Chapter 17

**Linking Evidence to Claims**

In many ways, the most important part of any argument is the claim because it is the element that establishes the arguer’s position. Once the claim is stated, evidence and links become the other essential elements. Evidence was discussed in the previous chapter. The subject of this chapter is links. Sometimes, people use the term *links* synonymously with the term *reasoning.* The view taken in this chapter is that links are an important part, but not the whole of reasoning. A *link* is the process whereby people reason their way from evidence to a claim; therefore, the two concepts are very similar.

The link\(^1\) is sometimes not even stated in the argument. Whether stated or unstated, the link is the reasoning process that connects evidence to claim. Different kinds of links frequently separate arguments into common types. For instance, certain kinds of links regularly appear in “arguments from principle,” while others are used in arguments by “analogy.”\(^2\) Still other links are apparent in “arguments by dissociation.” In each of these cases, as well as others, links more clearly identify the type of argument employed.

Unlike evidence and claims, links are frequently unstated. Because links are so closely associated with patterns of reasoning, audiences will usually understand the link even if it is not explicitly stated. Thus, debaters can take advantage of those familiar patterns and leave the links unstated.

**Chapter Outline**

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1 The original term that Stephen Toulmin used was “warrant.” This text uses the simpler and more direct term, “link.”

2 Links are so central that they sometimes define the nature of the argument itself. Links are described by the phrase “argument by.” Eg. “Argument by generalization,” “argument by analogy,” etc.
This chapter does not discuss all of the kinds of links that debaters have at their disposal, but it does describe several of the more commonly used kinds of links. Links discussed in this chapter represent some very frequently used methods of connecting evidence and claims. Those links are briefly described in the following illustration, and then more completely in the remainder of this chapter.

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td>Authority</td>
<td>Support a claim by associating that claim with the opinion of experts in the field.</td>
<td>Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has announced repeatedly that millions in Africa are dying of AIDS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Create an association between particular examples and a more general rule.</td>
<td>I have three debaters who are failing my class, so I am beginning to question how serious debaters are about their classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>Create associations between things that are similar or dissimilar. This kind of link is used to create or criticize claims of similarity.</td>
<td>China’s economic power in the twenty-first century will be like America’s in the twentieth century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causal links</td>
<td>Create associations between causes and effects. This kind of link is used to create claims of causal association.</td>
<td>Smoking leads to heart disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>Connect a particular situation to a general principle.</td>
<td>Capital punishment is always unjust because it violates the principle of the right to life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility</td>
<td>Evaluate one thing as incompatible with something else.</td>
<td>Persons who oppose abortion by arguing that taking a life is immoral are logically bound to oppose capital punishment as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>Create new categories by dividing an old category into two new ones.</td>
<td>Opposition to abortion is not a matter of a “right to life.” It’s a matter of a right to human life.</td>
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**Argument By Authority**

An authoritative link is used to create a positive association between an arguer’s claim and the statement of some authority. But what exactly is “an authority?” People who have
engaged in certain positive acts become “authorities,” and their words carry more weight than those of persons who are not authorities. For example, persons who have earned advanced degrees in nuclear physics are considered authorities in that subject, and audiences tend to accept, without further argument, what they say regarding nuclear physics. A person with a degree in French literature would not be accepted as an authority on nuclear physics.

To assess the adequacy of an authoritative link, debaters should ask at least three questions about the particular source used to support the claim:

1. **Is the person an expert?** Many qualities identify people as experts, but usually, experts hold advanced degrees or have particular experiences that give them access to information beyond that which is available to the general public.

2. **Is the person an expert in a field relevant to the claim?** Even if a person is a well-recognized expert, his or her expertise might not be in an area relevant to the argument. A person trained in nuclear physics may be a qualified source about nuclear energy but is not likely to be qualified to talk about international relations.

3. **Is the person trustworthy?** Even if a person is an expert in a relevant field, that person may not be trustworthy. Trustworthiness is related to a person’s ability to make relatively unbiased conclusions. As an authority, a person may lack trustworthiness because of either a lack of honesty or an unwillingness to change his or her pre-formed opinions. For example, in the statement by the former director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, to U.S. President, George W. Bush, Tenet told Bush that the prospects of finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq would be a “slam dunk” (*Toronto Star* and *Washington Post*). Tenet’s prediction proved to be false. Some believe that Tenet was being dishonest; some believe he was simply unable to get past his previous beliefs about Iraq and weapons of mass destruction.

