

# Getting started with argument mapping

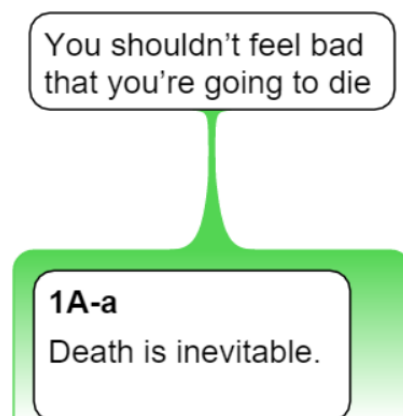
[Adapted from training materials created by Simon Cullen. Adam Elga, September 12, 2017]

## Reasons

Reasons are the basic building blocks of arguments. Reasons aim to raise our confidence in a claim.

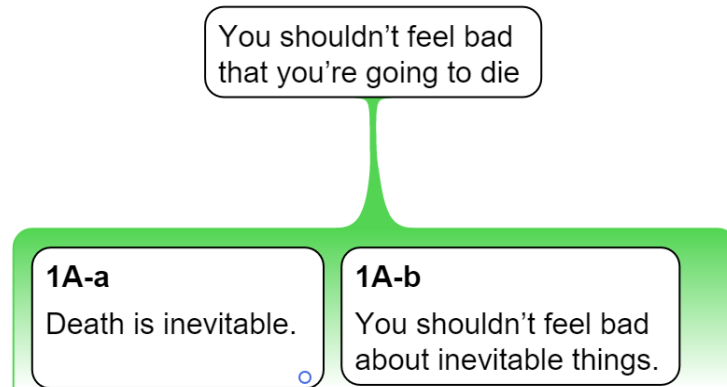
For example, someone might say, "You shouldn't feel bad that you're going to die because death is inevitable." Here, the claim that death is inevitable is provided as a reason to believe the conclusion that you shouldn't feel bad that you will die.

In an argument map, reasons are represented using green boxes:



Notice that if someone said "You shouldn't feel bad that you're going to die because death is inevitable" their argument would be incomplete.

1A-a only supports the conclusion (the claim in the white box at the top of the map) when it is supplemented with another claim, 1A-b:

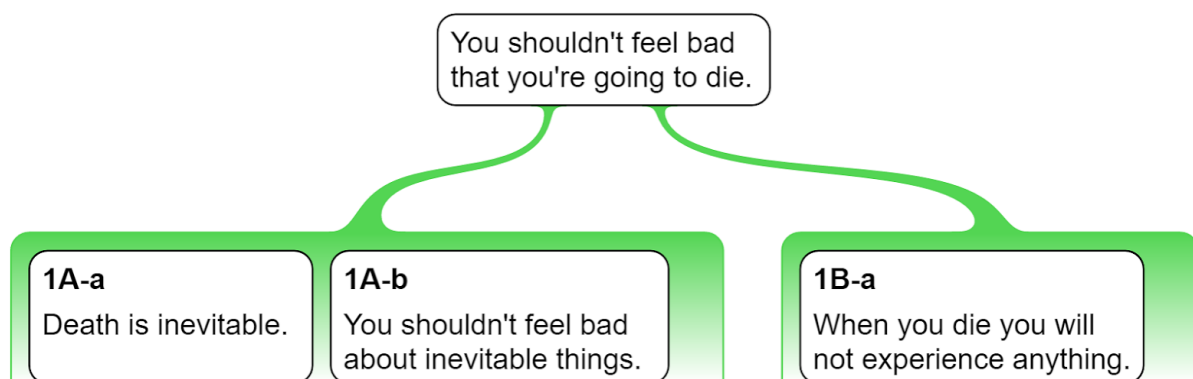


***1A-a and 1A-b are placed in a single green box to show that they only support the conclusion when taken together.***

*Each claim must be plausible for either one to provide support for the conclusion. If you didn't believe 1A-a, you wouldn't think that 1A-b supported the conclusion, and if you didn't believe 1A-b, you wouldn't think that 1A-a supported the conclusion. But if you believed them both, then your confidence in the conclusion would rise.*

## Independent reasons

Argument maps also allow us to represent arguments that contain multiple independent reasons for a claim. Here is an example:



