Building a Better Argument

Student Handout #1: Finding Premises and Conclusions

Key Terms:

- **Argument**: a conclusion together with the premises that support it
- **Premise**: a reason offered as support for another claim
- **Conclusion**: the claim being supported by a premise or premises
- **Explanation**: a statement or set of statements designed to show *why* something is the case rather than *that* it is the case

Example:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Socrates was a man.
3. Therefore Socrates is mortal.

The three lines taken together constitute an argument. Line 3 is the conclusion. Lines 1 and 2 are premises.

Tips for picking out premises and conclusions:

- You can look at the text for clues like these:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise Indicators</th>
<th>Conclusion Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
<td>Therefore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>Hence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For</td>
<td>So</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As</td>
<td>Accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows from</td>
<td>Consequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As shown by</td>
<td>Proves that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inasmuch as</td>
<td>As a result</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- For this reason
- For these reasons
- It follows that
- I conclude that
- Which shows that
- Which means that
- Which entails that
- Which implies that

- You can also try acting like a 3-year-old:
  1. Read a sentence and ask, “Why should I believe that?”
  2. Look at the rest of the passage and see if you can find anything that looks like an answer to the why question.
  3. If you find an answer, then the answer is a premise and the original claim (the sentence about which you asked why) is a conclusion.
  4. Repeat the process for each claim.