Building a Better Argument

Student Handout #1: Finding Premises and Conclusions

Key Terms:

- **Argument**: a conclusion together with the premises that support it
- **Premise**: a reason offered as support for another claim
- **Conclusion**: the claim being supported by a premise or premises
- **Explanation**: a statement or set of statements designed to show *why* something is the case rather than *that* it is the case

Example:

   1. All men are mortal.
   2. Socrates was a man.
   3. Therefore Socrates is mortal.

The three lines taken together constitute an argument. Line 3 is the conclusion. Lines 1 and 2 are premises.

Tips for picking out premises and conclusions:

- You can look at the text for clues like these:

Premise Indicators		Conclusion Indicators	
Since	As indicated by	Therefore	For this reason
Because	The reason is that	Hence	For these reasons
For	May be inferred	So	It follows that
As	from	Accordingly	I conclude that
Follows from	May be derived	Consequently	Which shows that
As shown by	from	Proves that	Which means that
Inasmuch as	May be deduced from	As a result	Which entails that
	Given that	Thus	Which implies that

- You can also try acting like a 3-year-old:
   1. Read a sentence and ask, "Why should I believe that?"
   2. Look at the rest of the passage and see if you can find anything that looks like an answer to the why question.
   3. If you find an answer, then the answer is a premise and the original claim (the sentence about which you asked why) is a conclusion.
   4. Repeat the process for each claim.