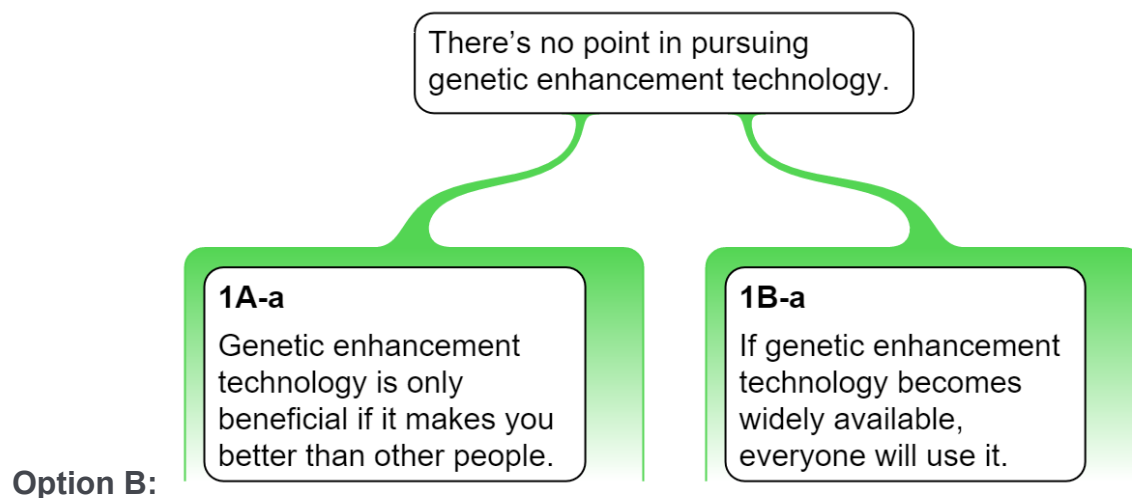
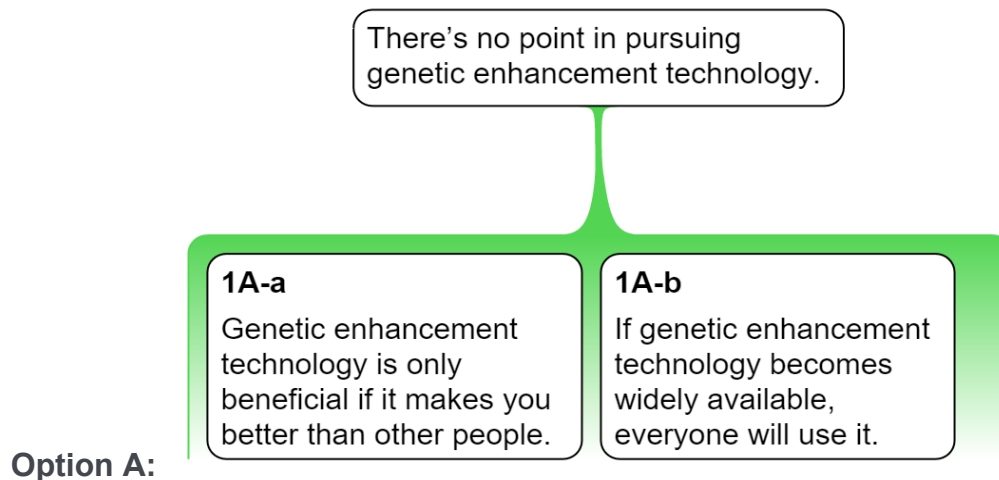
***Notice that 1B-a could support the conclusion regardless of whether 1A-a and 1A-b are true.***

In other words, 1B-a is an independent reason to believe the conclusion, and that is why it is placed in its own green box.

To test your understanding, consider the following argument and answer the question below.

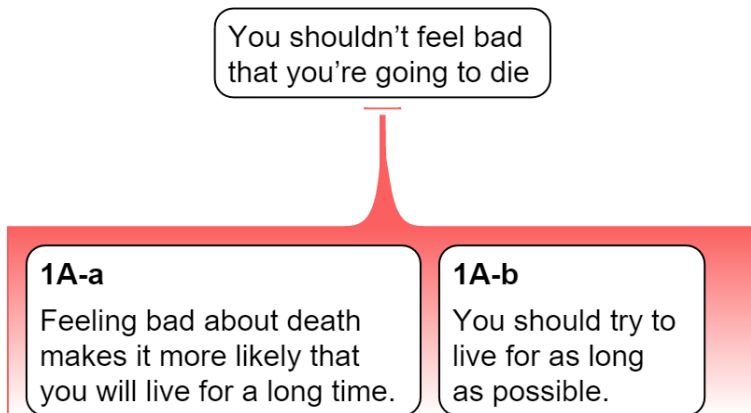
Being genetically enhanced is only beneficial if it makes you better than other people -- for example, if it makes you taller or better looking than average. But if genetic enhancement technology becomes widely available, everyone will use it, so there's no point in pursuing genetic enhancement technology.

Which of the following best represents the argument in the passage above?



