

(Adapted from Timothy W. Crusius and Carolyn E. Channell, *The Aims of Argument*)

Definition of the Toulmin Method:

Thorough analysis requires us to go beyond the kinds of "gut-level" responses we undergo when reading. To respond analytically to an argument is to do much more than state a basic agreement or disagreement with it; it is to determine the *basis* of our agreement or disagreement. In other words, analysis is a process of discovering how the argumentative strategies an author employs (the *how* and *why* levels of an argument) lead us to respond to the content (the *what* level) of that argument in the way that we do. Sometimes, too, such analysis can cause us to change our minds about our judgment of how effective or ineffective an argument is.

The Toulmin method, in short, is an effective way of getting to the *how* and *why* levels of the arguments we read. It is a type of textual "dissection" that allows us to break an argument into its different parts (such as claim, reasons, and evidence) so that we can make judgments on how well the different parts work together.

Parts of an Argument

Using the Toulmin method requires that we take an argument apart and examine its various elements. This "dissection" allows us to understand the argument more fully, summarize it more accurately, and discuss its effectiveness or ineffectiveness more intelligently than we would have otherwise.

It might be helpful to envision writing the parts of an argument like building a house of cards, in which you work backwards, beginning with the uppermost level (the claim). Each level is balanced precariously on the level beneath it. And in order for an argument to hold up under careful scrutiny, each level must be strong enough to support what is placed on top of it.

The Claim

Think of the claim in an argument as the most general statement in that argument. It may not be a particularly general statement all by itself, and some for arguments are very narrow indeed. But the claim is like the umbrella statement that all other parts of an argument have to fall under. It is the uppermost level of our "house of cards."

After you have identified an argument's claim, it is important to determine how far the author intends to carry that claim. The next step in this process, in other words, is the identification of any qualifiers or exceptions the author makes to the argument's claim

Identifying Qualifiers

Qualifiers are words like *some*, *most*, *many*, *in general*, *usually*, *typically* and so on--little words whose value to an argument is immeasurable.

Example of a qualified claim:

Many books by Charles Dickens are fun to read.

Example of an unqualified claim:

Books by Charles Dickens are fun to read.

Without qualifying words like *some* or *many*, a claim like this can be interpreted (by the careful analytical eye) as *All books by Charles Dickens are always fun for everyone to read.*

Although unqualified claims like these are not necessarily a bad argumentation strategy, they do allow ample room for challenges to be made to an argument. An appropriately qualified claim is much easier to defend.

Identifying Exceptions

Oftentimes, an author will specifically exclude from an argument certain cases or situations. Such exceptions serve to restrict a claim, so that it is understood to apply in some situations but not in others.

A claim like

Most books by Charles Dickens are fun to read.

might be limited by the following exception:

Having labored over David Copperfield in high school, I would not rank that book among them.

Exceptions like this one are important, because without them, readers who would like to challenge a claim may begin to concoct exceptions of their own..

The Reasons

Why does a writer believe the claim s/he makes? The reasons a writer gives are the first line of development of any argument. To use our "house of cards" image again, reasons comprise the second level of an argument, without which the uppermost level (the claim) cannot remain balanced (or, in the language of argument, "effective").

How can we tell if reasons are strong? In other words, how can we determine whether or not they are sturdy enough to support the claim? Using the Toulmin method, we ask two main questions: Is the reason relevant to the claim it supports? and Is the reason effective?

Determining the Relevance of the Reasons

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of reasons used in an argument, we must first determine whether or not they are relevant to the claim they mean to support.

If an argument's claim is

Argumentation is an important skill to learn,

the reason,

People are dropping out of college at an alarming rate.

would probably prove to be irrelevant. A more relevant reason might be

On the university level, argument is valued by professors of various disciplines who say that they would like for their students to be able to take a strong position and support it with ample reasons and evidence.

Determining the Effectiveness of the Reasons

If a reason is effective (or "good"), it invokes a *value* we can believe in and agree with. Value judgments, because they are by necessity somewhat subjective, are often the most difficult to make in arguments. It is, therefore, always a good idea to restate the value being invoked as clearly as possible in your own terms. Then you'll be able to evaluate whether or not the value is good in itself or worth pursuing.

