

Argument

Arguable and Unarguable Claims

Arguable claims have two characteristics: definition and uncertainty.

What do we mean by definition? The claim is not broad; it has focus. The claim is not vague; it has words that lack ambiguity.

What do we mean by uncertainty? Once the claim is clearly definable, it may still be certain. If something is certain, then there is no argument.

Which of the following claims are arguable?

1. Some people oppose abortion.
2. Any law that limits the rights of citizens to own firearms is a step away from democracy and toward a totalitarian government.
3. Since it is a common practice in both commercial and scholarly publishing for editors to correct and revise the work submitted to them by authors, it should also be acceptable for college students to get editorial help with their papers before submitting them to a teacher.
4. Because pollution increasingly threatens life on earth, funds should be devoted to cleaning up and preserving the environment.
5. The language of the United States has been and is English; therefore, the information on official documents, such as ballots, should be printed only in English.
6. Every college student should be required either (a) to demonstrate proficiency with computers or (b) to take a course in basic computer science.
7. No college student should be required to take courses in a foreign language.
8. Government officials should have no sources of income that might create a conflict of interests.
9. Changes in the lifestyles of Americans would improve their health.

Types of Information

To help with an argument, you need to understand the certain types of information listed below.

Fact—a statement of how something exists. Irrefutably verifiable.

Ex. The Constitution of the United States requires that you be at least 35 years old to be president of the United States.

Alleged Fact—needs verification for people to accept it.

Ex. The English poets Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge once planned to build a utopian commune in Pennsylvania.

Opinion—a judgment based on facts, a conclusion that needs factual evidence to support.

Ex. The death penalty should be banned in the United States because, more than anything else, it perpetuates a culture of death.

Belief—a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality or values, not on facts.

Ex. I believe that getting angry in traffic is a fundamental denial of God's love.

Preference—expression of taste, what a person likes or dislikes.

Ex. The Bruce Springsteen concert was the best this year. He truly is the Boss.

Inference—a conclusion derived from a fact or set of facts. It forms an assumption from the evidence.

Ex. Seasonal temperatures continue to be erratic, the polar caps are melting, and the dangerous tornadoes plague the United States in record numbers. This evidence suggests that global warming is radically altering our climate.

Interpretation—an opinion on the significance or meaning of something.

Ex. Oprah Winfrey's Book Club has had amazing success. Americans must really have a hunger for reading.

Prejudice—an opinion based on insufficient or unexamined evidence.

Ex. It doesn't surprise me that Allison doesn't have an active social life. She's an accountant after all.

Identify the following types of information.

1. Whenever I visit Colorado I love the way the mountains loom over the horizon.
2. Isn't it interesting that Sarah suddenly became interested in bug collecting at the same time she became interested in Herbert?
3. Tornadoes have struck Shades Mountain every year for the past four years. It appears that residents of Shades Mountain can expect more destruction.
4. You will damage your eyes if you stare into the sun.
5. Cigarette smoking is largely responsible for the increase in lung cancer.
6. Because the Internet is so dangerous, parents should keep it out of their homes.
7. A decrease in lung cancer diagnoses indicates a reduction in smoking among young people.
8. There is no question that Mark Rothko paintings are beautiful works of art.
9. Orlando is a great place to live if you don't mind being around a bunch of liberals.

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