

Argumentation (The Toulmin Method):

SUU Writing Center

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Much of the information in this tipsheet has been adapted from the website:

<http://writing.colostate.edu/references/reading/toulmin/index.cfm>

Invented by language philosopher Stephen Toulmin, a useful method of argumentation requires what may be described as “textual dissection.” By breaking an argument into its different components (claim, reasons, evidence), you can help readers make judgments as to how well these parts work together as a whole. In doing so, you invite readers to do more than agree or disagree with an argument; you ask them to consider the basis for that agreement/disagreement.

The Claim:

The claim is the most general statement in an argument. It is the umbrella that all the other parts of the argument fit under. It is the main point the author is trying to get across. After identifying the claim, you indicate how far you want to carry the argument by including qualifiers and exceptions.

Qualifiers:	Exceptions:
Some, most, many, in general, usually, and typically are examples of qualifiers. They indicate that you are avoiding sweeping generalizations.	Often, you will need to exclude certain cases or situations from your argument. Such exceptions serve to restrict a claim, allowing you to avoid unfair and inaccurate statements.
Example: Most college students have at least one job.	Example: Most college students, except those still supported by parents, have at least one job.

The Reasons:

Why do you believe the claim you are making? The reasons you list help you outline your argument. To use the Toulmin method in testing your reasons, ask two questions of each one: **Is the reason relevant to the claim it supports? Is the reason effective?**

Relevance:	Effectiveness:
If a reason is relevant, it has a direct bearing on or relationship to the topic you are discussing.	If a reason is effective, it invokes a value your readers may be expected to believe in and agree with. Because such values are subjective, they need to be stated clearly in an argument.
Example: Claim-- Most college students have at least one job. Irrelevant Reason-- College students like to play. Relevant Reason-- College is expensive and students need a way to pay for it.	Example: Claim-- Most college students have at least one job. Ineffective Reason: College students need money for Big Macs. More Effective Reason: College is expensive and students need a way to pay for it.

SEE THE NEXT PAGE FOR MORE HELP WITH THE TOULMIN METHOD

The Evidence:

Back up your reasons with facts, examples, statistics, or expert testimony. You must do this because your readers are not likely to take your opinion as evidence. They want to know that other people share your opinion. Evidence needs to be sufficient, credible, and accurate.

Sufficiency	Credibility	Accuracy
Do you have enough evidence to convince your audience?	Is your evidence believable and authoritative?	Does your evidence “tell the truth”? In other words, are all your quotes complete and not taken out of context?

Anticipated Objections and Rebuttal:

To show fairness, you should anticipate objections or concerns that your readers may raise and respond to them in a thoughtful way. You should show respect to opposing arguments, but do be explicit about why you reject them.

A Summary of the Toulmin method:

It may helpful for you to review this summary of the method offered by Timothy W. Crusius and Carolyn E. Channell in *The Aims of Argumen* (34):

Claim:

Qualifier:

Exceptions:

Reasons:

What makes this reason relevant? What makes this reason effective?

What evidence supports this reason?

Is the evidence sufficient? Credible? Accurate?

Objection:

Rebuttal:

Finally, as John D. Ramage and John C. Bean have noted in their text *Writing Arguments*, many writers also find it useful to consider the **assumptions** that underlie their claims, reasons, and evidence.