Argument Structure
V) Lesson 3b: Inference Erasers: "but"
(with Dependent Reasons)

Slide 1

Welcome to Lesson 3b.

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

Slide 2

In our last lesson, we noted that when there's no contrast or tension between the dependent reasons it's a good idea to connect them with an inference eraser from the "and" family, the family that includes expressions like "and," "moreover," "furthermore," and "in addition." Sometimes, however, there is a certain contrast or tension between the dependent reasons.

In this argument, for instance, there's a contrast or tension between "Good pets are quiet" and "Dog's aren't quiet." These ideas don't contradict each other, of course (The argument would be a lot of trouble if they did!) but the first idea is talking about quiet animals and the second idea is talking about a non-quiet animal and so there's a contrast there.

When there's a contrast or tension between dependent reasons, it often sounds more natural to connect them with an inference eraser from the "but" family, which includes "but," "yet," "however," "although," "even though," and "nevertheless."

For example, we could write the argument from top to bottom like this:

"Dogs often bark

so

they aren't quiet,

but

good pets are quiet.

Thus,

dogs don't make good pets."

Or we could write the argument from bottom to top like this:

"Dogs don't make good pets.

After all,

good pets are quiet

but

dogs aren't quiet

since

they often bark."

Can you see how we used conclusion indicator expressions when we wrote "down" an arrow, from reason to conclusion, and reason indicator expressions when we wrote "up" an arrow, from conclusion to reason? That's important to understand.

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 3

We'll diagram the argument "Cats don't make good pets since they aren't affectionate. After all, affectionate animals wag their tails when they're happy, but cats don't wag their tales when they're happy." 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 don't make good pets."

"Since" tells us that reasons about to be given for the conclusion (no big shock there)

and the immediate reason is "cats aren't affectionate."

"After all" signals that reasons are going to be given for "cats aren't affectionate," and those reasons are

"Affectionate animals wag their tails when they're happy,

but

cats don't wag their tales when they're happy."

Note how the "but" in the passage helps us to see that "affectionate animals wag their tails when they're happy," and "cats don't wag their tales when they're happy" are dependent reasons that should be added together in the diagram.

Is this a good argument? Of course not. It isn't true that all affectionate animals wag their tails, but that's not the point. The point of diagramming an argument is to help us understand it. Evaluating an argument once we do understand it is the next step, another thing altogether, that we aren't discussing here.

This concludes Lesson 3b. You may now proceed to the "Gauge Your Understanding" exercises and then continue with Lesson 4.