

## Critically evaluating sources

For most of us the problem is how to organise ourselves to check for these things routinely as we read. It will help if you keep a copy of this checklist by your side as you work.

### Evaluating arguments – checklist

#### 1 Arguments

1.1 *Are there hidden assumptions in the argument?*

1.2 *Does the conclusion follow from the reasons given?*

*Qualifiers*

*Distributing terms*

*Converting claims*

*Affirming and denying*

#### 2 Evidence

2.1 *Does the author have enough reliable evidence?*

*Untypical examples/ insufficient or weighted evidence*

2.2 *Does he represent the evidence accurately?*

*Statistics*

2.3 *Does he draw reliable inferences from it?*

*Analogies*

*Oversimplifying (stereotypes, straw man, special pleading, false dilemma)*

*Invalid causal inferences (post hoc fallacy, cause/ correlation, multiple and underlying causes)*

2.4 *Are the inferences relevant?*

*Attacking the person, popularity, authority, fear, compromise*

#### 3 Language

3.1 *Is the author's meaning clear?*

*Jargon*

*Loaded language*

*Begging the question*

3.2 *Does she use words consistently?*

*Equivocation*

# Analogies

When authors use an analogy to draw inferences, check three things:

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## Evaluating arguments – checklist

- |          |   |                          |
|----------|---|--------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | The <b>connection</b> between the analogy and the inference:<br>1.1 <i>When does the connection break down? They all tend to at some point.</i><br>1.2 <i>Is there a causal connection: does the evidence show that one thing really does cause another?</i>                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>2</b> | The <b>numbers</b> involved:<br>2.1 <i>The number of examples between which the analogy holds – the more we have, the more confident we can be.</i><br>2.2 <i>The number and variety of the characteristics shared by the analogy and what it is being used to explain.</i>             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>3</b> | The <b>relation</b> between the analogy and the inference drawn from it:<br>3.1 <i>Is it the right strength or does it exaggerate the extent of the similarity?</i><br>3.2 <i>How significant are the similarities and differences between the analogy and what is being explained?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

For more information, see *How to Write Your Literature Review*, Chapter 9.