5.10: The Focus of this Chapter

This chapter focuses on the process critical thinkers use to discover what contentions or arguments they will present in order to persuade an audience to grant adherence to the position they are advocating. One of the key skills needed by the critical thinker is the ability to ask quality questions of the claim being argued.

- **In an argument, the questions we ask are known as “Issues.”**
- **Issues are single, specific, unbiased questions** whose answer allows us to make a decision on the claim.
- **There are different types of issues for different types of claims.**
- **An answer to your issue is known as a contention.**
- **In an argument, you do not directly prove your claim.** Instead you prove your contentions. By proving your contentions, you prove your claim.
- **An organized set of contentions is known as a “Case.”** There are a variety of ways a case can be organized from “Problem Solution” to “Needs.”

Building the structure of your case is the first step in creating an argument that can persuade others. In the next chapter we look at Evidence and how it is used to support that argument. Without evidence, we are just making assertions. There is an old 19th century Latin phrase that says, “*Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur*” which is translated as “*what is freely asserted is freely dismissed.*” Building on this a journalist named Christopher Hitchens wrote what is now known as Hitchens’s Razor, which as we see below, again emphasizes the burden of proof.
Any amateur can find the answer to a question.

It is the expert who knows what questions to ask.