

Why should we become critical thinkers?

should be included in the reconstruction. This is particularly important when 'because' is used in a proposition used to express an explanation. See the next section, discussing the distinction between arguments and explanations.

6 Again, as with conclusions, a text or speech may not include specific premise indicators. Context is the best means of identifying premises in such cases. It may also help to try adding premise indicators to propositions to see if the passage or speech still runs smoothly.

7 Ordinary language can make identifying arguments more difficult than it might otherwise be because people do not always express all of their premises explicitly. Thus many attempts to persuade by argument rely on implicit premises: these are propositions assumed or intended by the arguer as reasons in support of the conclusion, but which are not actually expressed by any sentence provided by the arguer. Sometimes this happens out of oversight; other times because the arguer assumes that, in the given context, the premise may already be taken for granted. In Chapter 5 we will discuss the interpretation of hidden premises and the reconstruction of arguments to include them.

Arguments and explanations

Words that function as **indicator words** can be used for other purposes. The sentence, 'Since 2004 I have been a student at the University of Anytown' contains the word 'since'; but in this case the word merely designates the beginning of a period of time, and does not indicate a premise of an argument.

A trickier case is the use of words such as 'since' and 'because' – especially 'because' – in **explanations**. The distinction between *arguments* and *explanations* is important, but not always easy to make because arguments and explanation often have a very similar structure. In some cases we have to think hard about the context in order to determine which is intended. We need to work out whether they are telling us that such-and-such event occurred as a result of some other event – that is, whether they intend to assert a relation of cause and effect. For in that case, 'because' is being used to introduce an **explanation**, not an argument.

The best way to appreciate the distinction between arguments and explanations is to consider an example. Consider this proposition:

The tap is leaking.

Why should we become critical thinkers?

Someone might advance an explanation for this by saying something like:

The tap is leaking because it needs a new washer.

On the other hand, we can imagine someone advancing an argument for that very same proposition, reasoning as follows:

There is sound of dripping water coming from the bathroom.
Therefore, the tap is leaking.

What exactly is the difference? The difference is that when giving the explanation, the speaker assumes that his or her audience *already accepts the proposition that the tap is leaking*, or at least that the speaker has no need to *persuade* the audience of this fact. Given this fact, the speaker is *asserting* that the *cause* of that fact is the faulty or worn-out washer. By contrast, when giving an argument, the speaker does not assume that the audience accepts or will accept that the tap is leaking outright; the arguer intends to persuade the audience that this is so by giving the audience a good reason to believe it.

This example of an explanation uses the word 'because' – the word here indicates a causal relationship instead of a logical connection between premise and conclusion. As demonstrated by the following examples, 'since', 'therefore', 'thus' and 'so' may also be used in explanations that are not intended to provide reasons for acting or believing something:⁴

- ▶ Since we forgot to add yeast, the bread didn't rise.
- ▶ We forgot to add yeast, therefore the bread didn't rise.
- ▶ We forgot to add yeast, thus the bread didn't rise.
- ▶ We forgot to add yeast, so the bread didn't rise.