Argument Structure
IV) Lesson 3a: Inference Erasers: "and"
(with Dependent Reasons)

Slide 1

Welcome to Lesson 3a.

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to explain what dependent reasons are and use the "and" family of inference erasers to communicate and analyze arguments with dependent reasons.

Slide 2

Let's begin by returning to an argument from the previous lesson, the argument that takes "dogs can learn tricks" as a reason to believe "dogs are intelligent" and takes "dogs are intelligent" as a reason to believe "dogs make good pets."

And let's focus on that second inference, the inference that takes us from "dogs are intelligent" to "dogs make good pets." This isn't a terrible inference, but it could be better. In particular, can you see what we're assuming when we move from "dogs are intelligent" to "dogs make good pets"?

We're assuming that intelligent animals make good pets.

We can include this idea in the argument by adding it to "dogs are intelligent."

Ideas that are added together like this are called "dependent reasons" because each of the ideas depends upon the other in order to support a conclusion. In general, two or more ideas are dependent reasons in support of a conclusion if each idea is incapable of supporting the conclusion on its own but the ideas taken together are capable of supporting the conclusion. In this case, for instance, "dogs are intelligent" doesn't give us good reason to believe that dogs make good pets unless we assume "intelligent animals make good pets." Similarly, "intelligent animals make good pets" doesn't give us good reason to conclusion that dogs make good pets unless we assume "dogs are intelligent." Taken together, however, "dogs are intelligent" and "intelligent animals make good pets" give us very good reason to believe that dogs make good pets in the sense that anyone who believes both of these ideas will be pretty much forced to believe the conclusion as well.

And, just in case you're curious, "dogs are intelligent" is still a subconclusion in this argument because the argument is giving us reason to believe it. "Intelligent animals make good pets" on the other hand, is a premise.

Slide 3

When an argument is written or spoken, dependent reasons are often connected with something that I call an "inference eraser expression." Not surprisingly, inference eraser expressions have the function of saying "there isn't an inference between these ideas" or "neither of these ideas is being given as a reason to believe the other."

If there is no contrast or tension between the dependent reasons, as is the case in this argument, it's a good idea to use an inference eraser from the "and" family, which includes "and," "moreover," "furthermore," and "in addition."

For instance, we could write this argument as follows, using conclusion indicator expressions and working from top to bottom:

"Dogs can learn tricks.

This shows that

they're intelligent,

and

intelligent animals make good pets,

which is why

dogs make good pets."

Or we could write the argument from bottom to top, using reason indicator expressions, like this:

"Dogs make good pets.

After all,

intelligent animals make good pets

and

dogs are intelligent

because

they can learn tricks."

Note that the ultimate conclusion can be at the beginning of the argument or at the end. The decision is up to you. I generally try to lead with the ultimate conclusion because it helps my readers to know where I'm going. If the ultimate conclusion is controversial, however, I'll end with it in order to ease my readers into the idea.

Now that we've seen how to write a passage that contains an argument when we're given the argument diagram, let's turn to constructing the diagram for an argument that appears in a passage.

<u>Slide 4</u>

We'll diagram the argument "Cats are independent and independent animals are easy to care for. Consequently, cats are easy to care for so they make good pets." As we noted in our last lesson, it's always a good idea to start by identifying the ultimate conclusion, if possible. Can you see what the ultimate conclusion is here?

It's "cats make good pets."

"Cats are independent" is being given as a reason to believe the ultimate conclusion.

The "and" tells us that it will probably be added to another idea,

and it looks like that idea is "independent animals are easy to care for."
        Now let's stop for a minute and think about what would naturally follow from "cats are independent" and "independent animals are easy to care for." If someone believed these two ideas, what would they be likely to conclude from them? They'd be likely to conclude that cats are easy to care for, and this is exactly what the argument does when it says

"Consequently"

"Cats are easy to care for."

The "so" tells us that "cats are easy to care for" is being given as a reason to believe "cats make good pets"

and so the argument is diagrammed like this. I hope that makes perfect sense to you, but if you're still a little confused don't worry. This gets a lot easier with practice.
        This concludes Lesson 3a. You may now proceed to the "Gauge Your Understanding" exercises and then continue with Lesson 3b.