**Argumentation Organizational Strategies**

The Toulmin Model (Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik, 1984) deals with rules of rational argumentation. Its particular strength lies in the fact that it makes a systematic and precise use of words and concepts already familiar to most educated people. The model is a six-step system of argument:[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. a **CLAIM** is made;
2. **DATA**, i.e., facts to support it, are offered;
3. a **WARRANT** for connecting the grounds to the claim is conveyed;
4. **BACKING**, the theoretical or experimental foundations for the warrant, is shown (at least implicitly);
5. appropriate MODAL **QUALIFIERS** (some, many, most, etc.) temper the claim; and
6. possible **REBUTTALS** are considered.

As the concepts in the Toulmin model are applied to various kinds of texts and used in classroom discussion,students may be brought to see that the grounds for a claim are slim or that the theoretical backing is absent or of dubious relevance. Students learn that the plausibility of the claim is dependent upon a set of relations that can be extended and analyzed in a systematic, although not necessarily conclusive, fashion. Thus, students see that the language of reason is--or ought to be--the language of everyday life, in all of its complexity and untidiness (Kolupke, 1985).

The Toulmin Model has wide applicability across disciplines and in relation to a variety of texts. The history professor can advise the student writing on the failure of the Roman empire that stronger grounds are needed for the claim that Gracchan reforms were the cause. The psychology professor can suggest that a term paper on the function of dreams needs stronger theoretical backing. The sociology professor can advise the young analyst of the causes of child abuse to qualify her conclusions. The American literature professor can remind the enthusiastic admirer of Hemingway to anticipate possible rebuttals to his argument that the Hemingway "code" is a complete guide to life.

The Toulmin Model of Argument is an interesting view on logical argument due to its non-complicated reasoning and consolidations of both inductive and deductive reasoning (I use the term "non-complicated"because to say that Toulmin's Model is "simplistic" or "simple" assumes that the model is easily encompassed for all that it proposes). However, in the realm of instructing composition the method of constructing an argument is only as valid as one's method of evaluating the argument's cogency.

Fulkerson's description of Toulmin puts forth six characteristics to forming an argument: Grounds (Data),Warrant, Backing, Qualifier, Claim, and Rebuttal. The order of forming and argument then stands to be: "Given grounds, and since warrant because of backing, therefore a properly qualified claim holds, unless specific rebuttals exist that cause the reasoning to fail" (Fulkerson, 20). While this all sounds good, and may even hold up in a court of law (i.e., O. J. Simpson trial), it is folly without evaluation of the argument's cogency.

The chronological (specific to textual analysis)

* The rhetorical
* The logical
* The “false premise” (an adaptation of the geometrical-proof structure)

And what I describe as various problem-solving models, including:

* Nested arguments
* The Critical Crux
* The Dialectic
* What I call my “Econ 101” rule

Below are my notes, discussing each of these models and their relative strength/weakness as a structuring rubric.

1. **The Chronological model:** follows the order of events/points raised by the text
   1. Advantage: ease of organization
   2. Pitfall: tends to fall into plot summary
   3. **Recommendation**: best used as a device for your first, working draft or for brainstorming. Reorganize paper in revised draft.
2. **The Rhetorical model:** order points so as to enhance their persuasive power. (strongest point last, etc.)
   1. Advantage: generally engaging for your reader, and encourages you to foreground the argumentative aspects of your paper
   2. Pitfall: why have a weak leg in your argument at all? You can do better.
3. **The Logical model:** Order points such that Point A is a stepping-stone to Point B, and so on. Move from simpler points to more advanced concepts, or from a reading to (testing) its implications, from cause to consequence.
   1. Advantage: Paper develops and reader learns as s/he reads.
4. **The False premise or tentative approach:** sort of like the indirect proof in geometry—here you begin with a premise that seems reasonable but which you intend to displace; alternatively, begin with a tentative approach that is increasingly refined as we read the paper.
   1. Advantage: very successful when coy and sophisticated
   2. Pitfall: can sound amateurish, or like a working draft, when it’s not pulled off