If an argument's claim is

Argumentation is an important skill to learn,

the reason,

No other type of writing requires a great deal of thought.

is arguably not very effective, since many people would not agree with or value this idea. (Notice, too, how qualification might help this reason.) On the other hand, a reason like

If you look at writing assignments given in various disciplines of the university, you will find that many of them include elements that are related in some way to argument

would be likely to give the impression of being effective (and supportable).

The Evidence

We would all probably like to believe that the people we argue with will accept our claims and reasons as perfect and complete by themselves, but most readers are unlikely to do that. They want evidence of some sort--facts, examples, statistics, expert testimony, among others--to back up our reasons. If this level of the house of cards is either unstable or absent, neither of the two levels it supports (the reasons and claim) can be effective.

To be believable and convincing, evidence should satisfy three conditions. It should be *sufficient*, *credible*, and *accurate*.

Determining the Sufficiency of Evidence

As you look at the evidence supporting a reason, ask yourself if the author makes use of enough evidence to convince a reasonable reader.

If one reason given in an argument is

If you look at writing assignments given in various disciplines of the university, you will find that many of them include elements that are related in some way to argument.

An example from one Engineering assignment would most likely be insufficient, where several such examples would provide a more varied range of situations in which the stated reason holds true.

Determining the Credibility of Evidence

It is important to decide how credible (believable and authoritative) a piece of evidence is within an argument. As you look at the evidence supporting a reason, ask yourself whether or not this evidence matches with readers' experience of the world. If it doesn't, does the evidence come from a source that readers would accept as more knowledgeable or authoritative than they are?

If one reason given in an argument is,

On the university level, argument is valued by professors of various disciplines who say that they would like for their students to be able to take a strong position and support it with ample reasons and evidence, statistics taken from *The National Inquirer* and given in support of this

This reason will typically be much less credible than ones taken from *The Journal of Higher Education*.

Determining the Accuracy of Evidence

As you look at the evidence supporting a reason, ask yourself if this evidence "tells the truth." Are statistics gathered in verifiable ways from good sources? Are the quotations complete and fair (not out of context)? Are the facts verifiable from other sources?

Sometimes it is difficult to determine accuracy without having the writer's sources in front of you, but there are oftentimes cases in which you will be suspicious of a piece of evidence for one reason or another.

If, in support of a reason like

College students are very enthusiastic about learning argumentation skills

a writer uses this piece of evidence:

In a survey conducted in my residence hall, 92% of the respondents asserted that they enjoyed writing arguments more than any other activity listed on the questionnaire,

you might be led to ask questions like "Who conducted this survey?" "Who were these respondents?" or "What were the other activities listed on the questionnaire?"

Anticipated Objections and Rebuttal

When we analyze an argument using the Toulmin method, we look for potential *objections* to the argument's reasons, objections which the writer expects his or her opponents to make. Usually, these are included in arguments as opportunities for the writer to present her or his own reasons as refutations/rebuttals.

Example of an Anticipated Objection

If one reason in an argument is:

On the university level, argument is valued by professors of various disciplines who say that they would like for their students to be able to take a strong position and support it with ample reasons and evidence,

the writer might hold up the following objection:

Many students argue that fields like Engineering and Math have no use for argumentation skills.

Once a writer identifies counter-arguments opponents might make, it would be self-defeating to announce those counter-arguments and not argue against them. Therefore, after stating the objections of opponents, most writers will refute or rebut the objections. Good rebuttal usually requires evidence, so don't forget to look for support for the rebuttal position in that part of an argument. Like all evidence, rebuttal evidence should be sufficient, accurate, and credible.

