

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Distinguishing Between Warranted and Unwarranted Claims

An important part of critical thinking is being able to distinguish between warranted and unwarranted claims. A *claim* is a statement about something that is presented as a fact or as being true. A claim is *warranted*, or justified, if it is based on fact and can be proved true by supporting evidence. A claim is *unwarranted* if it is not based on fact and cannot be proved true.

In order to decide if a claim is warranted or unwarranted, it is important to look for proof. Even if a claim is true, it must be considered unwarranted if no facts are presented to back it up. In each case, the question needs to be asked: What evidence is given to prove the truth of this statement?

For example, read the following claim by Mohandas Gandhi:

Through non-violent means, the Indian people could achieve independence from British rule.

To decide if this is a warranted or unwarranted claim, turn to page 646. After reading this page, you will see that the following points are true:

1. Many Indian people boycotted British goods.
2. Some went on hunger strikes.
3. Many of the Indian people refused to pay taxes.
4. A few Indians refused to support Great Britain during World War II.
5. In 1947, the British finally agreed to Indian independence.

This claim by Gandhi is warranted because India did gain its independence from Great Britain and proof was given of the non-violent means of protest used by the Indian people.

For another example, read the following claim:

Nikita Khrushchev favored the policies set down by Joseph Stalin.

To decide if this is a warranted or unwarranted claim, turn to page 629. After reading this page, you will see that the following points are true:

1. Khrushchev began a program of de-Stalinization.
2. Khrushchev closed many labor camps.
3. The secret police became less violent.
4. Soviet writers and artists were allowed more freedom.
5. Efforts were made to raise the standard of living.

This statement is an unwarranted claim because Khrushchev's program was an attack on the policies set down by Stalin.

For practice in this skill, read the following claim:

Under the South African policy of apartheid, blacks and whites are treated in a separate but equal manner.

To decide if this is a warranted or unwarranted claim, turn to page 650. List evidence to support your decision.