PROBLEM-SOLVING structures

1. The “Econ 101” rule—an enhancement of the “false premise” model
   1. Works with a basic structure: you would think so, but you would be wrong…(and here’s why)
   2. Paper begins with the commonplace reading (or other false premise that we have reason to buy into),then shows where it breaks down. In the process, paper advances an alternative reading.
2. The Dialectic: Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis
   1. I encourage students to think about using counterarguments to their advantage by incorporating them within this structure.
   2. Paper advances a clearly defined thesis that becomes sharpened and refined as the writer confronts a challenge to that thesis (antithesis, or counterargument). The synthesis is the refined thesis.
3. The Critical Crux
   1. Similar to the dialectic, the critical crux model helps students structure an intervention in ongoing debates. The paper presents two salient voices on an argumentative topic (Critic A argues X, Critic Bargues Y) and situates the writer’s intervention within the context of this discussion.Paper explicates and analyzes arguments X and Y, playing off their relative weaknesses to set the stage for the writer’s own intervention.
   2. Advantage: foregrounds what is of especial interest and significance about the paper
   3. Pitfall: be careful not to frontload your paper (devoting too much space to others’ ideas)—your argument should be clearly articulated in the thesis, and it should be always present (as an emerging force) in the paper, coming into its own no later than (say) one-third of the way into the paper. (reserve2/3 for your own argument).
4. Nested Argument
   1. Nesting is one strategy that allow you to preserve a larger scope while working inductively with particular and precise data/evidence. The paper begins with an argumentative frame that tackles a larger issue, then defends why a particular case study or moment in the text is crucial to our understanding of the issue. Paper then confronts that moment/case study and before the end pans back to test its conclusions against the broader issue and offer suggestions for future research.
   2. This structure may be combined with others, above. Generally best reserved for longer research papers.

**Argumentation: Enthymemes, Warrants, and the Toulmin Model**

In logic, a **syllogism** is a series of statements that, if true, lead to a clear, irrefutable conclusion. The textbook example of a syllogism is as follows:

* Premise: Socrates is a man.
* Premise: All men are mortal.
* Conclusion: Socrates will die.

Since Socrates is indeed a man, and since all men will certainly die, the conclusion is valid.

In an **enthymeme**, as opposed to a formal syllogism, not all the premises need to be irrefutably true—nor do they all need to be listed. Whereas not all the premises need be irrefutably true, they do need to be *accepted as true by the audience*. A speaker may begin, “We all know that we need to protect the environment . . .” An audience of ecologists and conservationists is ready for the next premise, but another audience—lumber companies, oil companies—may object to any conclusion based upon that premise, feeling that there’s too much protection already.

Second, enthymemes *need not spell out premises that are taken for granted by the audience.* A speaker may say,“What our government needs is more law based on the Ten Commandments.” For some audiences, such a statement is part of a set of unspoken premises they all agree to, for example: the Ten Commandments are a good basis for law; there’s no church-and-state separation problem with building laws on the tenets of a particular religion; and so on. For other audiences, however, these unspoken assumptions are unlikely to be taken for facts; rejecting the underlying assumptions, they will reject the main premise, as well.

In this example, the unstated premise—that the Ten Commandments are a sound and appropriate basis of law—serves a specific function: it *motivates* the claim, or supplies a *warrant*, rendering that claim a reasonable solution to the underlying problem. George Trail defines warrants as “permission from an audience”: “what an audience is willing to accept provisionally as true, or accurate, can be considered as ‘warranted.’”

**The Toulmin Model for Argumentation**

Claims: the statements (propositions, assertions) of fact, judgment, or policy that represent your argumentative thesis, or point.

Support: the evidence (data, statistics, physical evidence, quotations), authorities (expert testimony, reports,etc.), and reasoning (examples, explanations) that bear out your claims.

Warrants: the assumptions or presuppositions that enable you to infer your claims from the evidence. Warrants are typically unstated and must be inferred by the audience/reader.

1. http://www.concentric.net/~Creyn266/COMM335/Toulmin.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)