# Objections

Objections aim to lower our confidence in a claim. Argument maps use red coloring to represent objections:



Notice that if you became convinced of 1A-a and 1A-b you would become less confident of the conclusion.

Apart from this one difference, objections work in exactly the same way as reasons.

## Unstated Assumptions

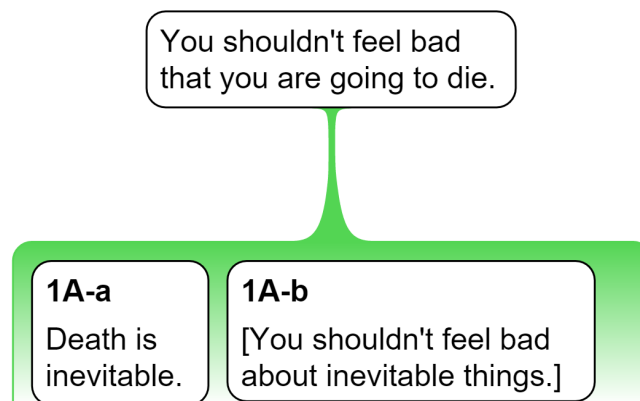
When people present arguments in writing or speech, they rarely state *all* of their claims explicitly. Rather, they tend to leave many of their assumptions unstated. An important part of analyzing arguments is making these unstated assumptions explicit.

You have already seen several examples of this. The very first argument we looked at contained an unstated assumption:

*"You shouldn't feel bad that you're going to die because death is inevitable."*

What is assumed when the claim "death is inevitable" is used to support the claim "You shouldn't feel bad that you are going to die"? The unstated assumption is that you should not feel bad about things that are inevitable.

When we supply the unstated assumptions in an argument map, we mark them by using square brackets:



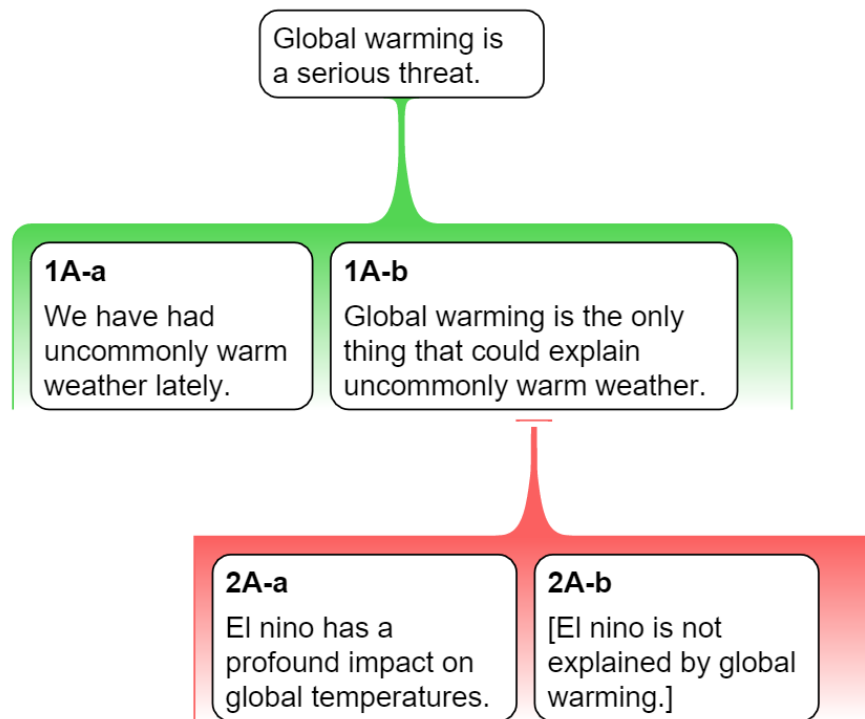
## What goes in the top box?

The **conclusion** of an argument is the claim the argument supports (or opposes) overall. In other words, *all the other claims in the argument somehow support (or oppose) this conclusion, and the argument does not use the conclusion to directly support (or oppose) any other claim.*

This does not mean that the conclusion is always what the author of the passage believes. Sometimes the conclusion is a claim that the author of an argument actually disagrees with (or doesn't take a side on).

Here is a simple example where what goes in the top box is *not* necessarily what the author believes.

*Argument: Some people reason from the fact that we are having an uncommonly warm winter to the conclusion that global warming is not a serious threat. They seem to assume that global warming is the only thing that could explain our current weather, however they are mistaken to do so. El niño can cause warmer winters in our region, and El niño has nothing to do with global warming!*



Does the author believe that global warming is a serious threat? Maybe; maybe not. But the author's purpose is not to take a stand on that. Rather, the author's purpose is to *explain* an argument that global warming is a serious threat, in order to object to it.