

# Validity and Soundness

## Definition

If an argument is...

... **valid**, this means that it is “formally correct”; i.e. its conclusion follows from its premises.

To test for validity, ask yourself: If I believed all of the author’s premises, would I also have to believe her conclusion?

... **sound**, this means that its conclusion follows from its premises *plus* all those premises are true.

Soundness is the *more demanding* criterion; it presupposes validity: If an argument is *invalid*, it can never be sound. But if an argument is valid, this does not yet guarantee its soundness.

## How Validity and Soundness Are Connected to *Truth*

In philosophy, “valid” and “sound” are terms that apply to whole arguments, not to individual claims like premises and conclusions. The latter are either “true” or “false”. (Therefore, do not write things like “This conclusion is invalid” or “That argument is not true”.)

All of an argument’s premises and its conclusion can be true, and the argument might still be invalid! What you say by claiming “This argument is invalid” is not that the author’s conclusion (or her premises) are false. You simply say that this conclusion does not follow from these particular premises.

## In Criticizing an Argument...

... always be specific as to *how* and *where* you disagree. Do not write things like: “I believe this argument is completely flawed.” Instead, say whether the argument is invalid or unsound, and what part of it is problematic:

- If you think the argument is unsound, say which one of the premises you think is untrue (and why)!
- If you think the argument is invalid, explain why. (You can give a counter-example, for instance.)