

**P A R T I :
W R A P - U P**

To sum up, in Part I, we have looked at the three basics that help us deal with argumentative text.

1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT AND THE INFORMATIVE TEXT

The argumentative text differs considerably from the informative text in a few aspects.

To begin with, the argumentative text is usually about the subject matter that tends to draw different opinions, hence, its term--issue. The general purpose of the text is to express the writer's view on such issue, be it, to criticise, support, persuade etc. When reading an argumentative piece, you have to identify the writer's opinion, sometimes by means of inference if the writer does not explicitly state it. Moreover, the argumentative text uses certain language distinguishing itself from the informative text. Finally, certain columns in magazines or journals are of argumentative natures. They include, but not limited to, editorials, commentary or opinion etc.

2 ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT STRUCTURE

Although the argumentative text does not separate itself from other kinds of text in terms of basic structure: the introduction, the body and the conclusion, its elements are somewhat distinctive.

Firstly, the text must contain the writer's thesis or the writer's claim. This tends to be placed in the introduction.

Then, to back up his claim, the writer proposes arguments. An argument consists of premises and a conclusion. The premises may come in different types of evidence: authoritative opinions, examples or statistics. The typical location of the arguments is in the body paragraphs.

Finally, in the concluding paragraph(s) the writer is likely to wrap up his piece with solutions, remarks or suggestions on the issue.

3 READING SKILLS FOR ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT

Reading skills that help us approach the argumentative text more effectively include:

3.1 DISTINGUISHING FACTS FROM OPINIONS

3.2 IDENTIFYING THE WRITER'S THESIS

3.3 ANALYSING TEXT STRUCTURE

3.4 RECOGNISING THE WRITER'S REFUTATION

3.5 UNDERSTANDING REASONING

3.6 MAKING GENERALISATION AND INFERENCES

3.7 RECOGNISING THE WRITER'S PURPOSE, ATTITUDE AND TONE OF VOICE

3.8 JUDGING EVIDENCE AND EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

We shall now practice using the reading skills discussed in examining the following argumentative text.

PRACTICE

In Defense of the MBA

By Sandeep Krishnamurthy

Business Week

A University of Washington professor argues that the degree isn't the problem, it's the solution—to poorly run companies, unethical managers, and a crippled economy.

During this recession it has been disappointing to see arguments against the MBA degree. If you listen to the loudest critics, you would start to believe that the MBA is directly responsible for the premature demise of capitalism. I find these criticisms to be superficial, knee-jerk responses to larger problems. Largely speaking, these attacks on the MBA throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. (1)

I speak from experience. Over the past 10 years I have been directly involved with MBA students as an educator and administrator. I routinely see the benefits of the MBA degree in action, and this experience has made me a passionate believer in its power. MBA education transforms lives and careers. I am in touch with entrepreneurs who are seeking out transformational business opportunities in a downturn. I see graduates rapidly rise within their corporations to significant leadership positions. I see quiet computer programmers turn into passionate leaders during the course of their MBA education. I personally know a scientist working in a lab who transformed into a marketing director as a direct result of MBA education. The list goes on. I regularly see the MBA change lives, making it hard for me to accept the hand-wringing and disproportionate criticism. (2)

The MBA degree is central to how you should be approaching capitalism. It is part of the solution—not the problem. Join me in a thought experiment. Imagine a world where there are no American business schools or MBA graduates. Would that be a better world? For three reasons, I don't think so. First, the MBA enables key competencies. Running today's corporation is not akin to running a lemonade stand. It requires an in-depth understanding of theories, tools, and frameworks. The MBA imposes an analytical discipline on business problems. The central problem with Enron, AIG, or the latest scandal of the month is incompetence. Some firms are run poorly. Period. Shouldn't more and better education be the path to solving these problems as opposed to no education at all? Will the next Enron be avoided as a result of more or less education? (3)

Second, the MBA helps students learn from the mistakes of others. The case study method, a central part of MBA pedagogy, is predicated on this idea. Students learn to be decision-makers and take a stand on available data. They see how their analysis can lead them astray if they are not careful. Third, the MBA helps students learn from industries other than their own. Too often corporate employees get caught up in the issues surrounding their industry. They meet people just like themselves at seminars and trade shows who act as echo chambers rather than spaces

for discourse. The MBA is their chance to learn from colleagues in other industries and to view a problem from multiple perspectives. If the MBA degree were not available, our corporations would be run by unqualified managers who would get soundly beaten in a global marketplace. (4)

Robust debate: the secret MBA sauce

The two most common arguments against MBA graduates are: They are analysts who cannot communicate, and they are intrinsically unethical, rapacious capitalists. Unfortunately, both of these criticisms take aim at old stereotypes rather than present reality. Every single business school that I follow has made a serious attempt to include programs in communication and ethics. The MBA programs on my campus start with a retreat where students get an in-depth immersion in ethics and ethical decision-making. Communication is part of the DNA of all your courses. We believe leadership skills can be taught and developed. Class participation is par for the course. (5)

I came across the argument that learning from an MBA education is equivalent to what can be gained from simply reading a couple of popular business books or textbooks. These opponents miss the point that the "secret sauce" of an MBA classroom is the robust discussion. Robust argumentation based on evidence is the de facto mode. Classmates challenge each other on the strength of these arguments en route to a class consensus. Participating in such an environment strengthens the students' ability to analyze, communicate, persuade, and build consensus while incorporating different points of view. (6)

Capitalism has its critics at this point in our history. However, it is not going away. We need to educate the next generation of smart, ethical, and passionate capitalists who will help us build the next world-beater. What better platform to do this than the MBA degree? (7)

Let's practice the reading skills we have covered by working through the following questions.