Authoritative links are used to connect experts’ statements directly to the claim that a debater wishes to make. Debaters need to make sure to only use authoritative links to support appropriate kinds of claims, and to ensure that the authority is an expert in the particular field under consideration, and is trustworthy.

**Argument By Generalization**

An argument by generalization can be used to describe an entire group by presenting evidence from specific cases selected from within that group. Such an argument almost always relies on examples as evidence (discussed in the previous chapter). Generalization is based on the probability that examples selected from a group are likely to exhibit many of the same features of the group as a whole. In other words, by examining a representative sample

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3 The reference to “slam dunk” comes from the sport of basketball. When a player is left virtually alone on the court with the ball, the player may forcefully “dunk” the ball into the basket, hence, “slam dunk.”
of a group, one is able to make a statement about the group as a whole. The assumption is
that characteristics observed in the group probably belong to not only the sample, but also to
the group as a whole.

Thus, an argument by generalization moves from evidence about specific examples to a
claim regarding the group as a whole. For instance, a debater wanting to argue that student
athletes will become successful business people should begin by examining examples of
students who were athletes in school and who later became successful in business. To
construct such an argument, the debater would describe several representative examples of
student athletes, then would show how each of them turned out to be successful in business.
The point of the argument is not to merely describe the members of the group—the examples
of student athletes—but to argue that the entire population of student athletes (or at least a
substantial portion of them) shares the characteristic of becoming successful business people.
Thus, the argument is designed to link examples chosen from a sample group of student
athletes to the entire population of student athletes.

The above example illustrates a descriptive claim, the most common type of claim supported
by argument by generalization. The argument only shows that they become successful
business people. It does not explicitly state that being a successful businessperson is good or
bad. This description however, like most descriptions, has evaluative dimensions. If one
believes that successful business people are fundamentally unhappy, the argument could be
used to argue that participation in athletics is a bad idea. If, on the other hand, one believes
that becoming a successful businessperson is valuable—because it provides a good income,
stability for a family, etc.—then this argument can be used to argue that participation in
student athletic programs is valuable. Probably, most people believe that success in business
is valuable, but the point is that, although the argument is explicitly and primarily
descriptive, it contains implicit evaluative dimensions, as well.

Some arguments using generalization links are better than others. The adequacy of a
generalization link is based on at least two assumptions: (1) that a sufficient number of
examples are presented as evidence, and (2) that the examples are representative of the entire
group. For example, to argue that student athletes become successful business people by
pointing to only a couple of examples would not be sufficient as a generalization. In that
particular case, two examples are not sufficient to allow the debater to make a statement
about student athletes in general. The second question to be asked about the adequacy of a
generalization link is whether the examples are representative of the group as a whole. If the
examples of student athletes came, for instance, from a single university, one might not be
able to argue that they are representative of the entire population of student athletes. More
will be said about the adequacy of this and other kinds of links in Chapter 21, “Fallacies in
Argumentation.”

Argument by generalization functions because several examples drawn from a group are
linked to the overall group. This link allows debaters to create descriptive arguments. Other
kinds of links can also be used to create descriptive and other kinds of arguments.
Argument By Analogy

In an argument by generalization, a claim about a group is based on information about selected members of that group. The link created by analogy is different. Analogy, based on an association of similarity, occurs when the arguer makes a claim about one member of a group based on the features of some other member. As a generalization link moves from specific cases to a generality, a link by an analogy moves from one specific case to another.

Two subtly different kinds of analogy will be discussed in this chapter. Using the first kind, the debater argues that one example is similar to another; in the second kind, the debater argues that two examples are so similar in known regards that they should be expected to also be similar in unknown regards.

