

Toulmin Model of Argument

“Toulmin Model.” Ethics and Persuasion, 2009.

commfaculty.fullerton.edu/rgass/toulmin2.htm.

Stephen Toulmin, originally a British logician, became frustrated with the inability of formal logic to explain everyday arguments, which prompted him to develop his own model of practical reasoning.

The **first triad** of his model consists of three basic elements: the **claim**, **ground**, and **warrant**.



A **claim** is the point an arguer is trying to make. The claim is the proposition or assertion an arguer wants another to accept.

The claim answers the question "So, what is your point?"

Example: "You should send a birthday card to Mimi, because she sent you one on your birthday."

Example: "I drove last time, so this time it is your turn to drive."

There are three basic types of claims:

Fact: claims which focus on empirically verifiable phenomena; a claim that is simply a fact is not appropriate as a thesis for an English essay or research paper;

Judgment/value: claims involving opinions, attitudes, and subjective evaluations of things; a subjective, personal values-based claim is generally not appropriate as a thesis for an English essay or research paper;

Policy: claims advocating courses of action that should be undertaken; this is the type of claim that is an appropriate thesis for an English essay or research paper.

The term "**grounds**" refers to the proof or evidence an arguer offers. Grounds answers the questions, "What is your proof?" or "How come?" or "Why?"

Grounds can consist of statistics, quotations, reports, findings, physical evidence, or various forms of reasoning.

Example: "It looks like rain. The barometer is falling."

Example: "The other Howard Johnson's restaurants I've been in had clean restrooms, so I'll bet this one has clean restrooms, too."

Grounds can be based on the following:

evidence: facts, statistics, reports, or physical proof,

source credibility: authorities, experts, celebrity endorsers, a close friend, or someone's say-so

analysis and reasoning: reasons may be offered as proof

The **warrant** is the inferential leap that connects the claim with the grounds.

The warrant is typically implicit (unstated) and requires the listener to recognize the underlying reasoning that makes sense of the claim in light of the grounds.

The warrant performs a "linking" function by establishing a mental connection between the grounds and the claim.

Example: "Muffin is running a temperature. I'll bet she has an infection." **warrant: sign reasoning; a fever is a reliable sign of an infection.**

Example: "That dog is probably friendly. It is a Golden Retriever." **warrant: generalization; most or all Golden Retrievers are friendly.**

Warrants can be based on the following:

Ethos: source credibility, authority

Logos: reason-giving, induction, deduction

Pathos: emotional or motivational appeals

Shared values: free speech, right to know, fairness, etc.

Note: these categories aren't mutually exclusive; there is considerable overlap.

The **second triad** of the Toulmin model involves three additional elements:

Backing provides additional justification for the warrant.

Backing usually consists of evidence to support the type of reasoning employed by the warrant.

The **qualifier** states the degree of force or probability to be attached to the claim.

The qualifier states how sure the arguer is about his/her claim

The **rebuttal** acknowledges exceptions or limitations to the argument.

The rebuttal admits to those circumstances or situations where the argument would not hold.

The **Toulmin Model** asserts that most arguments consist of these six parts. We can also identify three other important parts of an argument:

Assumptions

Counter-examples

Implications

Counter-arguments

The Toulmin Model

1. *Claim*: the position or claim being argued for; the conclusion of the argument.
2. *Grounds*: reasons or supporting evidence that bolster the claim.
3. *Warrant*: the principle, provision or chain of reasoning that connects the grounds/reason to the claim.
4. *Backing*: support, justification, reasons to back up the warrant.
5. *Rebuttal/Reservation*: exceptions to the claim; description and rebuttal of counter-examples and counter-arguments.
6. *Qualification*: specification of limits to claim, warrant and backing. The degree of conditionality asserted.

Warrants/General Strategies of Argument

Warrants are chains of reasoning that connect the claim and evidence/reason. A warrant is the principle, provision or chain of reasoning that connects the grounds/reason to the claim. Warrants operate at a higher level of generality than a claim or reason, and they are not normally explicit.

