Argument

Remember:

- An author's **claim** = the main point of the argument

- **Support** must be based on evidence and reasons that support the claim

- A good argument relies on support that is **relevant**

- A good argument relies on support that is **adequate**

- Be wary of author's **bias**—it may be part of the claim, but it can also affect the relevance, quality and quantity of support presented

Give it a try!

Which of these paragraphs provides the most relevant and adequate support and has the least bias?

1. Plastic bags contribute to pollution and have harmful environmental effects. They pose a threat to marine life. If ingested, the bags can block the stomach and cause starvation. Sea turtles for example, mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, which are part of their prey. In 2002 a minke whale that washed up on a beach at Normandy was found to have 800 grams of plastic and other packaging in its stomach. Stray plastic bags can also clog sewer pipes, leading to stagnant water and associated health hazards.

2. Plastic bags contribute to pollution and have harmful environmental effects. Plastic bags lead to the tragic demise of many poor sea creatures. For example, a dead whale was once found with 800 grams of plastic and packaging in its stomach. This is horrific, and it is all our fault for using plastic bags. Also, the bags can clog up sewers, which leads to flooding and standing water. So, not only are plastic bags harmful for animals, they also harm us. This is one of the simplest pollution problems to solve, if we can only be smart enough to stop using plastic bags.

Works Cited

Henry, D. J. *The Effective Reader*. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 2011. Print.

Answer: Paragraph 1

The Communications Center
BACA 207
myascbrandon@gmail.com
813-259-6598

HCC ASC
BRANDON ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

Argument

Arguments are claims that a speaker or writer makes and then supports with logical details. The *claim* is the main point of the argument, and the *support* is based on evidence or reasons that strengthen the claim.

There are four easy steps you can take to evaluate the strength or quality of an argument.

Step 1:
Identify Claim and Support

Remember, a writer's *claim* is the point s/he is trying to make, while the *support* is the evidence or details that are offered to back up the claim.

For example, which of the following sentences is the claim? Which offers support?

₁Popcorn contains only 15 calories per cup when it is air-popped. ₂Popcorn is a good snack. ₃Popcorn is a good source of fiber.

Sentence 1: _____

Sentence 2: _____

Sentence 3: _____

Answers: 1 is support, 2 is the claim, 3 is support

Step 2:
Is the Support Relevant?

Support for a claim is **only relevant if** it:
1. stays on topic, and
2. focuses on the claim (also known as the *controlling point*).

Statements that change the topic or ignore the claim/controlling point are **irrelevant support**.

For example, if an author claims that *the use of steroids is harmful and should be avoided,* would the following statement offer relevant support?

Drinking alcohol poses greater risks than using steroids.

Answer: No.

Step 3:
Is the Support Adequate?

Whether or not the support an author provides is *adequate* depends on the quantity and the quality of the support. The supporting details given in a text should **fully explain** the author's claim.

One thing you can do to determine if support is adequate is to ask the wh-questions after reading a text: *Who? What? When? Where? Why?* and *How?**

*Only ask the questions that are relevant; for instance, a text may not involve a specific location, in which case *where* is not necessary to answer).

Step 4:
Check for Bias

It is always difficult to be objective and leave our personal opinions behind. Authors face this problem when building an argument; **a writer may use language that presents an argument favorably or negatively**, especially if s/he has strong feelings about the topic. S/he might also **only include details that support his/her argument, even though other evidence exists.**

To check for bias, ask yourself these questions:

✓ Does the author provide mostly positive or negative support?

✓ Does the author provide mostly factual details?

✓ Evaluate the author's word choice. Did s/he use neutral language?

✓ Does the author include or omit opposing views?

Don't Jump to Conclusions!

❖ Always be aware that there may be more sides to a story than an author presents.

❖ Do not draw conclusions that are too far-removed from the data and information presented in a text (e.g. Drinking milk is healthy, but that does not imply that drinking milk will ensure you are in good shape/health).

❖ Be aware that almost all authors are biased—sometimes this bias is central to their point (argument).