

Toulmin Model of Argument

The twentieth-century British philosopher Stephen Toulmin noticed that good, realistic arguments typically will consist of six parts. He used these terms to describe the items:

Data: The facts or evidence used to prove the argument

Claim: The statement being argued (a thesis)

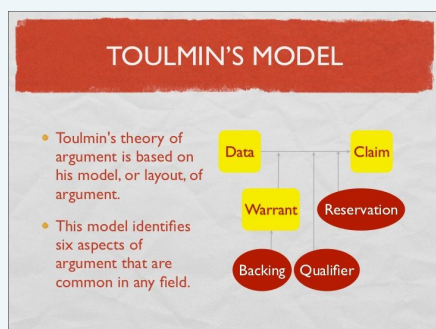
Warrants: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) logical statements that serve as bridges between the claim and the data.

Qualifiers: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or statements that propose the conditions under which the argument is true.

Rebuttals: Counter-arguments or statements indicating circumstances when the general argument does not hold true.

Backing: Statements that serve to support the warrants (i.e., arguments that don't necessarily prove the main point being argued, but which do prove the warrants are true.)

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Example

Toulmin's diagram of arguments typically looks something like this example:

An argument written in this manner unfolds to reveal both the strengths and limits of the argument. This is as it should be. No argument should pretend to be stronger than it is or apply further than it is meant to. The point here isn't to "win" or "beat" all the counter-arguments; the point is to come as close to the truth or as close to a realistic and feasible solution as we possibly can. Note that opening structure of "Data" leads to "Claim with qualifiers" is similar to the structure of a thesis in the form of an enthymeme, in which [one clause presenting a reason or evidence] leads to [another clause presenting an argument.]. Toulmin's model reminds us that arguments are generally expressed with qualifiers and rebuttals rather than asserted as absolutes. This lets the reader know how to take the reasoning, how far it is meant to be applied, and how general it is meant to be.

Toulmin model: Structure and Organization

The Toulmin model is useful for analyzing an argument you are reading. That was Toulmin's original purpose--the analysis of how arguments work. On the other hand, some students find it useful to use the Toulmin model as a basis for structure and organization. We might organize our essay in the following manner.

Toulmin Model for Essay Structure

- I. Introduction of the problem or topic.
 - A. Material to get the reader's attention (a "hook")
 - B. Introduce the problem or topic
 - C. Introduce our claim or thesis, perhaps with accompanying qualifiers that limit the scope of the argument. (NB: This will help you cut the topic down to a manageable length.)
- II. Offer data (reasons or evidence) to support the argument.
 - A. Datum #1
 - B. Datum #2
 - C. (and so on)
- III. Explore warrants that show how the data logically is connected to the data
 - A. Warrant #1
 - B. Warrant #2
 - C. (and so on)
- IV. Offer factual backing to show that logic used in the warrants is good in term of realism as well as theory.
 - A. Backing for Warrant #1
 - B. Backing for Warrant #2
 - C. (and so on)
- V. Discuss counter-arguments and provide rebuttal
 - A. Counter-argument #1
 - B. Rebuttal to counter-argument #1
 - C. Counter-argument #2
 - D. Rebuttal to counter-argument #2
 - E. (and so on)
- VI. Conclusion
 - A. Implications of the argument, summation of points, or final evocative thought to ensure the reader remembers the argument .

