USING TOULMIN'S MODEL OF ARGUMENTATION

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Although the writing of many college freshmen reveals flaws in grammar and style, a more serious problem exists. Most of these students simply do not know how to develop and organize their ideas (Meiland 252). Those of us who teach writing to college freshmen recognize this fact all too readily. How, then, can we expect college freshmen to produce a logical argumentative paper before they have developed the necessary basic intellectual skills to accomplish the task? No wonder that when we attempt to teach deduction, induction and fallacies to students who haven't learned yet to organize and develop their ideas on paper, it often becomes a frustrating experience for them—as well as for us.

Stephen E. Toulmin has recognized the need for a simple model of argumentation that helps students not only to develop ideas but also to organize them. In addition, Toulmin's model is a valuable adjunct to modern rhetoric with its heuristic ability to generate new ideas, its focus on audience, and its flexibility. For those instructors interested in exploring the model's potential as an effective teaching tool, below are an explanation of the model and a possible teaching strategy.

TOULMIN'S MODEL

Philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin based his method of argumentation on a model of law in which (1) a person makes a claim, then (2) gives grounds to support that claim, and (3) backs the grounds with a warrant. These three elements—claim, grounds, and warrant—are present in every argument. Three additional elements of Toulmin's model include a backing, rebuttal and qualifier that may be added as necessary, but the primary elements consist of the claim, its grounds and its warrant.

First, the claim, the basic purpose of an argument, can be an assertion, standard or thesis. Next, the grounds, the foundation of the argument, are the evidence or specific facts that support the claim. Finally, the warrant—implied or stated—links the grounds to the claim and gives the grounds general support. These first three elements are essential to any argument, and Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the claim, grounds and warrant.

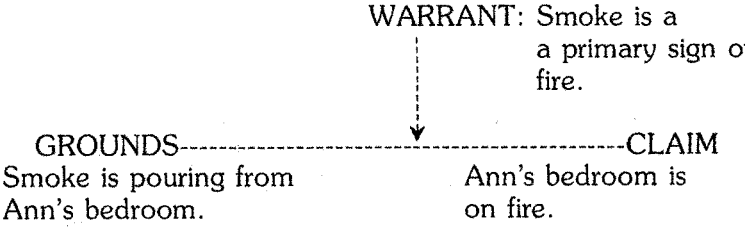


FIGURE 1

Asserting the claim that "Ann's bedroom is on fire," we note that the grounds (specific facts) for making such a claim are that "smoke is pouring from Ann's bedroom." So, given the warrant that "smoke is a primary sign of fire," the claim is probably valid. A general premise (the warrant) supports the specific fact (the grounds) that leads to the assertion (the claim).

The additional three elements—backing, rebuttal and qualifier—may be added as necessary. The qualifier, when present, is sometimes used in the wording of the claim and is therefore different from the rebuttal and backing which are often only implied. The backing establishes the reliability and relevance of the warrant; the rebuttal acknowledges exceptions that might invalidate the claim; and, the qualifier modifies the claim. Figure 2 illustrates all six elements in action. Transitional words, set off by commas in the following model, aid students in developing the warrant, backing, rebuttal and qualifier (Kneupper 240).

