

Questioning Ideas Fairly

A field manual for reading arguments, comparing perspectives, and revising your view

SAMPLE MANUAL / FREE BETA EDITION

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How to use this manual

Read one section at a time. Complete the exercises in a notebook, then return to a section that helps with a real question. The examples and prompts are illustrative. No external research findings are claimed.

01 / Identify the claim

02 / Map the argument

03 / Examine the evidence

04 / Compare perspectives

05 / Revise and discuss

Reader feedback

Tell us which instruction was useful, which was unclear, and what you would like expanded. Woguru sample editions are offered free while the library and feedback process are tested.

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Identify the claim

Start with the actual sentence

Choose a short passage and write the claim in one sentence. Distinguish a factual claim (“this policy reduced costs”), a value judgment (“fairness matters more than efficiency”), and a recommendation (“we should adopt this policy”). Many disagreements combine all three, so separate them before evaluating.

Worked example

“Every school should ban phones because phones always damage learning” contains a recommendation and an absolute factual claim. You can investigate the factual claim while separately discussing tradeoffs such as accessibility, emergencies, classroom distraction, and implementation.

Scope matters

Write who, where, when, and under what conditions the claim applies. “Some students in one setting” is different from “all students everywhere.” Do not broaden a source’s conclusion when summarizing it. If a passage is ambiguous, note the ambiguity instead of silently resolving it in your preferred direction.

Exercise

Choose an article or essay. Extract three claims. Label each as factual, value-based, or a recommendation. Underline absolute words such as “always,” “never,” and “everyone.” Rewrite each claim with its original scope preserved.

Map the argument

Use four parts

Record the conclusion, reasons, evidence, and assumptions. A reason explains why the conclusion might follow. Evidence supports a reason. An assumption connects the two without being fully stated. Keep these separate so you can identify exactly where you agree or disagree.

Worked example

Conclusion: a library should open later. Reason: more residents could visit after work. Evidence needed: current opening hours, visitor patterns, requests, and staffing costs. Assumption: enough unmet demand exists in the evening to justify the expense. That assumption deserves investigation.

Try a fair restatement

Write the strongest version you can support from the source. Avoid adding claims the author did not make. Then ask whether the author would recognize the summary. A fair restatement does not require agreement; it makes criticism more accurate.

Exercise

Make a four-box map of one argument. Add a fifth box for unanswered questions. Where a source provides no evidence, write “not supplied in this source,” rather than “no evidence exists.” Those are different statements.

Examine the evidence

Trace the source

Follow a quoted result to its original source where possible. Record author, date, purpose, method, population, and limitations. A screenshot or excerpt can omit context. A source's reputation is relevant, but it cannot substitute for checking what the source actually supports.

Questions to ask

Was the evidence observed, measured, reported by participants, or inferred? How were examples selected? Is there a comparison? Could another explanation fit? Are the findings being extended beyond the people or setting studied? You do not need to answer every methodological question to identify a limitation.

Worked example

Three interviews can reveal experiences worth understanding. They cannot by themselves establish how common those experiences are across an entire country. A large survey may estimate prevalence, but question wording and sampling still matter. Match the conclusion to what the method can support.

Exercise

Create an evidence card: claim; original source; evidence type; strongest support; biggest limitation; confidence in this particular claim. Use plain labels such as low, moderate, or high and explain your reason. Avoid false numerical precision.

Compare perspectives

Use common questions

Compare two perspectives using the same questions: What problem does each prioritize? What values guide it? What evidence does it use? What tradeoffs does it accept? What would count against it? This reveals substantive differences without reducing people to labels.

Worked example

Two people may agree that a public park matters but disagree about allocating space to sports or quiet gardens. The disagreement may concern values and competing uses rather than a factual mistake. Visitor information can inform the choice, but it cannot independently decide which values should receive priority.

Avoid shortcuts

Disliking a speaker does not refute an argument. Finding one poor argument does not refute every version of a perspective. Conversely, a fair hearing does not require treating all factual claims as equally supported. State where the evidence is stronger and why.

Exercise

Choose a manageable debate. Write a fair paragraph for each position, one shared concern, one real tradeoff, and one unresolved factual question. Ask a reader with a different view whether you represented their position accurately.

Revise and discuss

Keep a belief notebook

Record your current view, its reasons, uncertainty, and what could change it. Later, preserve the old entry and add the revision. Changing your view in response to better evidence is a useful outcome, not a failure of the exercise.

Conversation script

Try: “My understanding of your claim is... Is that accurate?” Then: “The evidence I find strongest is...” and “The part I am uncertain about is...” End with a question that could resolve something specific. Avoid diagnosing another person’s motives or mental health.

Know when to pause

Some discussions become personal or unsafe. You can stop without resolving the argument. For young readers, discuss distressing or age-inappropriate material with a trusted adult. This manual teaches reading and discussion practices; it is not psychological assessment or treatment.

Your next step

Choose one short text this week. Produce a claim list, argument map, evidence card, and fair comparison. Finish with a 150-word account of what you learned and what remains uncertain. This manual offers original exercises, not a validated psychological instrument.