3.1 IDENTIFYING THE WRITER'S THESIS

- a Does the title or the lead-in suggest the writer's opinion on the issue?
- b Does the writer explicitly state his opinion on the issue? Where in the text?

3.2 IDENTIFYING THE WRITER'S ARGUMENTS AND REFUTATION

- a Can you identify the writer's arguments
- b Does the writer use refutation to strengthen his arguments?

3.3 UNDERSTANDING REASONING

- a What kind of reasoning is employed? Inductive or Inductive reasoning?
- b Can you identify the premise and the conclusion in each set of reasoning?

3.4 DRAWING GENERALISATION AND INFERENCES

- a What are the conclusions the writer tries to arrive at?
- b Are there ideas not explicitly stated?

3.5 IDENTIFYING THE WRITER'S TONE OF VOICE

- a Can the writer attitude towards the issue be detected through his use of word choice?

3.6 EVALUATING ARGUMENTS AND JUDGING EVIDENCE

- a Does the writer exploit relevant, sufficient, logical evidence in support of his claim?

Let's examine each question together.

3.1 THE WRITER'S THESIS

The writer is defending the MBA education. However, the title isn't a complete statement, so it can't be used as the writer's thesis. If you look at the lead-in, you can see that it re-emphasises the idea suggested in the title—the writer is in favor of the MBA education. It is in the concluding section where we see the writer's thesis: The MBA education prepares much needed qualified capitalists for the capital world.

3.2 THE WRITER'S ARGUMENTS AND REFUTATION

The arguments follow the structure below:

Argument 1: The MBA degree brings merits. Many MBA graduates have been successful.

(P.1 & 2). For this, the writer uses authoritative opinion and an example of personal testimony—his own, basically.

Argument 2: The MBA degree is the solution to capitalism which rules the world we are living in. To strengthen this argument, the writer gives two reasons:

- 1 The program enables much needed key competencies to cope with competitive and sophisticated businesses.
- 2 The essence of the program is learning for others' mistakes.
- 3 Students learn from other businesses other than their own.

As previously discussed, refutation, which is the way the writer acknowledges the opposing view and offers counter-arguments to prove such view is invalid, helps make the writer's case more powerful. Here, we see such techniques in action.

Opposing view 1: MBA students lack communication skills and they are unethical.

The writer's refutation: The writer offers two arguments to rebut such view.

- 1 Only old stereotypes are so, but today's MBA graduates are not.
- 2 Every business school tries to provide ethical and communication courses.

Opposing view 2: Reading from textbooks suffices if one wants an MBA education.

The writer rebuts the idea by claiming that attending class uniquely characterises the MBA learning experience of engaging class discussions.

3.3 DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE REASONING

Premise: I have witnessed entrepreneurs who were able to seek business opportunities in a downturn.

Premise: I have seen MBA graduates move up their career path.

Conclusion: I am confident that the MBA education has a lot of benefits.

The type of reasoning: Inductive reasoning

3.4 DRAWING GENERALISATION AND INFERENCES

1 Which of the following can be drawn from the underlined?

- a Associating with people in the same industry cannot help ones successful in today's business.
- b Corporate employees often meet with same people who share the same way of thinking.
- c People have a good chance of coming up with solutions when looking at other businesses rather than only at their own industries0

2 Which of the following can be drawn from the underlined?

- a Business schools are now well aware of ethics issues for MBA graduates.
- b Many business schools are trying to offer courses that involve communication and ethics.
- c Some business schools are not successful in including ethics and/or communications courses in their programs.

3.5 THE WRITER'S ATTITUDE AND TONE OF VOICE

1 What attitude against Enron, AIG and other corporates with the same scandals does the writer imply by his use of 'period'?

Positive

Negative

2 In paragraph 5, 'DNA' is used figuratively. What type of figurative language is it?

Simile

Metaphor

Irony

'DNA' is used metaphorically to suggest that communication is the fundamental, crucial element of the MBA education, as is the DNA to a human body.

3.6 EVALUATING ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

We could examine some of the writer's arguments along with his other persuasive technique.

1 The writer begins his support of the thesis by referring to his over ten years MBA teaching. Evidently, this support is relatively strong, given the fact that he has shared with the reader his personal experience. In this instance, the writer appeals to 'authority' or 'ethos'.

- 2 The writer presents his arguments in the body paragraphs, as we've already looked at in **3.2 THE WRITER'S ARGUMENTS** and **3.3 DEDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE REASONING**. Yet, when we look closely, we can see that he rarely backs up his claim with concrete data. We don't see any studies cited. Rather, the writer presents his line of reasoning relying on examples from his dealing with his students.

What's more, when he suggests that MBA is the solution to such scandals as the Enron case and the likes, we might wonder if executives of most big companies wouldn't all hold an MBA degree. Yet, we could never hear the end of all these corrupt activities.

Also, when the writer addresses the issue of ethics and maintains that he's seen this become a part of the course, he is at best able to say the MBA schools he has dealt with try to put ethics in their curriculum, which doesn't mean that all schools are successful at such attempts.