**Toulmin's Method for Analyzing Argument**

Stephen Toulmin is one of the modern day leaders of rhetorical theory. He did not start out as a rhetorician though. He was born in London, England in 1922. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics and natural sciences from King's College in 1942. Later he received his Masters of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Cambridge. He has spent much of his life teaching at various universities around the United States. Toulmin has written several books. The most important of these works to the field of rhetoric is his book entitled *The Uses of Argument*. In this book he explains a structural model by which rhetorical arguments can be analyzed.

[***This web page has a great breakdown of the Toulmin method.***](http://hubpages.com/literature/How-to-Use-a-Toulmin-Argument-Model-for-Reading-and-Writing)

**Here are some of the web site's highlights . . .**

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, such analysis can cause us to change our minds about our judgment about 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 about how well the different parts work together.

***The Toulmin Method is a way of doing a very detailed analysis, in which we break an argument into its various parts and decide how effectively those parts participate in the overall whole.***When we use this method, we identify the argument's claim, reasons, and evidence, and evaluate the effectiveness of each.

**The Parts of an Argument according to the Toulmin Model:**

i) **Claims** - are the main point of the argument. Another name for the claim would be the thesis. The claim may be explicitly stated at the beginning of an argument, at the end, or somewhere in the middle, or it may not be stated anywhere.  It may be implied, in which case you will be expected to infer it.

ii) **Data** (support) - provides the evidence, opinions, reasoning, examples, and factual information about a claim.

iii) **Warrants** - are assumptions, general principles, conventions of specific disciplines, widely held values, commonly accepted beliefs, and appeals to human motives.  Most warrants are not stated in an argument.

iv) **Backing** - is audience specific and it bridges the gap between the author's warrant and the audience's opinion.

v) **Rebuttals**- establish what is wrong, invalid, or unacceptable about an argument and they may present counter arguments or new arguments that represent different points of view.

vi) **Qualifiers** - are words throughout the argument that quantify the argument. Some examples include: always, never, is, are, all, none, and absolutely, always and never change to sometimes, is and are change to may be or might, all changes to many or some, none changes to a few, and absolutely changes to probably or possibly.

Adapted from Wood, Nancy V.  *Perspectives on Argument.*  Third Edition.  Upper Saddle River, New Jersey:  Prentice Hall, 2001.

**The Toulmin model has six points: the claim, support, backing, warrant, qualifier, and rebuttal.**

* The **claim** is what the author is trying to say (the author's thesis/main idea).
* The **support** is what the author uses to back up his/her claim (the author's evidence).
* The **backing** is support for the warrant, which makes it more acceptable to the audience. These can be scientific and philosophical truths believed by the targeted audience.
* The **warrant** is the implicit, ***unspoken*** understanding between the author and the audience. It is traditionally a shared belief that allows the author to relate directly to the audience's expectations.
* The **qualifier** is a single word used to modify the argument allowing it to fit a broader range of situations.  All and everything are much more difficult qualifiers to support than some and a few.  If you say all people love ice cream, you are guaranteeing that the one audience member who is lactose intolerant is going to be the first to the microphone during the question and answer period.  We are constantly trying to find the one exception to such expansive qualifiers.
* The **rebuttal** is the where the author addresses the audience's opposing viewpoints or possible objections in order to strengthen his/her argument.  The rebuttal can also be a place where the author concedes any weaknesses in his/her own argument or strengths in opposing arguments, but then carefully qualifies the effect these weakness have on the general strength of his/her original argument.  You will use this less traditional rebuttal for Paper One's counterpoint.

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