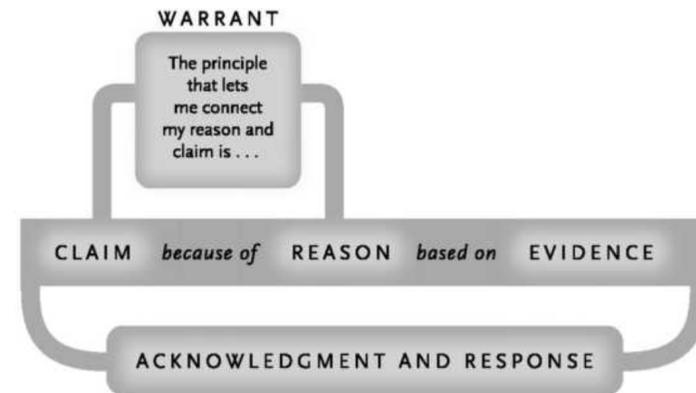


Building a complex argument

based on "The Craft of Research"
by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams

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Let's try first to create an argument
from last lecture's template



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BUILDING A COMPLEX ARGUMENT OUT OF SIMPLE ONES

- The five elements introduced in the previous lecture constitute the core of a "basic" argument.
- But arguments in research reports are more complex.
 - ✓ We almost always support a claim with two or more reasons, each of which must be supported by its own evidence and perhaps justified by its own warrant.
 - ✓ Since audience think of many alternatives and objections to any complex argument, careful researchers typically have to respond to more than one or two of them.

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Moreover, each element of an argument may itself have to be treated as a subclaim, supported by its own argument:

- Each response to an objection may need reasons and evidence to support it.
- If your audience doubts the truth of a warrant, you may have to treat it as a subclaim and support it with its own argument, including reasons, evidence, and perhaps even its own warrant with its own acknowledgments and responses.

Most arguments include background, definitions, explanations of issues that audience might not understand, and so on.

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Making Claims

Ask yourself three questions:

- (i) What kind of claim should I make?
- (ii) Is it specific enough?
- (iii) Will audience think it is significant enough to need an argument supporting it?

When you can answer those three questions, you're ready to assemble your argument.

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DETERMINING THE KIND OF CLAIM YOU SHOULD MAKE

Academic researchers usually pose not practical problems but conceptual ones, the kind whose solution asks audience not to act but to understand:

- The recession of 2001-2002 was caused partly by excessive investment in IT systems that improved productivity less than expected.

Some conceptual claims seem to imply an action:

- Businesses that invest in IT systems benefit only when they know how to use them to improve productivity.

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So if you want your audience to act, be explicit about what action you want them to take:

- Before investing in IT systems, a business should restructure its organization and management to use the system productively.

Be equally explicit if your claim is not practical but conceptual:

- We have identified six factors IT managers should understand before making substantial investments.

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If you pose a practical problem, audience will think that your claim is relevant to its solution only when they see you support two claims: one that explains what causes the problem and another that explains how doing what you propose will fix it.

But audience may also expect you to explain the following:

- Why your solution is feasible; how it can be implemented with reasonable time and effort.
- Why it will cost less to implement than the cost of the problem.
- Why it will not create a bigger problem than the one it solves.
- Why it is cheaper or faster than alternative solutions—a claim often difficult to support.

If your audience looks for but don't find those four sub-arguments, they may reject your whole argument

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EVALUATING YOUR CLAIM

- Make Your Claim Specific!
- Vague claims lead to vague arguments.
- The more specific your claim, the more it helps you plan your argument and keep your readers on track as they read it. You make a claim more specific through specific language and logic.
 - **SPECIFIC LANGUAGE.** Compare these claims:
 - TV inflates estimates of crime rates.
 - Graphic reports of violence on local TV news lead regular viewers to overestimate by as much as 150 percent both the rate of crime in their neighborhood and the personal danger to themselves and their families.

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SPECIFIC LOGIC. You can also be specific in the logic of your claim. Even with its specific language, this claim offers only a single proposition:

- Regular TV viewers overestimate both the rate of crime in their neighborhood and the personal danger to themselves and their families.

In the natural and social sciences, claims like that are common, even preferred. But in the humanities, such a claim might seem a bit thin. As you draft your working claim, try elaborating its logic in two ways:

- Introduce it with a qualifying clause beginning with although or even though.
- Conclude it with a reason clause beginning with because.

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Example

- **Although violent crime is actually decreasing,** regular TV viewers overestimate their neighborhood crime rate by 150 percent and therefore misjudge personal danger to themselves and their families, **because local TV evening news regularly opens with graphic reports of mayhem and murder in familiar locations, making many believe that crime happens nightly outside their front door.**

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- The three of the five elements that you need in a full argument:

(1) Although I acknowledge X,

(2) I claim Y,

(3) because of reason Z.

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You can use an introductory although clause to acknowledge three kinds of alternative views:

- something that your readers believe but your claim challenges
 - ★ Although most people believe they are good judges of their security, regular TV viewers overestimate...
- a point of view that conflicts with yours
 - ★ Although many security professionals see fear as the best motivation for safety precautions, regular TV viewers overestimate...
- a condition that limits the scope or confidence of your claim
 - ★ Although it is difficult to gauge their real feelings about personal security, regular TV viewers overestimate...

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When you add a final because clause, you forecast some of the reasons that support your claim:

- Although many believe that school uniforms help lower the incidence of violence in public school S,qualification the evidence is at best weak, claim,
because researchers have not controlled for other measures that have been instituted at the same time as uniforms, reason 1 **and because the data reported are statistically suspect. reason 2**

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Make Your Claim Significant

- While we can't quantify significance, we can roughly estimate it: If your audience/readers accept a claim, how many other beliefs must they change?
- The most significant claims ask a research community to change its deepest beliefs (and it will resist such claims accordingly).
- Some research communities consider a claim significant enough if it asks them only to accept new data on a topic of common interest.

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Conclusions

- If you are new to research, of course, your claim doesn't have to challenge the experts, just impress your teacher.
- If you can't predict whether it will, imagine your audience/reader is someone like yourself.
 - What did you think before you began your research?
 - How much has your claim changed what you now think?
 - What do you understand now that you didn't before?
- That's the best way to prepare for readers who will someday ask you the most devastating question any researcher can face: not Why should I believe this? but Why should I care?

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Conclusions

- That's the best way to prepare for readers who will someday ask you the most devastating question any researcher can face:
 - ❖ not Why should I believe this?
 - ❖ but Why should I care?

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Final class with a bit of homework (sorry!!!)

- Prepare a short description of your any class project your conduct or your hobby in form of:
 1. Topic + question + significance structure
 2. Significant claim + reason + evidence (including warrant + acknowledgement + response)
 3. Each of you will have about 10 minutes including questions/discussion form the audience

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