Example of a Rebuttal

To the anticipated objection:

Many students argue that fields like Engineering and Math have no use for argumentation skills,

a writer might offer the following rebuttal evidence,

However, a recent study appearing in journal, Language and Learning Across the Disciplines indicates that...(fill in the blank)

Drawing Conclusions from a Toulmin Analysis

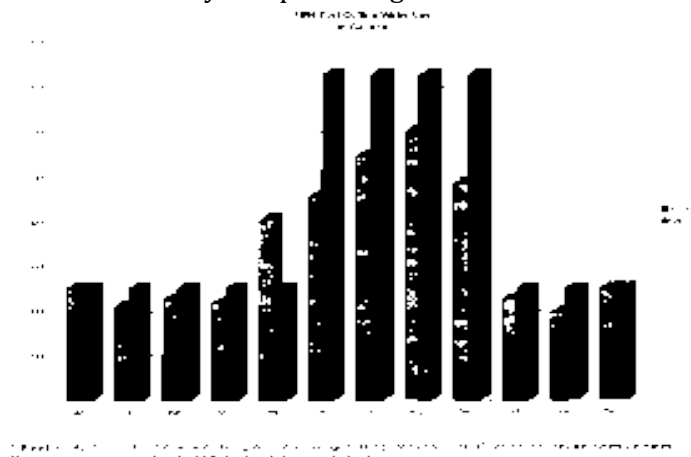
Once you have completed a Toulmin analysis of an argument, your task is to collect your "results" into an overall, coherent statement about the effectiveness of that argument. In other words, if you are attempting to respond to that argument--whether in a formal response essay or in an arguing essay where you are using the argument as evidence or as opposing evidence--you will need to shape your Toulmin results into a coherent, defensible, narrow *claim* of your own. To see an example of how you would do this, you might go to the relevant part of the Toulmin demonstration.

Landscaping that Makes Sense for the West

- ¶-1 When I moved here from Ohio twelve years ago, I cared for my lawn the way I did in Ohio--rather the way I didn't care for my lawn in Ohio. In southern Ohio, I never had to water my half acre of Kentucky bluegrass. And although I never sprayed my lawn with herbicide (weed killers), the neighbors all did and the grass grew so thick that I had very few weeds. What I did do was mow, and mow constantly! There was never a summer evening or weekend when I couldn't hear the roar of a lawn mower somewhere in the neighborhood. When I practiced this level of lawn care on my bluegrass here in Fort Collins, I ended up with a sorry-looking, balding brown patch of weed-infested turf. You see, southern Ohio borders Kentucky and that is where Kentucky bluegrass grows. It and other high-maintenance turf varieties are not meant to be grown in northern Colorado. In spite of this, we in Fort Collins persist in our quest to have these traditional lawns.
- ¶-2 It is time for us to rethink our landscaping practices. In our arid Western climate and poor soil, the traditional lawn takes too much water, time, and harmful chemicals to maintain. We can measure the cost not only in time and money but also in risk to our health and to the health of the environment.
- ¶-3 In Fort Collins, we must use herbicides when growing these foreign turfs. The local weeds are much hardier and there are city ordinances and homeowners' covenants against noxious weeds. But the chemicals we use to eradicate them run off into the water supply where they cause problems. Americans dump over 70 million pounds of herbicides and pesticides onto our lawns each year. This does not even include the amount of chemical fertilizers we use. Most of these chemicals run off into the water supply, where contamination causes problems for our health and safety (Bormann, Balmori, and Geballe 208).
- ¶-4 Concern grows over the effects these expensive chemicals are having on our health and the health of children, pets, and lawn care workers. In my Ohio neighborhood, chemicals were sprayed in a lawn somewhere almost daily. I remember their distinct smell and the irritation they caused when the wind blew them into my children's eyes as they played outdoors. In response to concern about the safety of these irritating chemicals, little yellow warning flags now dot Fort Collins lawns after spraying. These flags picture cross marks through silhouettes of children and pets. What do these warnings mean? Don't walk across the lawn? Don't let kids and pets play here? For how long? It does not make sense to continue using varieties of plants that require so many risky chemicals to keep them weed and bug free.
- ¶-5 Varieties of grass that are more resistant to pests, disease, and weeds and are better suited to the West make this risk unnecessary. Buffalo grass is one example. Terry Riordan, Ph.D., professor of horticulture at the University of Nebraska, said this about buffalo grass: "Buffalo

grass is pretty new and just starting to be used, but people who try it like it because it requires less maintenance than those other two species [Kentucky bluegrass and turf-type tall fescue]" (qtd. in Bucks 40). Turf species such as buffalo grass and crested wheatgrass tolerate the poor soil and dry conditions of the West and stay green with little or no irrigation (Meyer 60). These grasses are prairie grasses meant for our area. They are low growing and require little mowing. Riordon reported that some people only mowed their buffalo grass once during the season (qtd. in Bucks 40). We only have to water them a little to keep them green and not at all to keep them alive.

