

The Thinking Toolbox

Thirty-Five Lessons
That Will Build Your
Reasoning Skills

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“...Thou shalt not steal,...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” – Romans 13:9 “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.” – 1 Timothy 5:18

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Lesson 2

A Discussion, a Disagreement, an Argument, and a Fight

Most conversations can be put into one of four categories – a discussion, a disagreement, an argument, or a fight. Let's look at what we mean.

KATHY: Hello, Roberta. How have things been going?

ROBERTA: Fine, but I wish it would rain. My petunias are nearly dried up. There isn't supposed to be any rain today.

KATHY: The extended forecast said we'd have rain later this week.

This conversation is only a discussion. Kathy and Roberta are sharing information. They both might not have the same information, but they agree with one another.



A discussion

Here is a disagreement:

ROBERTA: Oh, I hope so. Where did you hear it was going to rain?

KATHY: It was on The Weather Channel. I always watch The Weather Channel for my weather.

ROBERTA: Really? I prefer Accuweather.com.

Now Roberta has a difference of opinion with Kathy. Roberta likes Accuweather.com better than The Weather Channel. They are still having a discussion, but now they disagree. However, neither feels that she needs to convince the other. Let's see what happens when they try to convince one another.



A disagreement

KATHY: I think The Weather Channel is more accurate. It seems like every time they predict a storm, it happens. I wouldn't go to Accuweather.com if I were you. They don't seem to be as accurate.

ROBERTA: Not in my experience. I'm sure The Weather Channel is a good source for weather news, but nothing beats Accuweather.com for accuracy. Accuweather.com received the "Windy" award from the National Meteorologists Association for being the most accurate weather source.

Now Roberta and Kathy are giving evidence for what they think. They are having an argument.



An argument

I know that sounds like a nasty word – argument – but it isn’t bad. It just means that Kathy and Roberta think it is appropriate to use evidence and reasoning to convince one another. As long as they talk civilly, there isn’t a problem.

Someone is presenting an argument anytime he states a viewpoint and gives reasons to support it. Anytime two or more people are engaged in stating differing views and reasons for these views, they are having an argument.

What gives the word “argument” a bad name is when it turns into something else – a fight.

KATHY: Oh, really. I’ll bet you made that up. I’ll bet there’s no National Meteorologists Association.

ROBERTA: I didn’t make it up. What are you insinuating?

KATHY: You’re always making things up to sound smart. If you ask me, you haven’t said a true word for years.

ROBERTA: At least I’m not a little-hen-clucking-gossip like you. I’ll take my hat and leave.

KATHY: I hope your petunias shrivel up and get eaten by a striped cucumber beetle.

Kathy and Roberta are fighting now. This type of conversation is never appropriate. Kathy and Roberta aren’t talking about where to go for a weather

forecast anymore; they are attacking and insulting each other. Kathy is calling Roberta a liar, and Roberta is calling Kathy a gossip – both nasty names. There is no clear line where an argument becomes a fight, but anytime both people become strongly emotionally involved or start insulting each other, it is probably a fight.



A fight



- 1. People are having a discussion anytime they exchange ideas.**
- 2. A disagreement is an exchange of differing views.**
- 3. An argument is an exchange of differing views as well as reasons for these views.**
- 4. A fight is an exchange of attacks and insults.**

Exercises

Identify each of the following examples as a discussion, a disagreement, an argument, or a fight.

1. MOM: Joey, it's time for you to go to bed.
JOEY: I don't want to go to bed. I want to stay up.
2. FRED: Ouch. That bee stung me.
DERF: That wasn't a bee; it was a wasp. You can tell because bees can fly. That wasp just slithered along the ground.
FRED: No, it has to be a bee. It made a rattling noise. Wasps don't rattle before they sting, silly.
DERF: I still think it's a wasp. Bees sting with their tails, and that wasp bit you.
3. SUZY: Let's go play house.
KABEL: I'd rather play store.
4. MR.: Honey, I bought you flowers for your birthday.
MRS.: Today isn't my birthday; that was last month.
MR.: I mean our anniversary.
MRS.: That's next month.
MR.: Sorry, honey, I forgot.
MRS.: That's okay. Thanks for the flowers.
5. TOM: Where should we go out to eat?
SUSAN: I like Steak and Shake; let's go there
TOM: Okay.
6. MAN WITH BIG HAT: Good morning ma'am. I come from the county sheriff's office, and I'm afraid we've had a report that you were threatening some salesmen with a shotgun. Is this true?
MRS. OAKLEY: It weren't no shotgun. I was usin' my express rifle, .700 Nitro Magnum.
7. MR.: See, Honey, I bought you flowers for our anniversary. They're blue, just like on our wedding day.
MRS.: No, those were red.
MR.: Blue.

