Forming an Effective Argument: Claims, Grounds and Warrants

In this class, we will often focus on the aspects of an effective argument as defined by logician Stephen Toulmin, beginning with the three most basic components: claims, grounds and warrants (backing, qualifiers and rebuttals will be covered in a future class session).

Claim – a claim is a debatable assertion about the nature of things (your thesis statement operates as your central claim). There are three types of claims: claims of fact, which assert what is factual and are empirically verifiable; claims of value, which represent moral or aesthetic judgments; and, claims of policy, which advocate or propose a course of action to be taken.

Grounds – the grounds provide the support or evidence for a claim. Grounds can be based on data, established on the grounds of the credibility of a source, or arrived at through analysis and reasoning.

Warrant – a warrant contains and traces the assumptions that connect the grounds to a claim, essentially explaining why and how the grounds provide support for the claim. Warrants may be based on ethos (authority of a source), logos (logical reasoning), or pathos (emotional appeals).

The need to identify claims and provide grounds and warrants works on a global level and a local level within an essay. Your thesis statement acts as the claim that will be supported and warranted throughout the essay; with that support, you will make additional, often smaller, claims that also require their own evidence and support.

Exercise

Break into small groups of 3-4. Each person in the group should take a minute to share some of the thinking about their essay that came from last night’s invention strategy writing. Identify at least one important claim you will make in your essay, and work with your group to identify the grounds and warrant you will provide for that claim.

Claim: ____________________________________________________________________________________

Grounds: __________________________________________________________________________________

Warrant: ___________________________________________________________________________________