

# **Using Tools of Argument to Improve IA Documents: Steps and Progress**

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**Note to Reader. This is an outline. The complete paper will be posted after the conference.**

### **Abstract**

In ten years over a hundred training courses have been offered through IAIA and other organizations to introduce practitioners to (as the course title says) "More Effective Impact Assessment: Tools for Stronger Argument and Clearer Writing." This set of tools, organized into two toolkits called 'Stronger Argument' and 'Effective Presentation,' are not related to any specific effort to 'streamline' IA despite the importance of that common goal. But they are intended to generate clearer, shorter and more effective documents, which are expected to make documents and procedures briefer and more effective. The tools have been adopted to varying degrees by individuals and organizations. Adopting new ideas and methods is often difficult. This presentation documents some of the steps that participants and their organizations have used to embed new ideas into practice. It identifies different goals that people have adopted, several phases that people have gone through, and some of the tools and practices organizations have used to support their staff. It summarizes successful approaches, and responses to limited effectiveness, from review agencies and the private sector. Participants identify frequent success making IA documents and procedures faster, cheaper, more transparent and more effective with reduced risk. Those benefits come from improving existing approaches and achieve the equivalent of streamlining.

### **Using Tools of Argument to Improve IA Documents: Steps and Progress**

#### **Overview**

Overall, this presentation is about tools for streamlining professional work including assessments. Its specific point is that steps to create strong arguments and share them clearly in written work can make IA processes more efficient and effective. And do so without any changes in rules or procedures. A package of tools called Organized Reasoning was created to support that end point. Does it achieve those goals? Yes. Although there are qualifications.

#### **Introduction**

This paper is about argument, used in a professional context, so the place to start is 'what is an argument?'

An argument is 'one or more statements, called reasons, arranged to logically support another statement, called a conclusion.'

The point of argument is to resolve something uncertain or unsettled by assembling data, analysis and reasoning to derive a conclusion.

Hence argument is not a ‘quarrel’, another meaning of the term argument. Professional arguments are not hostile and confrontational quarrels but are thoughtful, fair and carefully arranged reasoning that leads to a clear conclusion which readers can evaluate and decide whether to adopt as their own. The goal therefore is not ‘to win an argument’, a metaphor which can apply to courtroom situations but is not the professional context. Professionals do not need to defeat anyone. They seek ‘success’, in which the audience voluntarily accepts the arguer’s conclusion, because they are persuaded by its evidence and reasoning.

Professionals do not realize how pervasive arguments are in professional and assessment work.

The language of the assessment process is often of ‘description’ of baseline information, effects or significance. But that is a naïve simplification. One undertakes the whole assessment process because one does not know in advance what the impacts will be. One investigates baseline conditions, and ideas about impacts, significance and mitigation because one does not know what is there in advance and makes informed conclusions. One must investigate, analyze and come to conclusions. Sharing those ideas is argument.

### **There are three kinds of arguments: fact argument, evaluation argument, recommendation argument**

Looking at examples is the best way to distinguish them. Simple examples:

All arguments in this area damaged wetlands so this mine will have wetland impacts too.

Careful advance design is the best response. It is inexpensive and popular with stakeholders.

Frog populations need to be protected so wetland preservation should be required.

Arguments are named for the kind of statement that makes up their conclusion. The first offers ‘this mine will have wetland impacts too.’ That is a factual claim that the author wants the reader to believe because of the reason offered. Because there are empirical facts involved, some people do not notice that factual matters can be arguments. But note that one is reasoning that because of a factual pattern in the past, the future can be predicted. That is an argument about facts: a fact argument.

The second, marked by the evaluative term ‘best’, is an evaluation argument. Such arguments reason to a claim about some form of merit, criteria or value.

The third is a recommendation argument. Such arguments always include terms like ‘should,’ ‘ought’ or their negatives like ‘should not.’ The conclusion is a claim about an action the author argues is warranted.

Assessments are full of arguments. Examples.

Fact Arguments: Baseline studies, effect or impact predictions.

Evaluation Arguments: Significance determinations.

Recommendation Arguments: Scoping, mitigation, monitoring, approval or denial conclusions.

Not only do professionals not realize that much of what they do are arguments, they also don't appreciate complex detail of the logical sequences that underpin their conclusions.

Diagram of sequence of steps

Since assessments don't make arguments clear.

Data showing weaknesses of arguments in IAs

Overall-not knowing one is making arguments, or the complexity of the steps involved, means one can't benefit from 2500 years of tools and steps, from ancient Greece to modern cognitive psychology, created to help build strong arguments.

So: providing those tools can make professional work and assessments more sound and the results more findable in the text.