With regard to the first kind of analogy, a debater might simply want to establish the similarity between two examples. For instance, consider the claim that “Life in 21st century China will be like life in 20th century United States.” That argument makes a statement about 21st century China based on the similarities between it and life in the United States in the 20th century. To make such an argument, an arguer needs to describe some features of life in 20th century United States, then show that those features are likely to be present in 21st century China. The similarities of the features of those two examples then allow the arguer to make the general claim that, “Life in 21st century China will be like life in 20th century U.S.”

The conclusion of that analogy is a general one about similarities between the United States and China. That type of analogy might be used for evaluative purposes. If life in 20th century U.S. was good, life in 21st century China might be expected to also be good. So, in a general way, something we know about the first example (life is good in 20th century U.S.) predicts something we do not know about the second (life will be good in 21st Century China). However, that prediction is only implied and is not an explicit part of the analogy. The prediction becomes explicit in the second kind of analogy.

In the second kind of analogy, a debater might want to argue that two examples are so similar in known regards that they are also expected to be similar in unknown regards. That kind of argument by analogy also uses two parallel cases. The cases are said to be parallel because they both contain known similar features. However, the first case contains a known feature that is unknown in the second case. This argument by analogy infers that the features known in the first case and unknown in the second probably are present in both cases.

Using the earlier example of China and the U.S, the arguer might focus on similarities between the two parallel cases, China and the U.S. The arguer might suggest that those two cases are similar in two known regards: the presence of strong economic power and increasing numbers of women in the workplace. Based on the presence of those two known similarities, the arguer then might infer that a known feature of the first case, e.g., a general lowering of the rate of unemployment, will also be present in the second case. Thus, the claim made in that argument could be that 21st century China will witness a general lowering of the rate of unemployment. The analogy allows the debater to infer that something known in the first case is present, although unknown, in the second case.
In many instances, an argument by analogy supports a descriptive argument. Consider again the general analogy that 21st century China will be like 20th century U.S. A precise reading of that claim suggests that it merely describes, without evaluating, life in 20th century U.S. and 21st century China. However, this and most analogies are at least implicitly evaluative because the audience evaluates the first case (here, life in 20th century U.S) in a particular way and, therefore, will likely come to evaluate the second case (here, life in 21st century China) in the same way. Depending on the audience, people may have either a negative or positive association with 20th century U.S. They may see the U.S. as an arrogant superpower and a terrible polluter, or, on the positive side, may see the U.S. as an economic powerhouse and an advocate for human rights. So, depending on whether the audience sees 20th century U.S. as positive or negative, the argument by analogy will lead them to evaluate 21st century China in the same positive or negative way. Thus, an analogy has the function of transferring the positive or negative evaluation of the 20th century U.S. to 21st century China.

A precise reading of the second example’s claim that “21st century China will witness a general lowering of the rate of unemployment” also indicates that this is a descriptive claim. A more insightful reading, however, suggests that the claim is also evaluative given the assumption that most audiences perceive lowering the rate of unemployment as a positive thing. Thus, a more subtle reading of this claim indicates that it is evaluative as well as descriptive.

**Argument by Causality**

Causal links, as the name implies, are used to construct arguments of cause and effect. Constructing an argument about cause and effect is especially difficult because causes cannot be observed; we can only infer them. Over the years, people have developed a variety of ways to infer cause and effect relationships. Four of those ways include absence and presence, change over time, correlation, and controlled empirical studies.

One common ways to support a cause and effect relationship involves comparing the absence and presence of possible causes and effects to find potential relationships between the two. Using the idea of presence, a person might first notice the simultaneous presence of a suspected cause and suspected effect. Observers might notice that the U.S., a country in which citizens own a large number of guns, has a large number of murders—about 160,000 murders per year in a population of 300 million (Daniel Harris). Thus, the simultaneous presence of a suspected cause (a large number of citizen-owned guns) and a suspected effect (a high murder rate) might lead an arguer to suggest that the number of guns contributes to the high murder rate. But the simultaneous presence of cause and effect does not provide particularly good evidence of a cause and effect relationship. Someone might point to other factors in the U.S. that could be the real cause of the high incidence of murder—factors such as racial strife or inadequate numbers of police in some major cities. In other words, alternative factors unrelated to the suspected cause (citizen-owned guns) might be the actual cause of the effect (high murder rate).
In order to argue that alternative factors such as those mentioned above are not the real cause, the arguer must look not only to the simultaneous presence of the suspected cause and effect, but to simultaneous absence, as well. In the above example, the arguer might look for an instance where the suspected cause (citizen-owned guns) is absent, pointing perhaps to the case of China where citizen-owned guns are illegal. The question then becomes whether the suspected effect (a high incidence of murder) is or is not present in China. The arguer could then point to the fact that the likelihood of being murdered in the U.S. is four times higher than the chance of being murdered in China (Daniel Harris). Therefore, the arguer could conclude that because both the suspected cause (citizen-owned guns) and the suspected effect (high rate of murder) are absent in China, citizen gun ownership contributes to the high rate of murder in the U.S.

