

The Toulmin Model

A tool for diagramming
“informal” arguments

Stephen Toulmin



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

The three basic elements:

- **Claim** (assertion or proposition)
- **Grounds** (proof, grounds, support)
- **Warrant** (inferential leap)
- **Rebuttal** (counterclaim and refutation)

Claims

- A claim is the point an arguer is trying to make. The claim is the conclusion, proposition, or assertion an arguer wants another to accept.
- The claim answers the question, "So what is your point?"
 - You can only establish a claim after you have thought deeply about the topic at hand and conducted research
 - Creating a pro/con sheet can help you determine how you initially feel about the issue

More about claims...

- There are four basic types of claims:
- **fact:** claims which focus on empirically verifiable phenomena
- **judgment/value:** claims involving opinions, attitudes, and subjective evaluations of things
- **policy:** claims advocating courses of action that should be undertaken
- **definition/classification:** indicates what criteria are being used to define a term or what category something falls into

Example Claim

- For **many** Americans, owning guns does not, in actuality, protect them; therefore, strict gun laws should be in place.
- Claim of Policy
- The word “many” is a qualifier—some Americans may be safer in owning a gun.

Grounds (proof or data)

- Grounds refers to the proof or evidence an arguer offers.
- Grounds can consist of statistics, quotations, reports, findings, physical evidence, or various forms of reasoning.
 - example: "The Second Amendment ensures Americans have the right to keep and bear arms."

Examples for Grounds

- “The Second Amendment ensures Americans have the right to keep and bear arms” (Carlson).
- “Thirty-eight percent of Americans report having a gun in their homes, and another 2% say they have a gun elsewhere on their properties (like in a garage, barn, or car)” (Carlson).

Qualifiers

- Qualifiers are key words which help you to state a claim. These words make the assertion more likely to be true. They are often used in the thesis and throughout the paper:
- Qualifiers include: sometimes, often frequently, some, most, a few, many, may, might, could, commonly, usually, probably, possibly

More about grounds...

- Grounds are the support the arguer offers on behalf of his/her claim. The grounds answer questions such as:
 - "What is your proof?"
 - "How do you know?"
 - "Why?"
 - example: According to a 2005 Gallup poll, "Men are more likely than women to report gun ownership (49% compared with 33%), and whites are more likely than nonwhites to own (44% and 24%, respectively). Residents of the South are significantly more likely than those living in other regions to report owning a gun" (Carlson).

Still more about grounds...

- grounds can be based on:
 - **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
 - **premises** already held by the listener

Clue words for identifying grounds

- The grounds for an argument often follow words such as “because,” “since,” “given that...”
 - example: “Airports should x-ray all luggage **because** a bomb could be placed in a checked baggage.”
 - example: “I expect to do well on the test, **since** I studied all night for it.”

Warrants

- 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 connection between the claim and grounds
- The implicit nature of warrants means the “meaning” of an argument is as much a part of the receiver as it is a part of the message.
- Some arguments are “multi-warranted,” e.g., based on more than one inferential leap

More about warrants...

- 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)

Still more about warrants...

- warrants can be based on:
- **ethos:** source credibility, authority
- **logos:** reason-giving, induction, deduction
- **pathos:** emotional or motivational appeals
- * **value premises:** values shared by, or presumed to be shared by, the receiver(s)
- note: these categories aren't mutually exclusive, there is considerable overlap among the three

the first triad

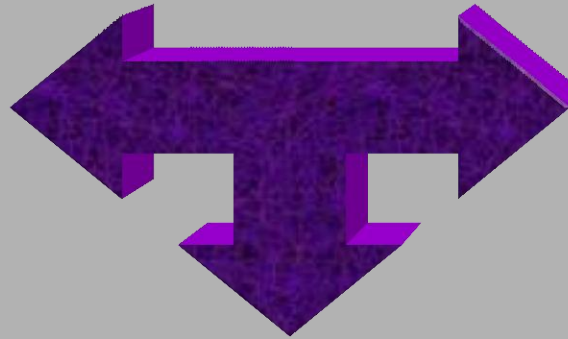
sample argument 1

Those who own guns may be less safe than those who do not own guns.

Claim

White, southern males are the highest percentage of gun owners in the U.S.