8. MR.: See, Honey, I bought you flowers for your birthday.
MRS.: Yeah right, you're just trying to be nice so I won't be mad at you for mowing over my delphiniums. You don't care about me.
MR.: If you just wouldn't plant your ridiculous flowers at odd places, perhaps I could remember where not to mow.
MRS.: Don't give me that; you know I told you not to mow there.
MR.: No you didn't. All you said was don't mow over the delwhatchama-callthems. How am I supposed to know what they look like?

Lesson 3

When It Is Dumb to Argue

While it is nearly always okay to have a discussion with someone, sometimes it is not appropriate to disagree, and sometimes it is not appropriate to have an argument. It is rarely appropriate to fight.

For example, if the Queen of England walked up and introduced herself, it would be appropriate to have a pleasant discussion with her. However, it probably would not be proper to disagree with her – at least not at that moment. And it certainly wouldn't be appropriate to argue or fight.

But let's say you were a student in a classroom and the teacher said something very wrong. Let's say he said the king cobra of southeast Asia is not poisonous, but is really a cuddly snake who likes to be kissed on the nose. In this situation, it would be okay to stand up and disagree. And depending on the type of class you were in, it might be okay to argue with him – explaining that the king cobra is poisonous, how it injects a powerful neurotoxic venom, and how without prompt medical aid, death is certain for its victims.

Sometimes it is a waste of time to argue.

FRED: What is the capital of South Dakota? I have no idea.

DERF: I don't know. Maybe it's Tulsa?

FRED: I think it's Los Angeles. That sounds Swedish, and I know there are lots of Swedish people in South Dakota.

DERF: No way. It's got to be Tulsa. My grandmother was Swedish, and she said she once visited Tulsa.

Both Fred and Derf admitted they didn't know what the capital of South Dakota was, but they are arguing about it anyway. Until one of them looks it up in an atlas, they are wasting their time.

There are other times when we shouldn't argue.

GUY: Hey, you! I think you parked just a little too close to my car – move it.

HANS: Actually, I was in this parking spot before you came. You were the one who parked close to me.

GUY: Don't be a smart-alec to me, Bub. Just move your car over.

Sometimes arguing can be dangerous. This man is obviously upset and isn't thinking clearly, so arguing about who was in the parking space first would probably only make him more angry.

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him”
(Proverbs 26:4 NKJV).



When might it be dumb to argue?

- 1. When it wouldn't be socially appropriate at the time.**
- 2. When neither person has any real knowledge about the subject being argued.**
- 3. When one of the persons involved is angry or isn't thinking clearly.**

Exercises

A. In the following situations, do you think it would be appropriate to argue?

1. ATHEIST: There is no God, and I can prove it. If God created the earth, why is there so much death and destruction in the world? Either God doesn't exist or He doesn't care about us.

YOU: I beg to differ with that.

2. HANS: Good grief, this article is 1,400 words long and it is supposed to

be only 700. I'll need to cut out a lot.

NATHANIEL: Actually, I remember we were allowed 723 words.

HANS: No. I distinctly remember 700.

NATHANIEL: 723.

