LEARNING OUTCOME

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to identify the parts of an argument.

WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?
An argument is an idea that we suggest is true. It has two parts: a **claim** and at least one **premise**.

Part 1 Claim
Claim: a statement that can be true or false. For example:

1. There is more air pollution these days.
2. Vegetables are good for you.

Not all sentences are claims. The following are not claims because they cannot be true or false:

- Questions (e.g. What time is it?)
- Exclamations (e.g. Oh my god!)
- Greetings (e.g. Hi Mom)
- Conditional sentences (e.g. If sentences.)
- Proposals (e.g. Let's eat meat tonight.)
- Instructions (e.g. Open the door, please.)

Part 2 Premise
A premise is a phrase, sentence or many sentences that tells us why (or sometimes how) we should believe a claim. For example:

1. There is more air pollution because <u>energy companies are burning a lot more coal</u>.
2. Vegetables are good for you <u>because they contain nutrients and fibre</u>.

Part 3 Tip
Here is one way to find a claim and premise in a story, book, or speech. Simplify complex ideas with this sentence pattern. The claim will come before the word *because*.

- The writer believes (claim) because (premise).

PRACTICE 1
Describe the argument in these sentences.

1. Given that these pills are all natural, they are totally safe.
2. There's probably no God, so stop worrying and enjoy your life.
3. Since light takes time to reach our eyes, everything we see actually existed in the past.

PRACTICE 2
Read the text. What is the argument?

> Most Americans eat at fast-food establishments more than once a week. Many re searchers agree that these eating habits are the leading cause of obesity in the U.S. Obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and hypertension cost our health care system billions of dollars each year. Whether through health care insurance premiums or taxes, everyone suffers the consequences even if you eat only healthful, home-cooked meals.

> Therefore, we should impose a small tax on every high-calorie meal served at fast-food chains. This would not only offset obesity-related health care costs, but encourage consumers to seek out healthy food options.

PRACTICE 3

Below are 5 claims. Change the claims into arguments by adding 2 or 3 premises.

1. Cooking at home is a good idea for university students.
2. People should drive compact cars.
3. Getting a job these days is hard.
4. Teaching in elementary school is a good job.
5. Writing a good composition is difficult.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Practice 1

1. The pills are totally safe because they are all natural.
2. Stop worrying and enjoy your life because there is probably no God.
3. Everything we see existed in the past because light takes time to reach our eyes.

Practice 2

The writer believes fast food should be taxed because the revenue could be used to pay for health care costs related to obesity and discourage consumption.

Practice 3

1. Cooking at home is a good idea for university students because it's healthy, cheap and delicious. (three adjectives)

2. People should drive compact cars because they're cheap to buy, drive and repair. (three verbs)

3. Getting a job these days is hard because of the competition, qualifications and location. (three nouns)

4. Teaching in elementary school is a good job because of the reliable salary, easy workload, and excellent pension. (adjective plus noun)

5. Writing a good composition is difficult because it requires dedication, practice and patience. (three nouns)

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These are suggested arguments; many more are possible.

- You should buy an Apple computer because it's different, just like the people who have changed the world.

- You should buy Nissan's electric car because it's convenient, comfortable and environmentally friendly.

- You should buy this ketchup because it will make your food taste good.