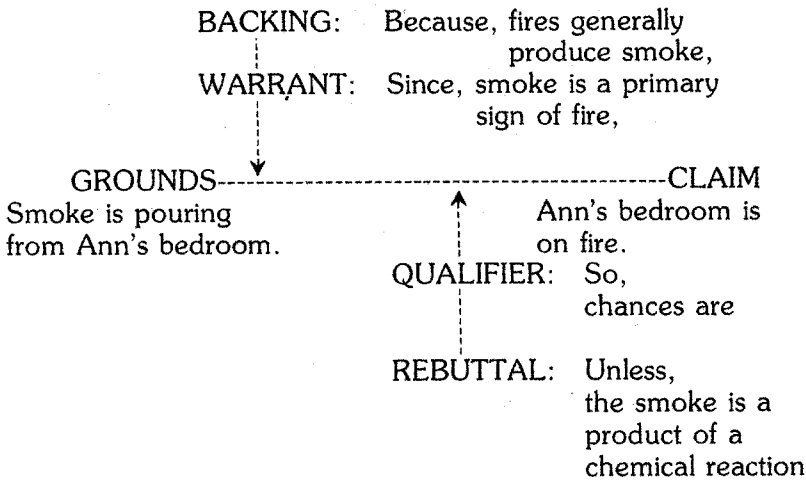


FIGURE 2

Figures 3, 4, and 5 illustrate how Toulmin's model subsumes inductive, deductive and analogical reasoning. No matter which reasoning we use, we can construct it according to Toulmin's model. In Figure 3, an example of inductive reasoning shows how several specific facts, backed by a general conclusion about those facts, leads to a general premise, or claim.

INDUCTIVE REASONING

In Figure 3, the diagram illustrates inductive reasoning as it shows how several specific facts can lead to a general conclusion.

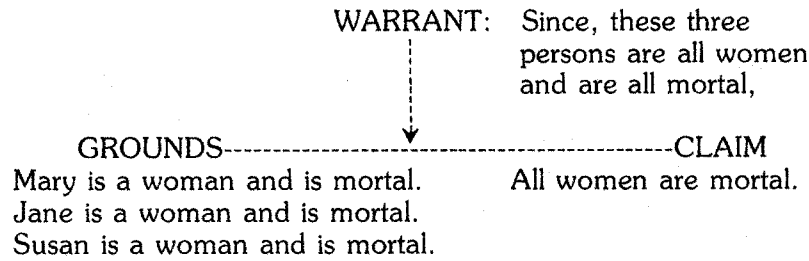


FIGURE 3

DEDUCTIVE REASONING

In Figure 4, the diagram illustrates deductive reasoning as it shows how a general premise based on statistics and backed by a conclusion about those statistics suggests a specific fact.

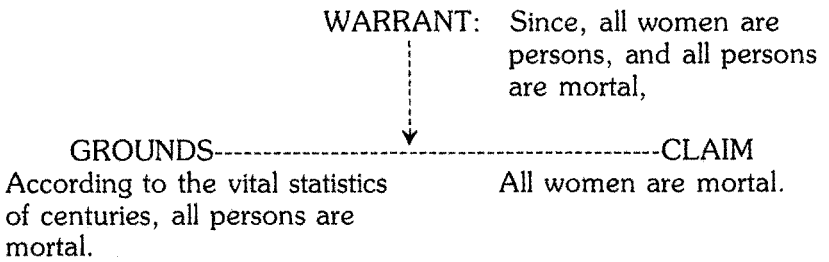


FIGURE 4

ANALOGICAL REASONING

In Figure 5, the diagram illustrates analogical reasoning as it shows how several similarities between two different objects, backed by a general conclusion about those similarities, makes a specific claim.

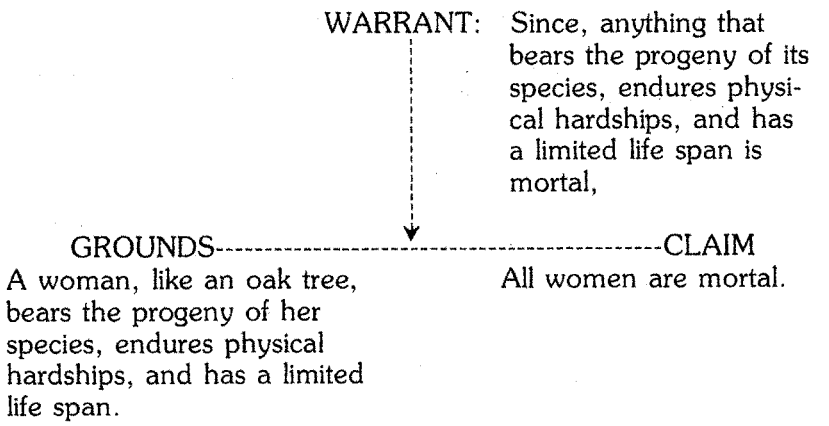


FIGURE 5

Specious as the reasoning may be, the diagrams nevertheless show how any kind of reasoning fits into the simple claim-grounds-warrant structure of argumentation. The model's ability to subsume the more formal types of logic results in easier teaching and clearer comprehension. In addition to this simplicity, the model recommends itself as a valuable heuristic.

