

**What are the value assumptions in each argument?  
What are the descriptive assumptions behind each reason?  
Are they acceptable assumptions?**

**1. We should get our troops out of Iraq now!**

R: Bush lied to us about weapons of mass destruction.

R: We are only over there for oil, anyway.

R: The Iraqis don't want us there.

R: They can fight their own war.

**2. We need to stay the course in Iraq until the job is done.**

R: If we back out now, it will only encourage terrorists.

R: We should finish what we started.

R: We are fighting for Iraqi freedom and democracy.

R: Winning the war in Iraq will make the world safer from terrorism.

**3. Internet pornography should be banned!**

R: The constitution was never meant to protect pornography as free speech.

R: Its too easy for kids to access it.

R: It is destroying marriages.

R: It is addictive. Many men spend 15-20 hours a week viewing it.

R: It is demeaning to women.

In the leap from Reason to Conclusion, consider:

1. **ambiguous terms** that affect the outcome of the argument?
2. **Unsupported/unproven descriptive reasons** stated as if they are "true."
3. **Values** that you agree or disagree with.
4. **Descriptive Assumptions** you must accept for the reasons or conclusion to be true.
  - o Remember:  
Assumptions are *unstated* and *invisible*.  
To find them, ask  
**"What else must be true for the reason or conclusion to be true?"**
5. **Consequences of accepting the Conclusion.**
6. **Fallacies** of reasoning.

#### **4. Internet Pornography should not be banned.**

R: It is constitutionally-protected “free speech”

R: Those who don't like it don't have to view it

R: Parents can install filters

R: What one person does in the privacy of his/her home is nobody else's business if it isn't hurting anyone.

#### **5. Laws should be passed banning SUVs.**

R: It will improve the environment: they are gas-guzzlers contributing to global warming.

R: They take up an unfair amount of dwindling oil supplies.

R: They are killer vehicles in accidents with smaller cars.

#### **6. We should enforce limits on the number of children a couple should be allowed to conceive.**

R: The world is overpopulated.

R: Too many children in one family will result in some of them being deprived of parental attention.

R: Large families take up too many of the world's limited resources.

R: China's program of forced abortions and sterilization has effectively slowed the growth of the population of the largest country in the world.

## **7. Condoms should be distributed in high schools.**

R: It will lower the incidence of pregnant high school girls.

R: It will lower the incidence of STDs.

R: It will send a message about safe, responsible sex.

## **8. Condoms should not be distributed in high schools.**

R: It is not the school's business to make public health policy decisions.

R: It is the parents' responsibility to provide or not provide such items to their children.

R: It will send a message of adult approval of pre-marital sex.

R: It will increase teen promiscuity, which will result in increased pregnancies and STDs.

## More practice finding value and descriptive assumptions:

1. Can you believe what Coach Anderson did last week? Our football team was in the last minute of the fourth quarter of a playoff game, and we were only three points behind. Well, one of our runners got tackled close to the goal line and the referee called it a touchdown, but the coach saw that one of our players was offside before the play and told the ref. Because of that, we lost the touchdown and the game! I think the coach should be fired for costing us the championship.

Conclusion:

Reasons:

Ambiguous terms that are a problem to the conclusion:

Value conflicts and assumptions:

Descriptive Assumptions:

2. Conscientious objectors are traitors to their country and should be either arrested or deported to somewhere that will tolerate them. When one's country is in danger of foreign domination, there is no time for cowardice or reflection. The freedom of every citizen is in danger when a war is on, and it is every citizen's duty to contribute to that freedom's defense. Conscientious objectors put everyone at risk, and they must not be allowed to do so with impunity.

Conclusion:

Reasons:

Ambiguous terms that are a problem to the conclusion:

Value conflicts and assumptions:

Descriptive Assumptions:

3. The incumbent president should have no trouble gaining re-election. He is a Democrat. Of the 140,000,000 registered voters, 38 percent are registered Democrats, 32 percent are registered Republicans, and the rest are independents. The independents are split about evenly in the polls between the Republican and Democratic candidates. Only the greatest folly could cost the president the election at this point.

Conclusion:

Reasons:

Ambiguous terms that are a problem to the conclusion:

Value conflicts and assumptions:

Descriptive Assumptions:

4. Each year in the United States, hundreds of thousands of animals are slaughtered each year to please the palates of Americans. Before their death — usually by electrocution or blunt force head trauma — most of these livestock are kept in deplorable conditions. Cattle feedlots are packed so tightly that animals can scarcely move; chickens are held in cages so small for them to turn around in; veal calves are denied any motion at all to keep their flesh tender. For what? So that people who can afford the privilege can enjoy tasty meat products.

These methods are not necessarily bound to eating meat. People can raise animals the old-fashioned way — on farms with ample pasture and free-ranging animals — and still produce enough meat for America. Mass production methods of raising animals, like those described above, must change if we are to think of ourselves as ethical people; as long as we tolerate such tremendous and pointless suffering, we cannot.

Conclusion:

Reasons:

Ambiguous terms that are a problem to the conclusion:

Value conflicts and assumptions:

Descriptive Assumptions:

## Our VALUES influence our DESCRIPTIVE BELIEFS

Sometimes my values get in the way of accepting a descriptive conclusion about the way the world is, because I don't *want* it to be that way.

For example, I might value free market enterprise and do not value government regulation or intrusion. Therefore, when scientists produce conflicting data about the causes of global warming (descriptive issue), I'm inclined to believe that the data do not prove it is caused by human activity, because I don't want to face the likely prescriptive response of regulation.

Conversely, if I value ecology and "nature" and already believe that many environmental problems are due to human greed or indifference, I will be inclined to believe that the very same inconclusive data do prove that human activity has caused global warming (and therefore we need to do something about it.)

\*\*\*\*\*

### Human Nature:

- We will most likely notice the faulty descriptive assumptions inherent in an argument if the argument is one we disagree with.
- We fail to notice the faulty descriptive assumptions in arguments that we already agree with.
- To discover the descriptive assumptions in an argument that you like, role-play and take the opposite point of view: If you were arguing from the opposite point of view, how and what would you attack?