Presenting Arguments in Standard Form

One of the chief goals of a logic class is to evaluate the quality of reasoning. Since we strive (or ought to strive) to base our beliefs and actions on high-quality reasoning, we must first learn how to discern the difference between good reasoning and bad reasoning.

We express reasoning in the form of *arguments*. An argument is a series of statements, called *premises*, that are given in support of the truth of another statement, called the *conclusion*. Here is an example, expressed in *standard form* (with the premises listed above the conclusion):

P1: Being a surgeon would pay better but would allow less time with my family.

P2: Being a family practice doctor would fulfill me more at a personal level.

P3: Being fulfilled personally and spending more time with my family are higher priorities to me than making more money.

C: Therefore, I will choose to go into family practice.

Putting arguments into this form promotes clarity and facilitates evaluation. It also is important because of what it leaves out: We are not distracted by emotion, relationships, etc. We just have the pure argument, making it much easier to evaluate its quality objectively.