Paraphrasing, Schematizing and Evaluating Arguments
“The Philosopher’s World Cup”

- Monty Python & the Flying Circus
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92vV3QGagek&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92vV3QGagek&feature=related)
What is an argument?

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What is an argument?

- Two definitions offered:
  1. "...a connected series of statements to establish a definite proposition"
  2. "...an intellectual process."
Some reasons arguments fail:

1. “Abuse” - a fallacy of irrelevance - also known as an “ad hominem” argument because one is attacking the person not the issue at hand.

2. Mere assertion or simple contradiction – one fails to offer any reasons at all – one is just negating what has been offered without any supports of one’s own.
Some argument strategies:

- **Modus Ponens Syllogism:**
  - p1) If you’re arguing then I must have paid
  - p2) You’re arguing (antecedent)
  - C) I must have paid (consequent)

- P= Premise (a reason), C= Conclusion (the point of the argument), this is his argument in standard schematized format.
Some argument strategies:

- **Argument by counterexample:**
  It is not the case that my arguing implies that I must have been paid because I might be arguing in my spare time!
Is there an argument here?

- [http://youtu.be/U_eZmEiyToo](http://youtu.be/U_eZmEiyToo)
More argument strategies:

- **Disjunctive Syllogism:**
  - p1) the poison is either in the cup in front of me or in the cup in front of the pirate
  - p2) the poison is not in the cup in front of me
  - C) the poison is in the cup in front of the pirate
A reason why this argument failed:

3. The fallacy of false dilemma – How many alternatives should the Sicilian have considered? In a false dilemma, one has failed to consider all the relevant alternatives.
Implied premises, conclusions and even sometimes whole arguments:

- **P1)** the pirate knows where the poison is
- **P2)** whichever cup the pirate drinks from is the one the pirate believes is not poisoned.
- **P3)** the cup in front of the Sicilian is the cup that was in front of the pirate
- **P4)** the pirate does not know the cups were switched
- **P5)** the pirate drinks from the cup in front of him, thus indicating that he believes that it is not poisoned

**C)** the cup in front of the Sicilian is safe to drink
More argument strategies:

• Argument by Analogy:
  • P1) my ex-lover was a cheat and a liar
  • P2) this new person is of the same gender as my ex-lover
  • ____________________________________________________________
  • C) this new person is a cheat and a liar

Why is this not a good argument?
More argument strategies:

- Inference to the Best Explanation & Ockham’s Razor:

  - P1) We all just heard a loud crashing sound which seems to come from the area of Soquel Drive across the campus
  - P2) This sound could have been caused by an auto accident, a car backfiring, a construction crane dropping something or aliens landing ineptly in the football field.
  - P3) the construction is completed in the new VAPA complex
  - P4) it is hard to imagine why aliens would be so good at interstellar travel but so bad at landing
  - P5) not too many accidents happen in this stretch of Soquel drive
  - P6) many people who come to Cabrillo have badly tuned cars that cause backfiring

  - C) it was most likely a car backfiring – that is the simplest explanation which also explains the relevant data
More argument strategies:

- **Conductive Arguments:**

  - P1) the master of the house has been murdered in the library by a blunt trauma to the head
  - P2) the butler hated the master of the house
  - P3) the butler was seen coming out of the library carrying a metal paperweight that had blood on it by the downstairs maid
  - P4) the butler was the last person known to see the master alive.

  \[\text{____________________________________________________} \]

- C) the butler did it!

- Why isn’t this a *good* or conclusive argument? Can you get the butler off?
More argument strategies:

- **Hypothetical Syllogism:** (the example provided by my youngest son, James, when he was 15 ½ to persuade us to buy him a car)

- P1) if you don’t buy me a car on my 16th birthday, I won’t get any dates
  - Sp1) girls only date guys with cars
- P2) If I don’t get any dates, I’ll have no self confidence and get a poor self-image
- P3) if I have no self confidence and a poor self image I’ll flunk all my classes
- P4) if I flunk all my classes then the only job I’ll be able to get is flipping hamburgers at Mickie D’s
- P5) if this is the only job I can get and I’m out flunked of school, I’ll be so depressed that I’ll probably be fired from Mickie D’s
- P6) if I am out of school and fired then I’ll be kicked out of the house
- P7) if I’m kicked out of the house, I’ll die alone, starving in a gutter

- C) if you don’t buy me a car on my 16th birthday, I’ll die alone, starving in a gutter

- **What was wrong with James’ argument?** (4. the Slippery Slope fallacy)
More argument strategies:

