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 "datum' = grounds:

- Your book describes the "datum" as any item of information that could lead to a claim. We will call the datum the "grounds"—same thing. I see smoke and claim "Fire!" The grounds for the claim is the sight of fire.

- What connects the datum/grounds to the claim is a warrant, a presupposition that needs no proof: I see smoke and say: Fire! Warrant: "where there's smoke, there's fire."

The five basic elements:

- **Claim** (assertion or proposition)
- **Grounds (**proof, evidence, support)
- **Warrant** (presupposition linking datum to claim and grounds to claim)
- **Backing** (support for the warrant)
- **Qualifier**/Restriction (limitations on the claim)

Claims

- A claim is the point an arguer is trying to make, the proposition or assertion.

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

  - example: "Rosario is an American citizen, because she was born in the United States."

  - example: "Ellen is going to be a judge on American Idol, so the show will be more popular than ever."

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 to define a term or what category something falls into

Grounds (proof or evidence)

- Grounds can consist of statistics, quotations, reports, findings, physical evidence, or various forms of reasoning:
  - example: "I'm a vegetarian. One reason is that I feel sorry for the animals. Another reason is for my own health."
  - example: "I made the dinner, so you can do the dishes.

Grounds = support for claim.

- The grounds answer questions such as:
  - "What is your proof?"
  - "How do you know?"
  - "Why?"
  - example: "It looks like rain. The barometer is falling."
  - example: "The other Starbucks I've been in had wi-fi, so I'll bet this one does too."

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

Identifying grounds

- If they're stated, 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: "We cannot trust this man **because** he has perjured himself in the past."
  - Note that these are also enthymemes.

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

Warrents:

- Perform 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. That is also the major premise for the enthymeme)

  - example: "That dog is probably friendly. It is a Golden Retriever."

    (warrant: generalization; most or all Golden Retrievers are friendly. Again, this is also the major premise)
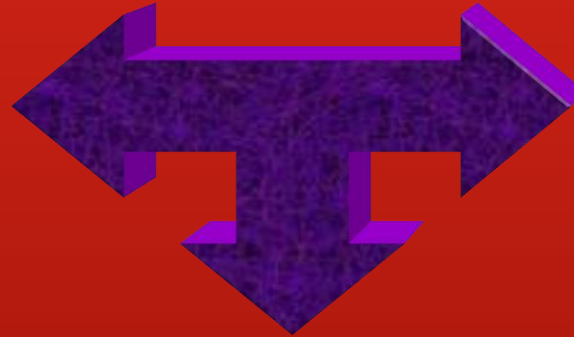
Warrents can be based on:

- **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: there is considerable overlap among these categories

The first triad

The Dodgers are likely to win the ballgame tonight

Claim

They are playing at home

Grounds

Warrant

(unstated) Generalization: The home team enjoys an advantage in baseball

The first triad, #2

"Slumdog Millionaire" is a wonderful movie.

Claim

It was nominated for 10 Academy Awards

Grounds

Warrant

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

The first triad, #3

Biff was probably in a fight

He has a black eye

Claim

Grounds

Warrant

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

The first triad, #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.

Limitations of Toulmin

- 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, so it's more useful for dissecting arguments later than in the "heat" of an argument
- Since warrants are unstated, different listeners may perceive them differently