The model's heuristic value will become evident as we first construct an argument step by step and then later apply guiding questions to each step. These questions will help students to discover flaws in their arguments and at the same time may provide them with new ideas. Figure 6 reveals the basic argument.

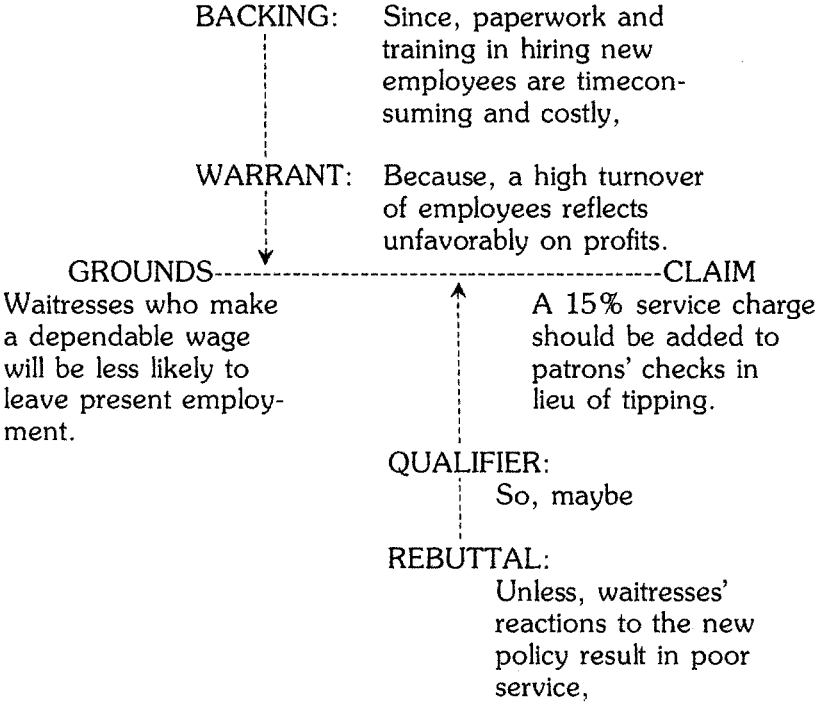


FIGURE 6

In order to be effective, an argument must be clearly stated so that it will be clearly understood by its audience. In the following

example, the audience is a group of restaurateurs, and the assertion is that tipping should be eliminated and replaced by a 15% "service charge" addition to patrons' checks. Since our purpose will be to persuade the audience to change a longstanding policy, we must clearly state how this change will benefit them as well as their patrons. For checking an argument's clarity and efficacy, Toulmin suggests applying the following questions at each step:

1. What position do I want my audience to take?

   (I want restaurateurs to agree with me that both of us would benefit if they'd add a 15% service charge and avoid tipping, so I'll assert:)

   Claim A 15% service charge should be added to patrons' checks in lieu of tipping.

2. Where must my audience begin so that they will take the step I want them to take and agree to my claim?
   (An appeal likely to get a good response from business persons is how to keep employees, so:)

   Grounds Waitresses making a dependable wage will be less likely to leave.
   Eliminates patrons wondering how much to tip and results in equitable sharing of service.

3. What is the linking idea between grounds and claim?

   (An appeal to the restaurateurs' profits will definitely help, so it probably should be stated rather than implied:)

   Warrant The high turnover of waitresses is costly.

4. Is the move from grounds to claim safe and reliable?

   (A general factor considered very important in the management of business profits is the benefit of good employer/employee relations, so:)

   Backing Paperwork and training involved in hiring new employees are time-consuming and costly.

5. What possibilities might upset the argument?

   (An exception that might make my claim invalid:)

   Rebuttal Initially, waitresses' reactions may result in poor service.

   (This idea yields another starting point, or claim: why not

convince the waitresses of the efficacy of the present claim by asserting: "A 15% service charge added to patrons' checks will ensure you a steady income.")

6. Is a qualification necessary?

   (Yes, in case the waitresses rebel:)

   Qualifier So, presumably. . .