So, one method of supporting a causal relationship is to use the simultaneous presence and absence of the cause and effect. By itself, the simultaneous presence of a suspected cause and effect does not provide particularly strong evidence of a causal relationship. However, the added evidence of the simultaneous absence of the suspected causes and effects makes much better evidence for a cause and effect relationship.

A second way of arguing for a cause and effect relationship is change over time. When someone argues that one thing causes another, he or she frequently does so by observing that some change in the first thing is accompanied by a corresponding change in the second. The person is able to observe the changes in both, and, on the basis of those changes, can infer that the change in the first thing caused the change in the second. For instance, a man who changes from a high fat to a low fat diet and loses five kilos in a month might lead to his inference that reducing the fat content in his diet caused his weight loss. Two things were observed: a change in diet and a loss of weight. From those observations, the arguer inferred that the changes in diet caused weight loss.

A third way to make inferences about cause and effect relationships is to examine correlation. To use the method of correlation to infer a cause and effect relationship, an arguer can point to the fact that the incidence of a suspected cause and its suspected effect rise and fall in relationship to one another. For instance, the arguer will suggest that as the frequency of a suspected cause increases, the frequency of the suspected effect also increases. Of course, many are quick to state that correlation and causation are not the same things. Although correlation is not causation, correlation is one test of a causal relationship. If two events are not correlated, then any inference that they are causally related to one another would be wrong. So, using the method of correlation, a debater might argue that smoking is one of the causes of lung cancer because, as the incidence of smoking increases within a society, the incidence of lung cancer increases, as well. Such a correlation provides evidence, although not perfect evidence, that smoking causes lung cancer. Correlation by itself may not be sufficient to prove a causal relationship, because correlation does not rule out other potential causes (such as living in a polluted area, being genetically disposed to lung cancer, etc.). Still, correlation is method to make at least an initial inference regarding a causal relationship.
A fourth method of supporting a cause and effect relationship involves controlled empirical studies. As stated earlier, correlation and simultaneous presence of suspected causes and effects are imperfect methods of inferring causal relationships. Sometimes, scholars are able to design controlled empirical studies that help to offset those imperfections. For instance, an empirical study might examine the relationship between smoking and lung cancer while controlling for the effects of other possible causes (such as pollution, genetics, etc.) and might discover that, even considering the potential effects of those alternative causes, the causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer still is substantial.

Debaters frequently use argument by causality to judge actions based on their consequences. A debater first uses causal links to convince the audience that a particular action will cause certain consequences. In that case, the argument is that an action (smoking) leads to a consequence (lung cancer). Then, the debater can argue that an action that has good consequences is justified while one that has bad consequences is not. Thus, in the smoking example, the debater maintains, either implicitly or explicitly, that society has an obligation to stop people from smoking to reduce the negative consequences of that action.

We must consider a variety of factors when judging the adequacy of this argument. As causes are inferred but not directly observed, they are difficult to prove and, even in the best of circumstances, cannot be proven completely.

**Argument By Principle**

Creating a link from a principle to a claim is a useful technique for supporting an argument of evaluation—especially in cases where debaters must justify a particular action. Whereas, the argument by causality is used to judge an action based on its consequences, the argument by principle, as its name implies, judges an action based on the principles involved. A simple comparison might clarify the distinction between consequences and principles. For instance, why is cheating on a college examination a bad idea? An argument based on consequences might suggest that cheating is a bad idea because students who are caught risk being expelled from school. An argument from principle might say you should not cheat because cheating goes against the important principle of honesty. Debaters using argument from principle ordinarily claim that principles are more important than consequences, and that, when consequences and principles point in opposite directions, people should follow the principles.

