

Toulmin Argument Model

Stephen Toulmin (*The Uses of Argument*, 1958), a British philosopher, is credited for developing a system of making practical arguments.

His argument system is based on justifying claims, and it involves analyzing your own argument from all sides to make it stronger. A Toulmin argument consists of the following components:

▶ **The Claim** – the statement or assertion the writer hopes to prove.

The claim must be controversial or debatable, or it is not an argument! Obvious facts do NOT work as claims.

- Example claim: The Electoral College should be abolished.

▶ **Ground/Evidence** – foundation that proves the claim.

- Example evidence: The Electoral College gives small states undue influence.

▶ **Warrant** – logical and persuasive connection between a claim and the evidence.

The warrant is often left unstated, it provides the logic of why the evidence proves the claim. A strong warrant is one that is very difficult to disagree with. An argument with a weak warrant is easily disproven.

- Strong warrant example:
 - **Claim/Evidence:** The Electoral College should be abolished because it gives small states undue influence.
 - **Strong Warrant:** No individual state(s) should have undue influence on presidential elections.
- Weak warrant example:
 - **Claim/Evidence:** The legal age for drinking should be lowered since I've been drinking since age fourteen without problems.
 - **Weak Warrant:** What works for me should work for everyone else.

▶ **Backing** – the evidence supporting the warrant.

If the warrant is not fully convincing on its own, a strong backing is extra persuasion on your argument's side.

- Example backing: Presidential candidates focus their campaigns on states with comparatively large electoral power and neglect many other states.

▶ **Rebuttal** – addressing potential objections/alternative viewpoints.

Acknowledging the opposition to your argument is a good way to show that you fully understand all sides of your claim. You can even then refute an objection to your claim, to make your argument even stronger. A rebuttal can contain two parts:

- Concession – admitting of a point from the opposition; acknowledgement
 - Example concession: The Electoral College was created to ensure that presidential elections were limited to the main candidates instead of becoming chaotic.
- Refutation – addressing/countering the concession to prove your own point
 - Example refutation: This was a precaution from before two-party politics and mass media ensured that only the main candidates ever get many votes.

► **Qualifiers** – words and phrases that place limits on claims.

If a claim in absolute terms would be too easy to dismiss, a qualifier shows that you're aware your claim isn't always valid. Some qualifiers: in some cases, under these conditions, possibly, routinely, etc.

- Unqualified claim: People who meditate have better mental health.
- Qualified claim: Many people who meditate find that it helps them manage their mental health.

Marshall, Teri. APSI 2018. St. Mary's Hall, 2018.

Lunsford, Andrea A., John J. Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. Everything's an Argument. 7th ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016, pp. 130-142.