

Distinguishing Arguments from Explanations

“

An argument tries to prove *that* something is the case

”

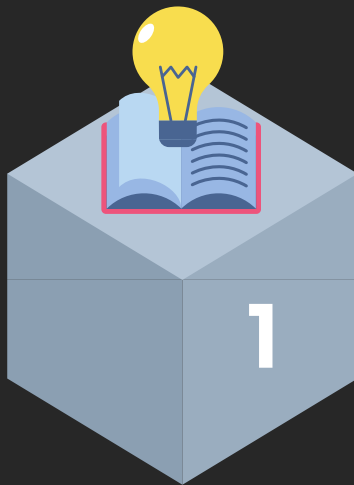
VS

“

An explanation tries to explain *why* it is the case

”

You can use the following four questions to help identify the difference...



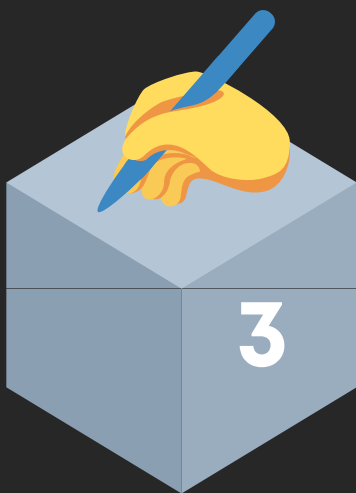
Is the author talking about something that is common knowledge?

If so, the passage is probably an explanation



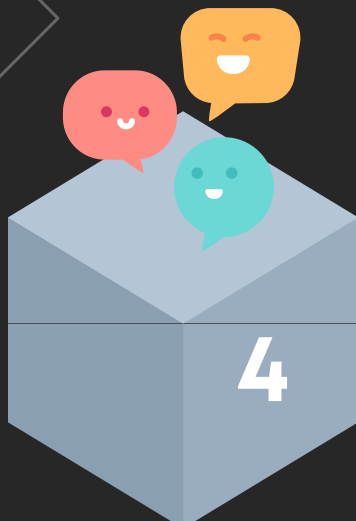
Is the author talking about something that occurred in the past?

If so, the author is probably explaining why something happened



What is the author's likely intent?

Is the author trying to persuade her audience to accept a claim as true (argument) or is she giving an account of the why or how (explanation)?



What is the most charitable way of reading the passage?

When in doubt, interpret the passage in the best light possible. There will be cases in which the best answer is "I simply can't tell..."

SOURCE | Bassham et al. *Critical Thinking; A Student's Introduction* (7th ed.) 2022.



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