An argument from principle ordinarily has three parts. First, the debater must select a principle. Second, the debater should argue for the importance of that principle. Third, the debater should apply the action being contemplated to the principle. One action sometimes justified on principle is the abolition of capital punishment (the death penalty). That example can be used to explain the three parts of an argument by principle.

In the case of capital punishment, the debater might, for instance, select the sanctity of human life as the appropriate principle. Having selected that principle, she or he would then turn to a consideration of the importance of that principle, perhaps suggesting that we should never violate the sanctity of human life because life is the essence of human existence.
Without life, the very essence of humanity is gone. Having selected the principle and shown why it is important, the debater would then apply the action to the principle showing how capital punishment quite obviously violates the sanctity of human life because it involves the intentional taking of a human life.

One of the difficulties with the previous example is that many people do not accept the principle of the sanctity of human life in all situations. For instance, most societies are willing to set aside that principle in matters of self-, family-, or societal-defense. In other words, most societies agree that the taking of a human life in self-defense, in defense of one’s family, or in defense of one’s nation is justified. As a result, some debaters might revise the argument slightly by modifying the selected principle and, as a result, the rest of the argument. That modified argument would, of course, need to argue that capital punishment is not needed in matters of self-, family-, or societal-defense.

The adequacy of an argument from principle depends on several assumptions. First, the argument presumes that the articulated principle is sound, in general, or at least in the context in which it is being applied. Frequently, persons who use an argument by principle claim that the principle applies universally. For example, some claim that the sanctity of human life is absolute and universal—that no cases exist in which the intentional taking of human life is justified. In other cases, arguers might define a specific context in which the principle is applicable. A debater might be unwilling to defend the sanctity of life as an absolute and universal principle, and might acknowledge certain instances where the principle should be set aside. The debater might, therefore, refine the principle by arguing that the sanctity of life should apply in situations that do not involve self-defense or defense of one’s family or community.

A second assumption of the argument from principle is that the action being defended applies unambiguously to the principle. A debater would have little difficulty demonstrating that capital punishment clearly applies to the principle of sanctity of human life, because capital punishment obviously ends a human life; however, the debater would have to construct a more elaborate argument to show that capital punishment applies to the principle against taking a life except in self-defense. In that case, the debater would need to argue that capital punishment is not necessary for a society to defend itself against potential murderers. The debater could argue that capital punishment is not necessary for self-defense for a variety of reasons, for instance, that life imprisonment without parole, instead of capital punishment, is a sufficient means of societal self-defense. Whether the principle involves the sanctity of human life in general, or the sanctity of human life except in cases of self-defense, the debater would need to establish that capital punishment is unequivocally related to the principle.

**Argument By Incompatibility**

Incompatibility is a kind of argument used to refute an opponent’s argument and, by implication, support the debater’s own. Using this kind of argument, a debater can attempt to show that an opponent holds incompatible views on a particular issue and that, as a result,
one of those views must be discarded. For instance, a debater using that argument might argue, “How can my opponent be a supporter of human rights and still support the U.S. war in Iraq?” The assumption is that the U.S. war in Iraq was incompatible with human rights, and, thus, a person cannot logically support both human rights and the U.S. war in Iraq simultaneously, and that, as a result, the opponent cannot logically support the war.

The argument from incompatibility has its foundation in principles of both logic and physics. A principle of physics maintains that two objects cannot be in the same place at the same time. Analytic philosophers hold to a precept that they call the “principle of non-contradiction.” That principle states that an object cannot simultaneously be and not be X. Those two principles are similar to an argument by incompatibility, but are not the same. Although two objects cannot be in the same place at the same time, an arguer can, even logically, hold two positions that seem incompatible. The difference is that the properties of the physical world are not amenable to change by interpretation. A person cannot “interpret” the physical world such that that person and an oncoming train would be able to occupy the same space at the same time. However, an arguer may be able to interpret the “U.S. war in Iraq” and “human rights” in such a way that they are not incompatible.

