

Developing Skills for Evaluation

Cluster 3 page 90

How can you develop a strong evaluation of an author's argument?

To strengthen your skills at evaluating an author's argument, use three strategies. You will see them in action here one by one.

Strategy 1: Evaluate the author's premises by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

Strategy 2: Evaluate the author's claims to decide whether they follow logically from the premises.

Strategy 3: Evaluate the author's evidence by corroborating or challenging it with other information.

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Strategy 1: Evaluate the author's premises by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

An argument is made of **premises** and a(n) **claim(s)**. Premises include reasons and evidence that the writer uses to support his or her claim. The claim (or conclusion) is the idea that the writer is arguing for.

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In the Creating Context section of the book, David Granger makes the claim that today, we need a hero. His argument is based upon these premises

- There aren't true heroes any more.
- People don't believe in heroes any longer.
- All the people who could be heroes today are flawed.

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Directions: Would the statement below the premise more likely be used to corroborate or challenge the premise? Some statements may neither corroborate nor challenge the premise.

Premise A: There aren't true heroes any more.

- America no longer has frontiers to conquer.

Response: This statement would most likely be used to corroborate the premise.

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Directions: Would the statement below the premise more likely be used to corroborate or challenge the premise? Some statements may neither corroborate nor challenge the premise.

Premise B: People don't believe in heroes any longer.

- Out of an entire class of first-graders, only two had an idea of what the word hero meant.

Response: This fact would likely be used to corroborate the premise.

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Directions: Would the statement below the premise more likely be used to corroborate or challenge the premise? Some statements may neither corroborate nor challenge the premise.

Premise B: People don't believe in heroes any longer.

- The Carnegie Hero Fund regularly recognizes persons who perform acts of heroism in civilian life in the United States and Canada.

Response: This fact would likely be used to challenge the premise.

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Directions: Would the statement below the premise more likely be used to corroborate or challenge the premise? Some statements may neither corroborate nor challenge the premise.

Premise C: All the people who could be heroes today are flawed.

- Many of our heroes from the past were imperfect. For example, Thomas Jefferson, a great American hero, not only owned slaves, but fathered several children by one of his slaves.

Response: This would be most likely be used to challenge the premise. The premise assumes that heroes from the past were perfect, but today all heroes are flawed.

Strategy 2: Evaluate the author's claims to decide whether they follow logically from the premises.

Suppose a popular sports figure claims that he is not a role model for children, and he should not be criticized for the choices he makes. Which claim is more consistent with this premise?

- With popularity comes great responsibility. The two cannot be separated.
- Sports figures are popular purely because of their athletic ability, not because they are supposed to be people of great character.

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Strategy 2: Evaluate the author's claims to decide whether they follow logically from the premises.

Suppose a popular sports figure claims that he is not a role model for children, and he should not be criticized for the choices he makes. Which claim is more consistent with this premise?

- With popularity comes great responsibility. The two cannot be separated.
- Sports figures are popular purely because of their athletic ability, not because they are supposed to be people of great character.

Response: The second claim is more consistent with the premise.

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Directions: For each of the following premises, which claim follows most logically?

Premise A: Whether they like it or not, sports figures are heroes to modern kids.

- Sports figures need to act responsibly because kids look up to them.
- True heroes are people who act courageously in the face of danger.

Response: Based upon the idea that sports figures are heroes, the first claim would follow logically.

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Directions: For each of the following premises, which claim follows most logically?

Premise B: Heroes are people who do the right thing in the midst of difficult situations.

- Pop music stars are heroes.
- 911 rescuers are heroes.

Response: If your premise is that heroes are people who do the right thing, then the logical claim would be that 911 rescuers are true heroes.

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Strategy 3: Evaluate the author's evidence by corroborating or challenging it with other information.

Evidence includes the facts and reliable opinions used to support a statement. For example, an author might cite the following statistic as evidence that children often see their parents as heroes.

Clearly, parents are children's real life every day heroes. A substantial proportion (93%) of children feel close to the people who love them.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement A.

Law professor Donna Matias defines an entrepreneur as someone able to identify and provide for an unmet need. In short, entrepreneurs are both problem solvers and wealth creators. Extremely successful entrepreneurs, therefore, are not evil. Rather, they are modern day heroes who have managed to effectively fulfill the needs of their consumers.

Statement A: A hero is someone who acts unselfishly on behalf of others.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement A.

Law professor Donna Matias defines an entrepreneur as someone able to identify and provide for an unmet need. In short, entrepreneurs are both problem solvers and wealth creators. Extremely successful entrepreneurs, therefore, are not evil. Rather, they are modern day heroes who have managed to effectively fulfill the needs of their consumers.

Statement A: A hero is someone who acts unselfishly on behalf of others.

Response: This information could be used both to corroborate and to challenge statement A.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement B.

Law professor Donna Matias defines an entrepreneur as someone able to identify and provide for an unmet need. In short, entrepreneurs are both problem solvers and wealth creators. Extremely successful entrepreneurs, therefore, are not evil. Rather, they are modern day heroes who have managed to effectively fulfill the needs of their consumers.

Statement B: A hero is someone who does brave acts of courage.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement B.

Law professor Donna Matias defines an entrepreneur as someone able to identify and provide for an unmet need. In short, entrepreneurs are both problem solvers and wealth creators. Extremely successful entrepreneurs, therefore, are not evil. Rather, they are modern day heroes who have managed to effectively fulfill the needs of their consumers.

Statement B: A hero is someone who does brave acts of courage.

Response: This information challenges the statement.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement C.

It's not that our heroes have become less noble or more immoral. It's that our technology has become more advanced. We now know more information, even too much information, about the men and women in high places. It's doubtful that even Mother Teresa could go through the fire of our all-knowing culture and come out unscathed.

Statement C: Men and women today don't have the character qualities to be great heroes.

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Directions: Decide if the information in the box below corroborates, challenges, or neither corroborates nor challenges Statement C.

It's not that our heroes have become less noble or more immoral. It's that our technology has become more advanced. We now know more information, even too much information, about the men and women in high places. It's doubtful that even Mother Teresa could go through the fire of our all-knowing culture and come out unscathed.

Statement C: Men and women today don't have the character qualities to be great heroes.

Response: This information challenges the statement.