

❖ Preface ❖

THIS TEXT IS intended for students in an introductory course in reasoning or informal logic and is designed to enhance reasoning skills. Reasoning and logic are the study of arguments with the purpose of determining which are successful and which are unsuccessful. Such a study requires close and detailed attention to language and how people use it to justify their ideas or convince others of their beliefs. Learning to reason, like learning a language, involves being able to make ourselves understood.

As in learning a language, one learns reasoning as much by practice and exercise as by explanation. Explanations play an important role, but by themselves they are difficult to understand and apply. We need examples and exercises in order to understand fully the explanations. This book relies on many examples and exercises to enhance the explanations. The exercises should be used not just to sharpen skills, but to help develop the understanding of key concepts and techniques.

Generally, the exercises are arranged to proceed from easier to harder. There are “confidence builders” at the beginning of each set of exercises and some really challenging ones at the end.

Each chapter begins with explanations and discussion, but the explanations depend on the exercises for illumination. The exercises are to be worked with a view toward a better understanding of the explanations. Solutions to selected exercises (indicated by a *) are provided in the Answer Key at the end of this text. The text plus the examples and exercises constitute a complete introductory course in reasoning, including the rudiments of formal logic.

One of the presuppositions of this book is that we can go a long way in judging the success or failure of ordinary arguments by using our common sense and background knowledge. Very little in the way of special formal knowledge is necessary for good reasoning. What is necessary is to use the common sense and knowledge we already have in a focused, careful, and directed way. The goal of this text is to help students develop these basic skills.

Chapter 1 sets out basic concepts and introduces many of the topics developed in detail in Chapters 2 through 8. These chapters are mainly concerned with understanding arguments and the notions of logical validity and soundness. Chapter 3, “Logic Puzzles,” introduces formal material such as truth tables for “not,” “and,” and “or.” This chapter is valuable because it forces students to argue validly before the notion of valid argument is formally defined in Chapter 4. Chapters 9 through 13 are mainly focused on premise evaluation and nondeductive reasoning. Many topics that are vital for understanding and evaluating the sorts of semitechnical reasoning that we find daily in the media are introduced in these chapters. These topics include causal, analogical, and statistical reasoning. Chapters 14 and 15 are primarily concerned with informal fallacies and persuasive abuses of language that interfere with good reasoning. Finally, Chapter 16 deals with extended passages in which all the skills and techniques of reasoning are brought to bear.

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