These six questions help us to check both the appeal to our audience and the soundness of that appeal. We begin with the grounds that waitresses who make a steady income may be less likely to leave in order to look for employment where tips are better, and we back those grounds with the warrant that a high turnover of employees is costly. Finally, the backing for that warrant is a general realization of all employers—the paperwork and training involved in hiring new employees is not only time-consuming but also costly.

Although new ideas may spring from any of the questions, in this particular case an idea for a new argument proceeds from step five—what possibilities might upset the argument? From our answer to that question comes material for another argument directed to a different audience—the waitresses. Consequently, after writing the first essay persuading restaurateurs to change the policy on tipping, we can follow with a second essay persuading waitresses that a change in this policy will benefit them. This process reveals one of the ways in which Toulmin's model can be used as a heuristic.

When it comes to analyzing someone else's argument or refining our own, Toulmin suggests that we ask the following four questions, one at each of these steps—claim, rebuttal, backing and grounds. Using the same argument directed to restaurateurs, we begin asking questions about the claim.

1. CLAIM: A 15% service charge should be added automatically to patrons' checks.
   a) Is the claim clearly understood?
      Perhaps "added automatically" should be changed to "built-in."
   b) From what standpoint is the claim addressed—moral, religious, financial, etc.?
      Financial
2. REBUTTAL: *Unless* waitresses' reactions to new policy results in poor service.

a) Does the wording of the claim allow for these exceptions?
No, it doesn't; perhaps the claim should be changed to read: "A 15% service charge, added automatically to patrons' checks, may be beneficial to restaurateurs."

The *may* qualifies the claim in case of waitress rebellion.

3. BACKING: *Because* paperwork and training involved in hiring new employees are time-consuming and costly. . .
   a) Is the warrant solidly backed for supporting the grounds?
   Yes, because a high turnover of employees reflects unfavorably on profits.
4. GROUNDS: Waitresses who make a dependable wage will be less likely to leave present employment.
   a) Are the grounds sufficient and relevant?
   Yes, based on the warrant and backing.

These questions that may be used to analyze an argument, as well as the six questions that may be used to construct an argument, are suggested merely as guides. Although the questions can be valuable guides in the construction and analysis of an argument, Toulmin offers them as optional aids, not as essential elements of the model. The only essential elements in Toulmin's logic are the first three basic steps of making a claim, giving grounds for that claim, and backing those grounds with a warrant.

A TEACHING STRATEGY

Instructors who decide to teach Toulmin's logic may want to begin by explaining and using only the three basic elements—the claim, grounds and warrant. As primary parts of the model, these simple steps are as easy for teachers to explain as they are for students to understand. Later, after students have become familiar with the language and basic structure of Toulmin's model, they will more readily adapt to and understand the remaining elements of the argument—backing, rebuttal and qualifier.

One way to introduce students to the model is to identify the three basic elements: the claim, grounds and warrant. Achieving this identification may be accomplished in several ways; one may be to issue a simple handout as follows.

1. The claim, the first element in an argument, is an assertion, thesis or proposition and answers the question, "What do I want to prove?"

2. The grounds, the second element in an argument, are evidence, specific facts or data that support the claim and answer the question, "What do I have to go on?"

3. The warrant, the third element in an argument, yields general support that links the grounds to the claim—either implied or stated, depending on the audience—and answers the question, "How do I get from evidence to claim?"

Additionally, when instructors add examples of arguments demonstrating the use of these three elements, students will have the basic tenets of Toulmin's model as a reference during discussion. After discussion, students may be encouraged to make their own claims and pursue a claim's merits: does it have specific facts to support it, and if so, what warrant links the grounds to the claim? Further discussion to determine the audience becomes necessary when the writer must decide whether or not the warrant should be implied or stated. The following diagram illustrates an argument in which the writer may be confronted with this necessity, depending on the audience (Figure 7).

