

Here are three things to note when reconstructing arguments:

1. Sometimes you need to fill in premises that the author hasn't explicitly stated in order to reconstruct their argument. It may require some creativity on your part to figure out the missing premises:

For example, suppose your text reads: "Even white lies are lies and therefore wrong."

The following is not a very good reconstruction of the argument:

- A. White lies are lies.
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- B. White lies are wrong.

The following is a better reconstruction of the argument:

- A. White lies are lies.
- B. All lies are wrong.
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- C. White lies are wrong.

2. Sometimes a passage will contain a sub-conclusion on the way to the main conclusion.

For example, suppose your text reads: "He won't be home, so he won't be able to water the flowers and they'll die."

This would best be rendered:

- A. He won't be home.
- B. If he won't be home, he won't be able to water the flowers.
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- C. He won't be able to water the flowers.
- D. If he won't be able to water the flowers, the flowers will die.
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- E. The flowers will die.

3. Sometimes the text will contain a bunch of extraneous information, or keep using different words. Try to get rid of the extraneous information, and to rephrase so the wording is consistent.

For example, suppose your text reads: "A fact that many know but few think about is that a pig is smarter than a dog. So if we're to eat animals based on intelligence -- as indeed we should -- we should not eat pigs but rather dogs, the former, as we noted, being brainier and thus not as appropriate a meal."

The following is not a very good reconstruction:

- A. A fact that few think about is that a pig is smarter than a dog.
- B. We should judge moral worth by intelligence.
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- C. We should not eat pigs but rather dogs because the former are brainier than the latter.

The following is a better reconstruction:

- A. Dogs are less intelligent than pigs.
- B. It is better to eat less intelligent animals than to eat more intelligent animals.
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- C. It is better to eat dogs than pigs.

Here are some examples of arguments for you to reconstruct:

1. “Ideal friendship requires equal autonomy in the relationship ... Without it, there will be unequal influence and power.” (John Kupfer’s “Can parents and Children Be Friends” page 290).

2. “Parents and adult children cannot become true friends for two reasons. Their relationship lacks the equality friendship requires, and they are not sufficiently independent or separate from one another.” (John Kupfer’s “Can Parents and Children Be Friends” page 290).

3. “Are only morally good people capable of establishing and maintaining close personal relationships? This is too restrictive. People’s caring, and their moral energies more generally, can be “specialized.” Just as some people can show generosity, loyalty, and delight in their happiness of their children but be generally selfish and ungenerous (i.e. toward most other persons), so can some persons do the same with friends.” (Lawrence A. Blum’s “Personal Relationships” page 515)