- ¶-6 Choosing a variety that requires little or no watering also saves Fort Collins homeowners money. Water in the West is scarce and becoming more expensive. My summertime water usage increases by over 100 percent, from around 4,500 gallons per month to between 10,000 and 12,000 gallons per month. The average water use in Fort Collins rises by almost 150 percent to 14,500 gallons. Even with only one watering per week, 33 percent of my total yearly water usage is for my lawn. Most Fort Collins residents water more often, reflected in the higher average water usage of 55 to 58 percent. (See the chart on the following page.) In the West, 60 percent of urban water goes to watering lawns (Bormann, Balmori, and Geballe 107). In a telephone interview conducted March 24, 1997, Laura D'Audni of the Fort Collins City Water Utilities reported the yearly outdoor water use of Fort Collins residents is between 50 and 55 percent. If we choose turf varieties that require little or no watering, we could cut our water bills by this percentage.



- ¶-7 More appropriate species of grass would save time and money by making fertilizers and amendments obsolete. Our soil is not suited to bluegrass. It is poor, arid, and alkaline and must constantly be boosted with chemical fertilizers and amendments. Lawn care experts recommend that fertilizer be applied to bluegrass three to four times per growing season. They say we should aerate and thatch as well. I spend much more time and money to maintain a lawn in Fort Collins than I did in Ohio--and my lawn here is only one-third of my Ohio lawn.
- ¶-8 If I could afford it, I could hire this service done. There are companies who would come to my home four times a season to spray my lawn with "liquid fertilizer and weed control" for only \$43.97 per application, plus \$50.60 for yearly aeration. So let's add that up: the chemical pesticides and herbicides; the fertilizer; the water; the cost of a mower, gas, and its maintenance; and hoses which constantly sprout leaks, get chewed up by the dog, or run over by the mower (or factor in the more expensive irrigation system). Consider this:

Basic Cost per Season for Care of Bluegrass

Four chemical applications	\$175.88
Aeration	\$50.60
55-58 percent of yearly water bill	\$183.60
Mower maintenance and gas	\$35.00
Total	\$445.08

Time Spent per Season in Basic Lawn Care

Hours mowing and trimming (2 hours per week x 5 months)	43.3 hours
Hours monitoring and moving hoses * (6 hours per week x 5 months)	129.6 hours
Total	172.9 hours

*This time could be cut down with multiple hoses going at the same time.

- ¶-9 I can think of plenty of other things I'd rather do with this money and time. I am probably not alone in thinking there has to be a better way. It is well past time that Coloradoans gave up their old-fashioned Eastern lawns for landscaping that makes sense in the West. So why aren't we hearing about alternatives from the lawn care industry? Because they have a lot to lose--billions of our dollars.
- ¶-10 Since the cost of maintaining an alternative is so low, lawn care experts have no stake in keeping us informed about more appropriate species or in making them easy to obtain. We get most of our information about lawn care and gardening from the lawn care industry itself. This is a conflict of interest. Most of the varieties of plants stocked in local nurseries require a lot of care and water to thrive. However, low-maintenance varieties are available and we can get the information we need to make good choices. We would do better to call our county extension office for information on species suitable to our area. In Fort Collins, an agent, referred to as a master gardener, can be reached at (970) 498-7400. They have been advocating alternative landscaping for some time.
- ¶-11 The most impartial information comes from sources that do not stand to gain monetarily from our choice. The *Coloradoan's* real estate section reprinted an article on landscaping from *Popular Mechanics* that stated, "Turf grasses are the foundation of every landscape plan, even when part of the plan is to reduce the percentage of grass in your yard. The only worthwhile suggestion here is to avoid traditional, short-root bluegrass varieties. These traditional turf grasses are notorious for their susceptibility to diseases and their reliance on huge quantities of water." It went on to describe a new variety of zoysia, Meyer Z-52, which was low maintenance, deep-rooted, less cold-sensitive, and stayed green longer (F1).
- ¶-12 If Fort Collins nurseries do not stock alternative types of seeds, they can be ordered and are comparable in price to other lawn seeds. (Buffalo grass is about \$8 per pound.) To spare the expense of putting in a whole new lawn, these seeds can be used to overseed and to repair bare patches. In this way, they will gradually fill in and reseed themselves.
- ¶-13 Hardy trees, shrubs, groundcovers, and flowers that require almost no attention once they are

