



5.3 Formal and Informal Argument

All academic writing uses a combination of formal and informal argument to persuade the reader of the truth of its claims. Although the area of study will determine the extent to which a piece of academic writing relies more on formal or informal argument, effective writing will be a well-crafted combination of the two.

Before discussing formal and informal arguments, we need to examine the types of language which are used to express these arguments.

The two broad categories of language which are relevant to critical thinking are 'formal language' and 'natural language'.

Formal Language	- a rule-governed set of symbols whose arrangement expresses certain relations . For example, in logic, mathematics and computer science. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ $(A \neg B)$ ('A is not B')➤ "5 + 7 = 12"
Natural Language	- an ordinary human language (such as English or Chinese) which refers to objects and concepts and is used primarily for communication . For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ I am a student.➤ 我是学生。

The terms 'formal argument' and 'informal argument' can be defined as follows:

Formal Argument	- An argument expressed in either formal or natural language, which is validated solely in terms of its logical form - i.e. the relationship(s) between premises and conclusions .
Informal Argument	- An argument expressed in natural language which may obscure its logical form, and which is validated mainly by the persuasive power of words .

The critique of informal arguments will be carried out in Section Four. The remainder of this section will be devoted to a discussion of some examples of the evaluation of formal arguments – namely – deductive, inductive and conductive arguments.