- **Reductio ad absurdum:**
  - P1) we’ve been told that it is mandatory to cut expenses at Cabrillo
  - P2) teachers are expensive
  - P3) the more teachers we cut the more expenses we save
  - P4) if we cut all the teachers, then we can save even more than we need to cut from our next several years’ budgets
  - P5) but if we cut all the teachers, then we won’t have a college
  - P6) if we don’t have a college, the issue of budgeting will be irrelevant

- C) the plan to save the budget by cutting all the teachers is self-contradictory and ridiculous.
More reasons why arguments fail:

5) *Argumentum ad Populum/Appeal to Popularity* – Just because “everyone” or, even the majority of people agrees with a certain proposition it does not necessarily make the proposition acceptable.

6) Appeal to force – Fallacy of irrelevance – just because someone is stronger or threatening, it does not follow that they are correct.

7) Begging the Question – Not the same as “Raising the Question” – this form of fallacy fails to address the question at hand and assumes that which is to be proven as true, usually by asserting the conclusion into the premises – it is a form of circular reasoning.

8) Straw Man – This fallacy occurs at the early stages of paraphrasing or schematizing. In this case one mischaracterizes one’s opponent’s argument in a way that makes it easy to dismiss. This is the opposite of the principle of charity (see the footnote on the 1st page of this guide).
Paraphrasing & Schematizing Arguments:

- Evaluating an argument begins with **Paraphrasing**: Paraphrasing is restating the argument in prose form, using simpler language, true to your own voice, that is consistent with the author’s intent, but is shorter than the original argument.

- **Schematizing** an argument is to lay out the premises and conclusion in a standardized form. It is *not* the same as an outline (though it can serve a similar purpose) since in one’s schematization the premises and conclusion may not be in the same order as the argument being evaluated, many points in the essay will be eliminated in the schematization as irrelevant to the argument and one may need to make implicit points explicit. In outlines one follows the order of the text; in schematizations, one presents the logical flow of ideas leading to a conclusion. Further, in outlines, one need only list the topics of each section: In schematizations, *each premise must contain a complete thought: each must assert something to be evaluated for acceptability or relevance.*
Evaluating Arguments: The ARG Method

- This method is adapted from *A Practical Study of Argument*, by Trudy Govier, (Wadsworth). Once the individual premises and conclusion have been identified, the next step is to evaluate the strength of the argument. There are three primary considerations to take during this phase:
  - **A**: Is each individual premise acceptable? The term “acceptable” functions like the term “true” in ordinary discourse. This means generally, that you have good reason to think that the premise is true and no good reason to doubt it.
  - **R**: Each premise must be relevant to the overall argument and support the conclusion. Relevance is not always obvious. Subpremises may include no reference to the conclusion but support the main premise which does directly relate to the conclusion.
  - **G**: Once you have tested for acceptability and relevance, now you need to consider whether enough evidence has been provided to support the conclusion. This is called “Grounds.” Are there any missing pieces of information that you can imagine would sway your judgment? Is there a critical fallacy in the argument structure?
First figure out what is the main question that the philosopher is addressing. Usually the best place to find this is in the title but sadly...not always.

Then look for a thesis statement that gives you some clue where that philosopher wants to take you. Some philosophers are kind enough to use certain words and phrases that are signifiers of a conclusion. Some even separate and identify a section called “Conclusion.” (In the assigned essay by Jorge Gracia, he writes fairly early towards the beginning, “My overall thesis is...” and he gives us a concluding section marked clearly as such. Very generous!)

Once you have the destination, then look for the central reasons offered in support of the philosopher’s central thesis.

Remember that there are nearly always sub-arguments to support the main premises (reasons offered in support for the argument) so don’t get too frustrated by what initially may look like a maze of disconnected ideas or garden-path excursions.
Some Hopefully Helpful Notes on Reading Philosophy…

5. Look for words that may be commonly used but seem to be used in a technical fashion in the essay – one clue is when the philosopher spends time specifying what they mean (common culprits include: identity, liberation, experience, happiness, knowledge, self, justice, etc...).

6. Allocate enough time to read slowly, schedule your reading when you’re not exhausted or distracted and be prepared to read the essay more than once.

7. Read interactively – that is, ask questions as you go along as if you could have a conversation with the philosopher.

8. Take notes as you read – writing marginalia, highlighting and schematizing can all be very useful tools for increasing your comprehension.

9. Try to suspend judgment until you have read (and understood) the entire essay – the time for critique is after some reasonable comprehension is achieved.
Some Hopefully Helpful Notes on Reading Philosophy...

10. Finally, and perhaps most importantly,