3. JUDGE: According to my information, you have been charged with jay-walking on a public street. How do you plead?
PLAINTIFF: Not guilty, your honor.
 4. CALLER: I can't believe you think it is okay to use the term "niggardly" on the radio. You're a racist.
TALK SHOW GUEST: Actually, the term "niggardly" has nothing to do with race at all. It simply means to be covetous and miserly. You can look it up in the dictionary.
CALLER: Yeah, right. It's obvious you're a racist.
 5. AUSTIN: I got you. I shot you with my ray gun. You're dead now.
ADAM: But I have atomic armor on. It reflects your ray gun back at you, so you're dead and I'm not.
AUSTIN: But my ray gun is armor-piercing. You're dead.
ADAM: But my armor has a special layer that stops armor-piercing rays.
AUSTIN: My ray gun is special. It goes through that layer.
 6. A blond Australian guy hands Queen Elizabeth an Australian death adder: 'Ere she is. Isn't she a beaut? Aye. Don't be scared. She's perfectly harmless; she would never bite a queen.
- B. In the following examples, is the speaker presenting an argument?
7. "I believe there is a God because if there wasn't a God there would be no purpose to life."
 8. PAUL: What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."
 9. MRS. OAKLEY: Howdy.
 10. JESUS: Lazarus, come forth!
 11. "And God said to Noah . . . 'Make yourself an ark of gopherwood: make

rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.” – Genesis 6:14

12. “You dirty rotten bum, why did you cut me off in traffic like that?”
13. “Studying logical thinking skills isn’t only about learning how to come up with mind-bogglingly good arguments to defeat an opponent’s argument and ‘show him what’s right.’ Learning when it is appropriate to argue is also very important.”
14. “Okay, this gun here’s loaded, so everybody start emptying your pockets and purses – and don’t forget the jewelry.”



Answer Key

Lesson 1: A Thinking Tool

1. We would trust the librarian.
2. We wouldn't believe him.
3. We would believe him.
4. We suggest you ask Your Mortal Enemy to pick it up first.
5. Perhaps you should check one other book before picking up an Eastern tiger snake.
6. Derf doesn't think they are lost.
7. Answers will vary.
8. Pokerface Pete and The Kid both thought Rusty was the notorious criminal Deadeye Dan. They both tried to shoot him, and both missed. They shot each other instead.

Lesson 2: A Discussion, a Disagreement, an Argument, and a Fight

1. Disagreement.

2. Argument.
3. Disagreement.
4. Discussion. In the end, they didn't disagree on anything.
5. Discussion.
6. This might be a disagreement, but it is probably just a discussion. The Man With Big Hat said something, and Mrs. Oakley corrected him.
7. Disagreement.
8. Fight. They are not talking very nicely to each other.

Lesson 3: When It Is Dumb to Argue

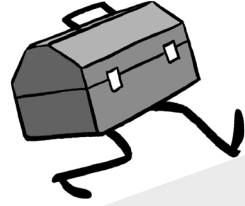
1. Argue, if you have a good argument.
2. This is a pointless argument.
3. Argue your case.
4. Don't argue. The person obviously doesn't want to listen to reason or to the dictionary.
5. This is another pointless argument.
6. Run!
7. Yes.
8. Yes.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 9. No. | tific facts, or maybe opinion. |
| 10. No. | 10. Statement of inference. |
| 11. No. | 11. Probably a statement of opinion. |
| 12. No. | 12. Statement of opinion. |
| 13. Presenting an argument, or
might just be making an asser-
tion. | 13. Statement of fact. |
| 14. Presenting an argument for
everybody emptying their pock-
ets. | 14. Statement of fact. This could be
checked by looking up city crime
statistics. |

Lesson 4: Fact, Inference, or Opinion

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Statement of fact. We could
verify this by comparing both
books. | 15. A statement of opinion, or
possibly a statement of inference,
depending on why she thought it
was on purpose. |
| 2. Bob is making an inference. | 16. Statement of fact followed by a
statement of opinion. |
| 3. Statement of opinion. | 17. Not warranted. The guy who isn't
dead might have murdered the
dead guy, and the dead guy shot
back in self-defense before he
died. |
| 4. Statement of opinion, or possibly
statement of fact, depending on
how it is meant. | 18. Not warranted. Bull elephants
rarely gore people in saloons. |
| 5. Statement of inference made
from facts. | 19. Warranted. |
| 6. Statement of opinion. | 20. Not warranted. The teller was
probably referring to the sheriff
who would track him down and
arrest him later. |
| 7. Statement of fact. This could be
verified by examining a whale. | 21. Felice is stating a fact; Hewey,
inference; and Lamont, opinion. |
| 8. Statement of opinion. | |
| 9. Inference from observable scien- | |





Colophon

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