established can be a beautiful alternative to turf, or a lovely compliment to smaller areas of an appropriate variety of turf. Flowers and shrubs that thrive in desertlike conditions and still produce beautiful foliage and blooms are available in local garden stores. The key is to plan, get good information, and choose plants appropriate to our region. A hardy groundcover like *Snow-on-the-Mountain* will take over an area in a season or two and requires no maintenance to achieve a carpet of variegated green foliage. Flowers like cosmos and dianthus thrive on poor soil and dry conditions to produce their delicate and colorful blooms throughout the spring and summer growing season. There are many beautiful wildflower mixes that do well in the Rocky Mountain West.

- ¶-14 The cost of switching to less hungry and thirsty landscaping can quickly be made up in the cost saved on water and maintenance. Initial costs can be kept to a minimum by overseeding with these new types of grass seeds, seeding bare patches with them, and letting them take hold gradually. Lawn space can gradually be shrunk and given over to heat and drought-resistant varieties of flowers, trees, shrubs, and groundcovers. These new plants can be bought with the money saved from not having to buy chemicals and water. Choosing varieties that are perennial or that reseed themselves will also keep cost and maintenance to a minimum.
- ¶-15 With a little thought, planning, and creativity, we who live in Fort Collins can have beautiful landscapes that serve as restful retreats for ourselves and our families without the cost and the effort of trying to maintain an Eastern water-hungry lawn in the arid West.

Works Cited

Bormann, Herbert F., Diana Balmori, and Gordon T. Geballe. *Redesigning the American Lawn*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1993.

Bucks, Christine. "The Right Grass = A Great Lawn." *Organic Gardening* May/June 1995: 38-42.

D'Audni, Laurie. Phone interview. 24 Mar. 1997.

Meyer, Scott. "10 Common Lawn-Care Questions." *Organic Gardening* Feb. 1996: 58-61.

Wasowski, Andy. "Cutting the Grass." *Sierra* Oct. 1996: 18-19.

"Year-round Interest Important in Landscaping." *Fort Collins Coloradoan* 30 Mar. 1997: F1.

Claim: a controversial statement

- **Reason #1:** the first argument (line of reasoning) supporting the claim
 - **Warrant/Principle:** the connection between the first reason and the claim:
 - **Backing:** evidence to support the first warrant

- **Evidence #1:** evidence to support the first reason
- **Evidence #2:** evidence to support the first reason
- **Evidence #3:** evidence to support the first reason

Reason #2: the second argument (line of reasoning) supporting the claim

- **Warrant/Principle:** the connection between the second reason and the claim:
 - **Backing:** evidence to support the second warrant
- **Evidence #1:** evidence to support the second reason
- **Evidence #2:** evidence to support the second reason
- **Evidence #3:** evidence to support the second reason

Reason #3: the third argument (line of reasoning) supporting the claim

- **Warrant/Principle:** the connection between the third reason and the claim:
 - **Backing:** evidence to support the third warrant
- **Evidence #1:** evidence to support the third reason
- **Evidence #2:** evidence to support the third reason
- **Evidence #3:** evidence to support the third reason

...(for as many arguments/lines of reasoning that you have in the paper)

Refutation Section

- **Objection #1:** the first argument against your claim (you can argue against the reason, the warrant, the backing, and/or the evidence)
 - **Rebuttal:** your argument against the first objection
- **Objection #2:** the second argument against your claim
 - **Rebuttal:** your argument against the second objection
- **Objection #3:** the third argument against your claim
 - **Rebuttal:** your argument against the third objection

...(for as many objections that you have in the paper)

REFERENCE

Toulmin, S. (1964). *The Uses of Argument*. New York: Cambridge University Press.