



House and Holmes: A Guide to Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

Teacher Handout 1: **Guide to the Courtroom Scene from *A Few Good Men***

Breakdown of the Argument

1. COL Jessup ordered LT Kendrick to order the men in Santiago's platoon not to touch PVT Santiago.
2. If the men in Santiago's platoon follow COL Jessup's order, then PVT Santiago is not in danger.
3. If COL Jessup believes that the men in Santiago's platoon will follow COL Jessup's order, then he believes that PVT Santiago is not in danger.
4. COL Jessup believes that his orders are always followed.
5. Therefore COL Jessup believes that PVT Santiago is not in danger.
6. Marines sometimes use a Code Red to take disciplinary matters into their own hands.
7. If the Marines use a Code Red on PVT Santiago, then PVT Santiago is in danger.
8. If COL Jessup believes that the Marines will use a Code Red on PVT Santiago, then he believes that PVT Santiago is in danger.
9. COL Jessup believes that the Marines will use a Code Red on PVT Santiago.
10. Therefore COL Jessup believes that PVT Santiago is in danger.
11. COL Jessup believes that PVT Santiago both is and is not in danger.
12. Therefore COL Jessup is lying.

The famous courtroom scene from *A Few Good Men* is an excellent example of deductive reasoning. LT Caffey hangs COL Jessup on the horns of a dilemma, to use the colorful phrase medieval philosophers coined. Caffey in effect presents Jessup with two options, neither of which the COL can really take. Either Jessup admits that his orders are not always followed (something the arrogant Jessup will never do) or Jessup admits that Santiago was not really in danger (an option that exposes Jessup to perjury charges).

There are actually two separate lines of argument here, each deductive. The two arguments reach contradictory conclusions. Any time a set of arguments generates a contradiction, we know that something must have gone wrong somewhere. In this case, the problem is that Jessup is lying.