Example: “Needle exchange programs should be abolished [**claim**] because they only cause more people to use drugs.” [**reason**]

The unstated warrant is: “when you make risky behavior safer you encourage more people to engage in it.”

There are six main argumentative strategies via which the relationship between evidence and claim are often established. They have the acronym “GASCAP.”

- Generalization
- Analogy
- Sign
- Causality
- Authority
- Principle

These strategies are used at various different levels of generality within an argument, and rarely come in neat packages - typically they are interconnected and work in combination.

Common Warrants

1. *Argument based on Generalization*

A very common form of reasoning. It assumes that what is true of a well-chosen sample is likely to hold for a larger group or population, or that certain things consistent with the sample can be inferred of the group/population.

2. *Argument based on Analogy*

Extrapolating from one situation or event based on the nature and outcome of a similar situation or event. Has links to "case-based" and precedent-based reasoning used in legal discourse. What is important here is the extent to which relevant similarities can be established between two contexts. Are there sufficient, typical, accurate, relevant similarities?

3. *Argument via Sign/Clue*

The notion that certain types of evidence are symptomatic of some wider principle or outcome. For example, smoke is often considered a sign for fire. Some people think high SAT scores are a sign a person is smart and will do well in college.

4. *Causal Argument*

Arguing that a given occurrence or event is the result of, or is effected by, factor X. Causal reasoning is the most complex of the different forms of warrant. The big dangers with it are:

1. Mixing up correlation with causation
2. Falling into the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* trap. Closely related to confusing correlation and causation, this involves inferring 'after the fact, therefore because of the fact').

5. *Argument from Authority*

Does person X or text X constitute an authoritative source on the issue in question? What political, ideological or economic interests does the authority have? Is this the sort of issue in which a significant number of authorities are likely to agree on?

6. *Argument from Principle*

Locating a principle that is widely regarded as valid and showing that a situation exists in which this principle applies. Evaluation: Is the principle widely accepted? Does it accurately apply to the situation in question? Are there commonly agreed on exceptions? Are there "rival" principles that lead to a different claim? Are the practical consequences of following the principle sufficiently desirable?

Rebuttals and Main/Faulty/Return Paths

Unlike many forms of writing, academic arguments will often include discussions of possible objections and counterarguments to the position being advanced. Academic arguments typically take place in disciplinary communities in which a variety of competing or divergent positions exist. When preparing to “speak” to the community by writing an argument, writers are aware of the arguments against which they must build their claims, and of the counterarguments which are likely to emerge. Dealing with counterarguments and objections is thus a key part of the process of building arguments, refining them, interpreting and analyzing them. There are several main reasons for introducing counterarguments and objections.

1. It demonstrates that the author is aware of opposing views, and is not trying to "sweep them under the table." It thus is more likely to make the writer's argument seem "balanced" or "fair" to readers, and as a consequence be persuasive.
2. It shows that the writer is thinking carefully about the responses of readers, anticipating the objections that many readers may have. Introducing the reader to some of the positions opposed to your own, and showing how you can deal with possible objections can thus work to "inoculate" the reader against counterarguments.
3. By contrasting one's position with the arguments or alternative hypotheses one is against, one clarifies the position that is being argued for.

When dealing with objections or counterarguments, authors tend to take one of three approaches.

1. **Strategic concession:** acknowledgment of some of the merits of a different view. In some cases, this may mean accepting or incorporating some components of an authors' argument, while rejecting other parts of it.
2. **Refutation:** this involves being able to show important weaknesses and shortcomings in an opponent's position that demonstrate that his/her argument ought to be rejected.
3. **Demonstration of irrelevance:** showing that the issue in question is to be understood such that opposing views, while perhaps valid in certain respects, do not in fact meet the criteria of relevance that you believe define the issue.

How well authors produce rebuttals and deal with counter-arguments is an important part of how we evaluate the success of an argument.

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