

CHAPTER 2

MAKING SENSE OF ARGUMENT

For many people, an argument means little more than a “yes it is” versus “no it isn’t” exchange. Consider the “Argument Sketch” from *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*:

A man walks into an office.

Man: Good morning, I’d like to have an argument, please.

Receptionist: Certainly, sir. Have you been here before?

Man: No, this is my first time

Man: Is this the right room for an argument?

Other Man: (pause) I’ve told you once.

Man: No, you haven’t!

Other Man: Yes, I have.

M: When?

O: Just now.

M: No, you didn’t!

O: Yes, I did!

M: You didn’t!

O: I did!

M: You didn’t!

O: I’m telling you, I did!

M: You didn’t!

O: Oh I’m sorry, is this a five-minute argument, or the full half-hour?

M: Ah! (taking out his wallet and paying) Just the five minutes.

O: Just the five minutes. Thank you.

O: Anyway, I did.

M: You most certainly did not!

O: Now let’s get one thing perfectly clear: I most definitely told you!

M: Oh no, you didn’t!

Unless our intention is humor, argument must consist of more than assertion. Argument should be *reason-giving*—it should offer data to support a conclusion. Debaters learn