

# Exercises for Better Philosophical Writing: Assessing Validity

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On Friday, February 7, 2014, a rainbow-coloured Pride flag was raised at Toronto City Hall in solidarity with the LGBTQ community in Russia during the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. Mayor Rob Ford immediately objected to the gesture, demanding that city officials remove the flag. On February 18, in response to mounting accusations that he was “homophobic”, Mayor Ford offered the following explanation of his actions on YouTube:

“This is about the Olympics, this is about supporting our athletes, this is not about your sexual preference. I support our athletes, I support the people that train four years to go to Sochi and Russia, and there’s no reason that I see we should be putting up the Pride flag during the Olympics. This is about being patriotic to our country.”

Reconstruct the argument implicit in Mayor Ford’s remark. Ask yourself: What is the *conclusion* he is arguing for? What *premisses* does he explicitly invoke to reach this conclusion? What other premisses may be *implicit* or *unstated* in his reasoning? Is the argument he offers a *valid* argument? Is it, moreover, *sound*? Why or why not?

Do not concern yourself with finding faults or criticisms with the premisses or the conclusion of Mayor Ford’s argument. Your task is merely to work out what his argument *is*, and to decide whether this argument is valid and sound.

Because the excerpt itself is not rigorously articulated, there are many possible answers to this question, and your aim should be to provide the most *charitable* interpretation available. If you cannot extract a sound argument from the excerpt, see if you can’t at least extract a valid argument with one or more false premisses. If you cannot do that, see if you can’t at least extract an invalid argument with all true premisses.