Evaluating Arguments

Fact, opinion, value judgement, claim, bias and the other terms of argument, how to judge reasoning, evidence and language, and how to compare two arguments and reach a judgement.

Question 3 gives you a source in which people put forward **arguments**. You show you can tell fact from opinion, judge how well reasons and evidence support a point, and decide **which argument is more convincing and why**. This chapter gives you the vocabulary and a method.

3.1 Fact, opinion, value judgement and the other terms of argument

The syllabus names eight terms you must understand: **bias, claim, fact, generalisation, opinion, prediction, value and vested interest**.

Term	Meaning	Example
Fact	Something that can be **checked and shown to be true or false**	"The town has 12 schools."
Opinion	What someone **thinks or believes**; it cannot be proved right or wrong	"Schools are better than they used to be."
Value judgement	An opinion about whether something is **good or bad, right or wrong, important or not**, based on values	"It is wrong to cut school funding."
Claim	A statement that something is true, which needs evidence	"Screen time harms sleep."
Generalisation	A statement about **all, most or many** based on a few cases	"Teenagers never read books."
Prediction	A statement about what **will** happen in the future	"Prices will double by 2040."
Value	A belief about what matters (fairness, freedom, tradition, family) that shapes opinions	"I value community above money."
Bias	Giving a **one-sided** view, leaving out or twisting information	A website that only lists the good results
Vested interest	A **personal gain** from the result: money, power, reputation	A company reporting that its own product is safe

A fact can be checked. An opinion is a view. A value judgement is an opinion about right and

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wrong or good and bad, using words such as should, ought, better, wrong, unfair, important.

Identifying and explaining

A typical question: "Identify one value judgement from the statement. Explain why it is a value judgement."

1. **Quote** the words exactly.
2. **Explain why**: "This is a value judgement because it says what is right or wrong, and different people could disagree depending on their values. It cannot be proved."

For a fact: "Identify one fact. Explain how well this fact supports the argument."

- It is a fact because it can be **checked**, for example from official figures.
- Then judge **how well it supports** the argument: is it **relevant**, **enough**, **recent**, from a **reliable** source, and does it show what the speaker claims? A true fact can still be weak support if it is about a different place, from long ago, or only one case.

> TRY IT
>
> "Over 3,000 people in our city were treated for air pollution illnesses last year, so the city should ban cars." **Is the first part a fact? How well does it support the conclusion?**
>
> **Fact:** yes, it can be checked against hospital records. **Support:** it shows pollution harms health, so it is relevant. But it does not show that **cars** are the cause, nor that a **ban** is the best action, so it only partly supports the conclusion.

3.2 Evaluating reasoning, evidence and use of language

The parts of an argument

An argument has a **claim** (conclusion), **reasons** that say why, and **evidence** that supports the reasons. To evaluate, ask how strong each part is and whether they fit together.

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Judging the reasoning

Look for	Strong reasoning	Weak reasoning
Link	Reasons clearly lead to the conclusion	Reasons are about something else, or the jump is too big
Cause	Shows how one thing leads to another	Confuses **correlation** with **cause** (two things rise together)
Assumptions	States or justifies what it takes for granted	Hidden assumptions ("everyone wants a car")
Balance	Considers other views	Ignores counter-arguments
Generalisation	Careful words (some, many, often)	Sweeping words (all, always, never, nobody)
Consistency	Points support each other	Contradicts itself

Judging the evidence

- **Type**: statistics, expert opinion, case study, personal experience (anecdote), example.
- **Relevance**: is it about the issue being argued?
- **Quantity**: is it enough, or just one example?
- **Reliability**: who produced it, how, and when? Could they have a vested interest?
- **Balance**: does the argument use only evidence that helps?

Different types give different strengths. **Statistics** show scale but can be selected or out of date. **Expert views** carry authority but may be biased. **Personal stories** show real experience but may not be typical.

Judging the use of language

Language is a tool used to persuade. Look at:

- **Emotive words** ("shocking", "disaster", "innocent children") that make readers feel rather than think.
- **Absolute words** ("always", "everyone", "never") that overstate.
- **Hedging words** ("may", "could", "some") that show care and honesty.
- **Rhetorical questions** ("Do we want our children to suffer?") that push the reader to one answer.
- **Tone**: calm, formal, angry, urgent, friendly.
- **Repetition and lists** used for emphasis.

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Do not say "the language is good". **Quote a word or phrase, say what effect it has, and say whether that makes the argument more or less convincing.**

Who is speaking?

Check the **author's expertise**, **purpose** (inform, persuade, sell), **audience**, **date** and any **vested interest**. A source that **gains** from the issue is not automatically wrong, but you must take that into account.

3.3 Comparing arguments and making a reasoned judgement

The Question 3 task (about 15 or 16 marks) is: "**Which argument is more convincing?** Your answer should consider both arguments, evaluate their reasoning, evidence and use of language, and support your judgement with their words and ideas."

A plan that reaches the top levels

1. **Opening judgement (one or two sentences).** Say which you think is more convincing and why, in a sentence. You can add "although" to show you have weighed both.
2. **Argument A** (about one-third): reasoning, evidence and language, each with **a quotation or detail** and a comment on its effect.
3. **Argument B** (about one-third): the same three things.
4. **Direct comparison**: use words such as **whereas, in contrast, both, however, unlike**. Compare like with like (their evidence against each other, their language against each other).
5. **Final judgement**: say again which is more convincing and **give the main reason**, such as "because its evidence is wider and more reliable even though its language is less powerful".

What markers reward

Level	What it looks like
Top	Analyses many aspects of **both** arguments, uses the sources' own words often, makes a clear, **explicit comparison**, reaches a reasoned judgement
Middle	Analyses some aspects of both arguments, some use of the source, some comparison
Low	Describes or summarises, says what each person said, no comparison, little use of the text

Analyse, do not retell. Writing what each speaker says earns little. Writing why their reasoning, evidence and language are strong or weak earns marks.

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Useful sentence starters

- "Argument A is stronger on evidence because ... whereas Argument B ..."
- "B's phrase '...' is emotive, which may persuade but does not give proof."
- "Both arguments assume that ..., but only A explains why."
- "Overall, I find A more convincing because ..."

TRY IT

Plan your answer to "Which argument is more convincing, Maya's or Daniel's?" in three lines before writing. **Judgement:** Daniel. **Because:** specific data from a named survey and careful words (**some**, **often**). **Against:** Maya uses a strong personal story but generalises ("everyone feels like this") and uses emotive language without evidence.

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