

Argument Structure
VI) Lesson 4: Theme Changers
(with Independent Reasons)

Slide 1

Welcome to Lesson 4.

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to explain what independent reasons are and use theme changer expressions to communicate and analyze arguments with independent reasons.

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So far we've seen arguments with premises, subconclusions, and dependent reasons. Only one structural element remains to be examined, and you can see it in this diagram; the argument that it presents has more than one inference arrow converging upon the conclusion, and this means that this argument contains independent reasons.

In general, two or more ideas or groups of ideas are independent reasons in support of a conclusion if each idea or group of ideas is capable of supporting the conclusion on its own. These independent reasons give us independent lines of reasoning.

In this argument, we have two lines of reasoning, each of which is at least theoretically capable of supporting the conclusion even if the other line of reasoning were absent.

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The independence of each line of reasoning is a function of the fact that each line of reasoning has its own theme, and so recognizing these different themes can help us to distinguish between lines of reasoning in arguments that aren't already diagrammed for us.

In our argument, the line of reasoning on left concerns Leslie's need for company and so we might say that it has a "company" theme.

The line of reasoning on the right addresses the exercise benefits of dog ownership. It has an "exercise" theme. Neither train of thought depends upon the other; each stands alone.

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To help our readers discern when the argument is about to present a new line of reasoning, it helps to use a theme-changer expression. There are plenty to choose from, including "Besides," "Furthermore," "In addition to this," "As if that weren't

enough,” “For one thing... For another thing...,” “First... Second... Third...,” and “Finally,”

For example, we could write this argument as follows:

“Leslie should get a dog.

After all,

Leslie needs company

and

a dog is good company.

Besides,

Leslie would take a dog for a walk every day

so

a dog would help Leslie to get more exercise.”

Can you see how the word “besides” helps our reader to recognize that a new line of reasoning is on the way?

We could also write the argument like this:

“Leslie needs company

and

a dog is good company.

It follows that

Leslie should get a dog.

In addition to this,

a dog would help Leslie to get more exercise

since

Leslie would take a dog for a walk every day.”

Here the expression “in addition to this” helps our reader to recognize a new line of reasoning, and there’s another clue as well. Take a look at where the ultimate conclusion appears in the passage.

It’s in the middle! We observed in lesson 3a that the ultimate conclusion is usually placed at the beginning of the argument or at the end. If an argument has more than one line of reasoning, however, the ultimate conclusion can appear at the end of one line of reasoning and at the beginning of the other, which puts the ultimate conclusion near the middle of the passage. Placing the ultimate conclusion between lines of reasoning like this is another way that we can help our readers to distinguish between different lines of reasoning.

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.

Slide 5

We’ll diagram the argument “Leslie wouldn’t have to move in order to get a cat because her apartment complex permits them. That’s one good reason why Leslie should get a cat. In addition to this, Leslie just doesn’t have time to walk an animal every day and cats don’t require daily walks.” According to our practice, we’ll begin by identifying the ultimate conclusion. Can you see what it is?

It’s “Leslie should get a cat.” Because the ultimate conclusion is in the middle of the argument, it’s probably between lines of reasoning.

The first line of reasoning is “Leslie wouldn’t have to move in order to get a cat because her apartment complex permits them.”

This contains the reason indicator expression “because,”

which tells us that “Leslie’s apartment complex permits cats” is a reason to believe “Leslie wouldn’t have to move in order to get a cat.”

The conclusion indicator expression “that’s one good reason why” simply tells us that this line of reasoning supports the conclusion.

“In addition to this” signals a new line of reasoning,

“Leslie just doesn’t have time to walk an animal every day and cats don’t require daily walks.”

This line of reasoning contains the inference eraser expression “and,”

which tells us that “Leslie just doesn’t have time to walk an animal every day” and “cats don’t require daily walks” are probably dependent reasons in support of the conclusion.

The entire argument, therefore, would be diagrammed like this. Notice how each line of reasoning has its own theme. We have the “apartment permission” theme on the left and the “doesn’t need walks” them on the right.

We’ve now finished Lesson 4. You may proceed to the “Gauge Your Understanding” exercises and then continue with the conclusion to this study of argument structure.