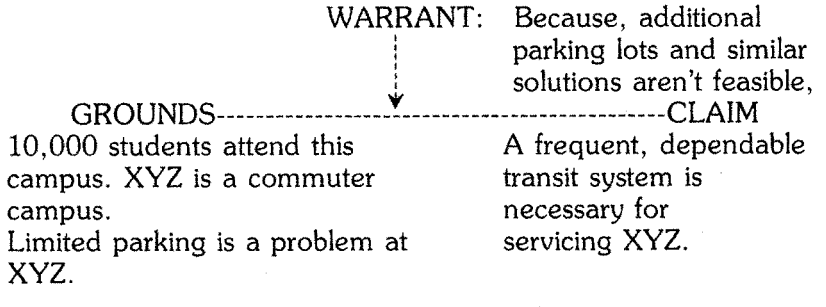


FIGURE 7

A student using this argument may merely imply the warrant if the audience consists of the administrators at XYZ campus who already know that additional parking lots and similar solutions aren't feasible. But, if the audience is the director of the transit system who is unaware of the situation behind the facts, the student should state the warrant since it will help to reinforce the facts in the case.

Although students should recognize the warrant for their grounds as they construct an argument, whether or not they state it in their essays will depend on their audience analysis.

When students are ready to construct their own arguments, instructors may want to furnish them with the questions to ask at each step of the process. Later, after the students have built their own arguments and are ready to critique the arguments of others, instructors can provide them with the four questions suggested earlier in this article for analyzing an argument. The arguments and their analyses will reveal how well the students have understood the construction and analysis of an argument—according to Toulmin's model.

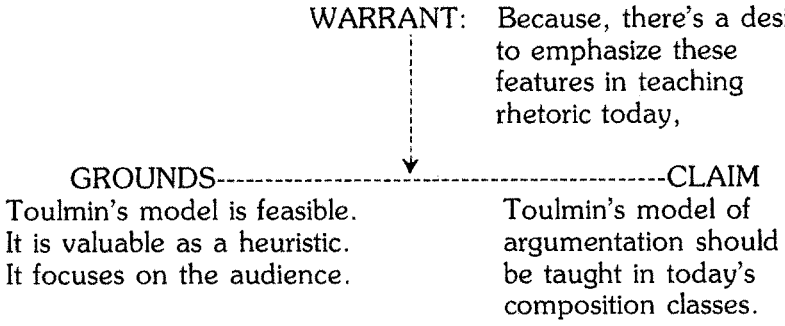
CONCLUSION

A number of researchers have argued in favor of teaching Toulmin's logic in the composition classroom. One of the current textbooks that demonstrates how this logic can be used in composition classes is Rottenberg's 1985 text and reader, *Elements of Arguments*. Rottenberg recognizes the necessity for composition teachers to find an alternative to the "tenuous relationship between learning about induction and deduction, however helpful in analysis, and the actual process of student composition" (vi). Until recently, the challenge has been to find a method of argument that students can use to defend their claims directly and efficiently. With the advent of Toulmin's model, a simpler method of defending claims has become available. Rottenberg reports that she has supervised hundreds of teaching assistants who have been enthusiastic in their appreciation of the model's straightforward and simple features (vi).

Locker and Keene, likewise, have found Toulmin's model both straightforward and easy-to-apply for students in two-year business and technical writing programs. Due to "its simplicity, completeness, and heuristic power," they consider the model a valuable tool for those students who have had little training in formal logic. They also note the emphasis this model places on audience: "Thinking in terms of the full Toulmin model forces students to consider the reader's probable responses and helps them write letters, memos, and reports that are reader-centered, not writer-centered" (103). According to Locker and Keene, Toulmin's model can be taught quickly, the basics in as few as twenty minutes. Instructors can use this model to show students the faulty or inadequate logic in their writing, but best of

all, students can use the model as a heuristic to check the logic in their own rough drafts (104).

Using Toulmin's model, I offer the following diagram of my argument:



Toulmin's model is a welcome adjunct in argumentation and a clear model for teachers. It is flexible, is valuable as a heuristic, and can be easily taught. Its flexibility lies in the fact that it subsumes inductive, deductive and analogical reasoning. Its value as a heuristic can be seen in the development of ideas while stages are constructed and in its effective use for analyzing the components of an argument (Kneupper 239). And, finally, it teaches students a method of logic that focuses on the audience. Teachers, as well as students, can benefit by using Toulmin's model of argumentation in the classroom.

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