The argument by incompatibility can function in a variety of ways. First, an argument by incompatibility can allow a debater to argue that, “views held by my opponent are different from views held by the my opponent in a different time or place.” Such a suggestion, if supported, allows a debater to cast doubt on the current argument of the opponent. If a debater makes arguments at one time or place that are opposite to arguments that he or she made in another time or place, that debater may lose a great deal of credibility and his or her arguments may become more suspect. Second, an argument of incompatibility can help a debater argue that, “The views of my opponent are incompatible with some accepted fact.” If a debater makes a statement that is incompatible with accepted facts, that statement arguably cannot be trusted. Third, an argument by incompatibility allows a debater to argue that the opponent’s views are incompatible with accepted values: “Refusal to act in this particular situation is incompatible with our values.” If principles or values demand a certain course of action, but society is not moving toward that action, an argument by incompatibility can suggest a change in action or policy.

Argument by incompatibility is an interesting way to make arguments of value—especially in debates where the opposing debaters are expected to state their own positions. Because most people have come to believe consistency is important, incompatibility links can be very persuasive. The next category of arguments is sometimes used in reaction to arguments of incompatibility.

**Argument By Dissociation**

Most of the previous kinds of arguments discussed operate by linking various concepts with one another. The causal argument associates cause and effect, argument by example associates several examples with one another, and argument by authority associates persons and acts. The last type of argument is different because it takes as its starting point a unified
concept and divides it into two different concepts using a process called dissociation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, pp. 411 - 459).

The process of dissociation starts with a concept that the audience is assumed to value, and then divides that concept into two new concepts, one which is valued and one which is not. Then, the arguer shows how valuing one of the new concepts and opposing the other can avoid the incompatibility. In this manner, the argument by dissociation is a means to argue against an argument of incompatibility.

At one point in the history of many cultures, a concept of the place of a woman was valued and agreed upon. In those cultures, the “place” of a woman was in the home, supporting her husband and her children. Any woman who stepped outside of that place was not valued. However, the notion of a “woman’s place” has changed. Many cultures now are coming to think that the real place of a woman is much larger than simply in the home. So, the place of a woman has been dissociated into two concepts: a woman’s traditional place and a woman’s real place, which might more appropriately be called “women’s roles in society.” That dissociation is developed by repeated argument about the place of women until the “place of women” that was once a unified concept is now divided into two concepts; the traditional place of women and the real roles for women in society. So, imagine an advocate’s response when someone accuses him or her of not respecting that a “woman’s place is in the home.” The advocate might argue by dissociation that “I do not restrict a ‘woman’s place’ to the traditional notion of supporting a home, husband, and children. In reality, the role of women in society is much broader, including not only in the home, but in other things like careers, service to society, government service, etc.” By dissociating the concept of a “woman’s place” into the dual concepts of a “woman’s traditional place” from a “woman’s real” role in society,” the advocate is able to answer the incompatibility.

Summary

This chapter has described a variety of methods of linking evidence to claims. One purpose is to catalogue various methods that debaters can use to draw such links. Another purpose is to encourage the debater to think about ways that certain kinds of evidence can be used in conjunction with certain kinds of links in order to support certain kinds of claims. In all cases, care needs to be taken to make sure that links are clear and adequately drawn.
Terms and Concepts From Chapter 17

- Authority
- Generalization
- Analogy
- Causal links
- Principle
- Incompatibility
- Dissociation

Discussions Questions For Chapter 17

- What are some criteria for determining whether or not a person is an authority who is adequate to use as evidence?
- What are some criteria for determining the adequacy of an argument using generalization?
- How can an analogy be used to support an argument of evaluation?
- What are four methods of supporting a causal association?
- What is the difference in using an argument by principle instead of an argument by consequence?
- How might a debater go about supporting an argument by principle?
- Why is an incompatibility a potential reason to evaluate an action in a positive or negative fashion?
- How can dissociation be used to resolve an incompatibility?

Exercise For Chapter 17

Starting with some claim discussed in Chapter 15 or some other claim you find interesting, support that claim using at least three different kinds of links.