Grounds



Warrant

(unstated) Generalization:
Due to cultural norms,
there is increased violence
in the South.

the first triad

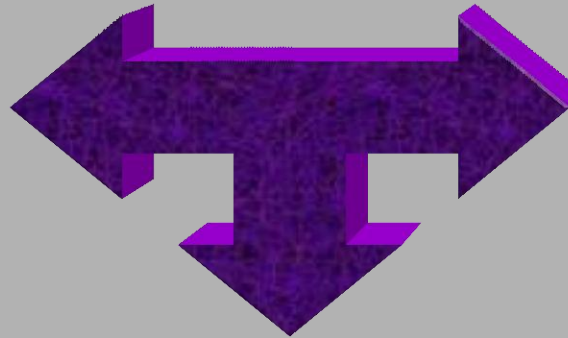
sample argument 2

“Juno” is a wonderful movie.

Claim

It was nominated for four Academy Awards

Grounds



Warrant

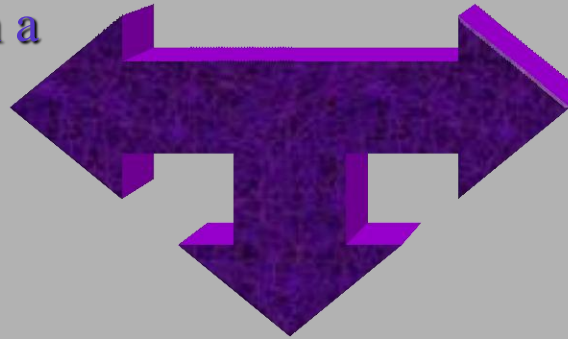
(unstated) Sign: a movie's greatness can be measured in the number of Oscar nominations it receives

the first triad

sample argument 3

Biff was probably in a
fight

Claim



He has a black eye

Grounds

Warrant

(unstated) Sign: A black eye is
a reliable indicator that a
person has been in a fight

the first triad

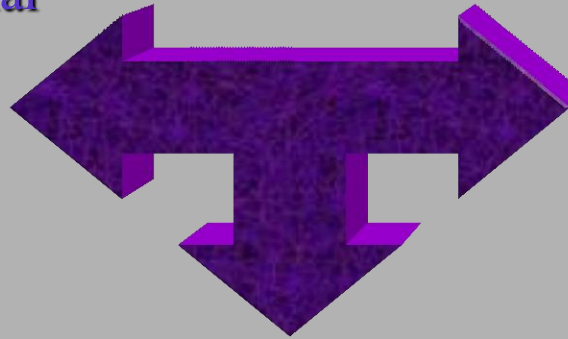
sample argument 4

If you surf at
Huntington Beach
right after it rains you
risk getting a bacterial
infection

Claim

Runoff from the rain
washes bacteria into
the ocean

Grounds



Warrant

(unstated) Cause-effect:
bacteria in the water causes
surfers to get ill.

Backing

- Backing the argument occurs when the reader gives examples which offer further support for the argument. Offer this if and when you have not yet successfully persuaded your reader and you need to “tip the scale”.

Counterclaim and Refutation

- After one has made the argument and is approaching a conclusion, the writer may use the method of rebuttal. This occurs when the writer offers a singular counterclaim (in which he/she concedes a point to the opposing side) but follows up swiftly with a sound refutation:

Rebuttal Example

- While owning a gun may afford one personal protection, it is often that same weapon which is used to injure the gun owner. In fact, in a Gallup poll, responders found the opposite to be true, “46% saying that having a gun in the home makes it a more dangerous place to be”) (Carlson).

Conclusions

- One may conclude in several ways:
 - A rebuttal—if this is a strong rebuttal and the counterclaim is appropriately “squashed”, one could conclude here
 - A call to action is a request in which one makes a reasonable suggestion for change
 - An anecdote, insight, memorable image or tying up of an idea introduced in the first paragraph(s) of introduction

Limitations regarding the Toulmin model

- The Toulmin model offers a somewhat static view of an argument
- Focuses on the argument maker, not the target or respondent
- Real-life arguments aren't always neat or clear
- The Toulmin model is an analytical tool
 - Useful for dissecting arguments before or after they've been made
 - Not as useful, practical in the "heat" of an argument
- Since warrants are unstated, different listeners may perceive them differently

To conclude:

- Introduction: 2—4 paragraphs
- Anecdote, compelling stat/quote/ rhetorical question+ background information+unfamiliar terms defined +
 Proposition: claim of fact, judgment, policy or definition (avoid 3 point thesis)
- Grounds/Warrants/Backing 2—5 pages
- Rebuttal/Conclusion 1 page