

Writing and Rhetoric

WRTG 1150 / 1250

Paul & Elder's Heuristic¹

1. PURPOSE

- a. What do you think the author's main purpose was for writing this article? What was he/she trying to accomplish?
- b. Is that purpose clearly stated or clearly implied?
- c. Is it justifiable?

2. QUESTION

All reasoning is an attempt to figure something out, to settle some question, or solve some problem . . .

- a. What was the key question that the author is addressing?
- b. Is the question raised the question being addressed?
- c. Is the question at issue well stated?
- d. Is it clear and unbiased?
- e. Does the expression of the question do justice to the complexity of the matter at issue?
- f. Are the question and purpose directly relevant to each other?

3. INFORMATION

- a. What is the most important information in the article?
- b. What facts is the author using to support his/her conclusions?
 - i. What experiences . . . ?
 - ii. What data . . . ?
 - iii. What opinions from other people . . . ?
- c. Is all this evidence relevant to the issue?
- d. Is the information accurate?
- e. Does the evidence address the evidence match the complexity of the issue?
- f. Does the author address evidence that refutes his/her position and purpose?

4. INFERENCES / CONCLUSIONS

- a. What are the key conclusions the author comes to in this article?
- b. Do the inferences outpace the evidence?
- c. Are the inferences consistent with one another?
- d. What assumptions (as opposed to evidence) lead the author to these inferences?

5. CONCEPTS

- a. What are the key concepts that the reader needs to understand in this article?
- b. Does the author clarify key concepts when necessary?
- c. Are the concepts justifiable? (What are the reasons for using these concepts?)
- d. Are there alternative concepts or alternative definitions of concepts that the author might have used?

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- a. What are the assumptions that underlie the author's reasoning?
- b. What does the author seem to be taking for granted (that might be questioned)?
- c. Is the author aware of (or sensitive to) his or her assumptions?
- d. Does the author use any questionable assumptions without addressing problems that might be inherent in those assumptions?
- e. How are your assumptions (the reader) shaping your point of view?

7. Trace the positive and negative consequences of the author's line of reasoning.

- a. Does the author acknowledge the implications or consequences of his/her line of reasoning?
- b. What are the implications or consequences that are not considered?

8. What is the main point of view presented in this article?

- a. What is the author looking at, and how is he/she seeing it?
- b. Is the author sensitive to alternate points of view?
- c. Does the author consider and respond to objections framed by alternate points of view?
- d. What are the relative weights of the possible points of view?

¹ Richard Paul and Linda Elder. "The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools." The Foundation for Critical Thinking www.criticalthinking.org

² July 22, 2011