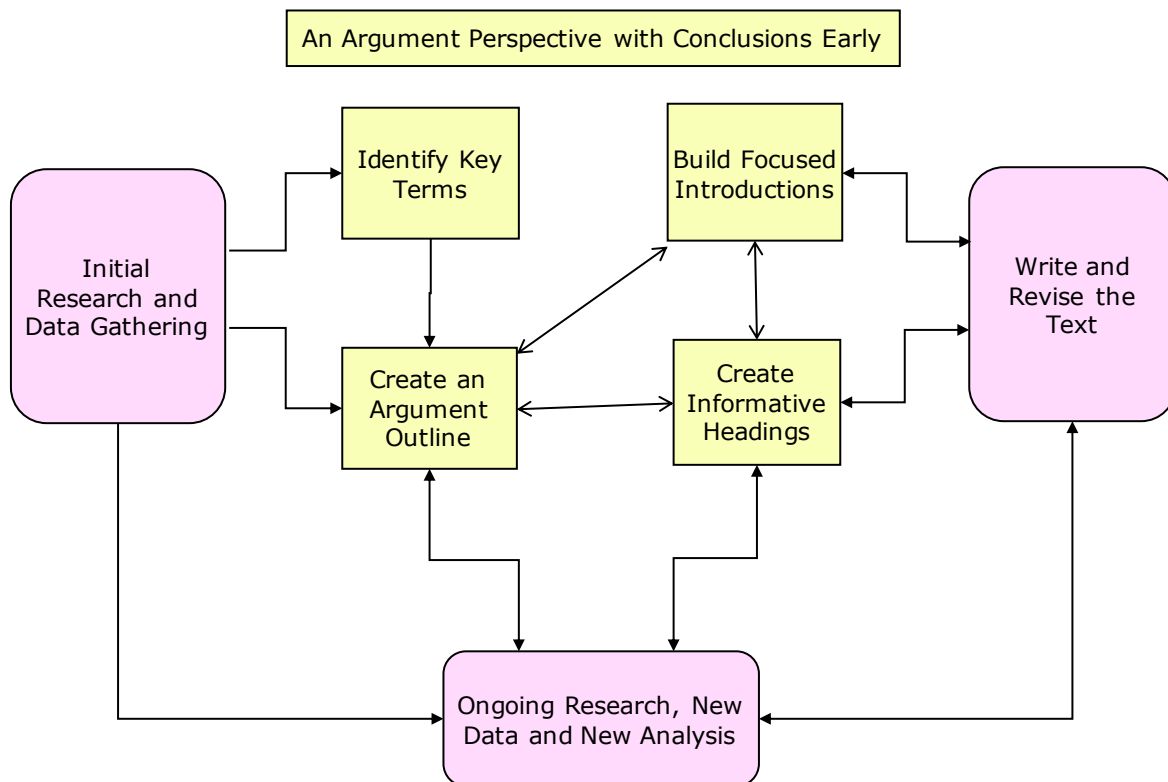
THEREFORE, Building arguments can make Assessment better. And without changing any rules.

**What is Organized Reasoning and why should it improve IA documents (and related processes)**

**A set of tools gathered into two toolkits, to achieve the goals of their titles: Create Strong Arguments and Build Effective Presentations.**

**Skip the details, but the tools are built from five strategic steps, each of which is supported by various tools and tactics.**

## The Strategies Influence Each Other and the Tactics



SO: THE POINT IS That these steps should achieve what 2500 years of practice says they can: produce stronger arguments that can be presented clearly in written form so readers can find and understand the reasoning and conclusions.

**what are the results and suggestions based upon them.**

### Building better arguments creates better results

You have to make arguments not just share data. Without an argument you can't justify a conclusion. IAs need conclusions not just data. That is what each kind of argument results in.

Sharing arguments with specifically focused steps makes those arguments findable in the text.

And makes for shorter and more focused text.

Arguments can be improved

### There is a set of strategic and tactical tools to write clearer arguments with findable conclusions

Presented via online workshops of four half day sessions or two days of live course. Presented to over 150 workshops

Tools can be used for both creating arguments (proponents and consultants) and analyzing the arguments of others (review agencies) and building clearer requests for further information

## **Results and progress**

Big picture. The steps are helpful to individuals and organizations. But application across whole organizations can be limited by the need for conviction at the top, and by a tendency to adopt separate tools before, or rather than, taking a wholistic approach.

Can be piece by piece or complete conversion, whatever works for the individual, project or organization

**Individual professionals.** Teja follows.

**Individual's report a variety of uses.**

All institutional progress is the sum of individual practice. But before addressing institutional results, I will address those individual results.

A few did not try to use them.

All reported some increased level of performance. That is better results.

A few reported some initial decrease in efficiency—slower initially—but all reported some level on increased performance. Of those who did not report greater efficiency, all expected improvements in future with more practice. Everyone who I checked with later said that they had become faster or more efficient with practice.

Details of one person's steps in following presentation.

Quote from ESAB woman.

In terms of streamlining. Better results with similar effort at worst and better results in a shorter time for most. That is streamlining.

## **Consultants and proponents**

### **Review agencies**

Individual documents

Overall process approaches-

Guideline documents that parallel templates

Just ask the clients if it is more efficient or effective and how, briefly

Ask Rio Tinto and Fortescue people if efficient or effective and how

Government Organizations with dual mandates

### **Conclusions**

Tools work. Always knew that. The package works, both as introduction to individual strategies and tools and as a process- a presentation of a sequence of steps.

Can work without any change to the rules. And has. But still not fully in its own right.

However, I continue to encourage broader applications. And am currently working with two review agencies in different countries to expand implementation more broadly within the agencies and with those who submit materials to them.

Time will tell.

### **Citations or Resources**

GB website

IAIA website