point of view, frame of reference and cultural perspective (e.g. is Canada at the top or the bottom of the world?) Does that depend on where in the world you live?

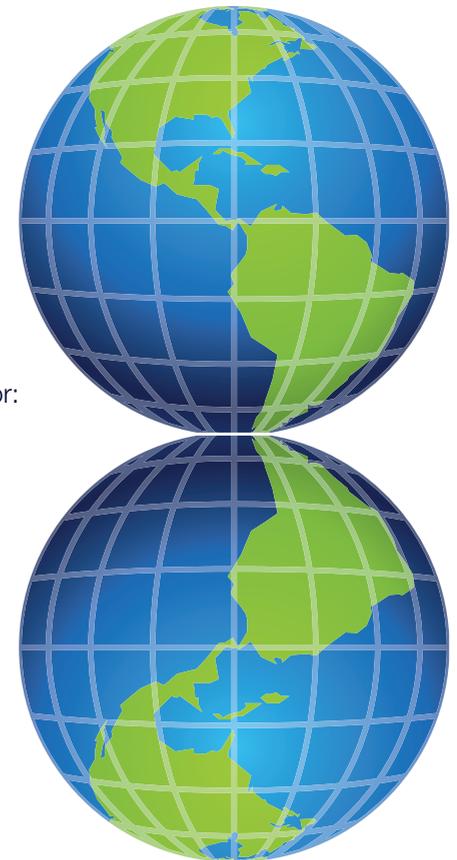
Our assumptions are made up of pre-suppositions – what needs to be true to make sense of our argument – axioms – what is self-evidently true and does not need to be proved, and things we take for granted – “common sense” or educated guesses about reality.

Exploring the assumptions within arguments helps us to determine the validity of the argument.

Exercise 1 – Recognizing assumptions

To understand the different parts of any argument, find a discussion of a controversial local or international event or an editorial in a newspaper in which the author is making a case for a certain conclusion, and then work your way through the following analysis:

- Identify and separate out the premises, the evidence for each premise and the conclusion
- Analyze each sentence or each statement separately, looking for stated assumptions like:
 - global statements – as we all know...
 - group identifiers – well educated people would all agree...
 - generalizations – it is safe to assume...
- Also look for unstated but assumed connections between statement or ideas. Look for:
 - necessary conditions – in order for that to be true this has to be true as well
 - sufficient conditions – this always means that
 - cause and effect connections – this brings about that
 - sequential connections – if this happens then that happens
 - assumed examples – this is an example of that
 - opinions stated as facts – “I think it is obvious that...”
 - consistent bias or particular point of view
 - any hidden agenda.
- For each premise, see if you can think of something which, if it were true, would contradict the stated premise
- Decide how valid or true you think each premise is
- Can you think of a different conclusion to the one the author has stated which would better fit the facts as you see them
- How do you think your own unstated assumptions or bias has affected your analysis of the argument?



Conclusion of the argument			
Sequence of premises that lead to the conclusion	Analysis of assumptions		
	What needs to be true in order for the premise to be true?	What would be something that if it were true would contradict the premise?	How valid or true do you think the premise is?
1.			
2.			
3.			
What other conclusion could you draw from the facts as you see them?			
How valid or true do you think the conclusion is?			
How do you think your own perspective, unstated assumptions or bias have influenced your analysis?			

Exercise 2 – Draw reasonable conclusions

- First go to **8b – Gather and organize relevant information to formulate an argument** (page 151) and construct your own argument and conclusion
- Go through all the steps a) – g) above and objectively analyze your own process of building premises to support a conclusion
- Do you think you have built a strong argument to support your conclusion?

