**From *Everything’s An Argument*, Chapter 7:**

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**Toulmin Argument**

In *The Uses of Argument* (1958), British philosopher Stephen Toulmin

presented structures to describe the way that ordinary people make reasonable

arguments. Because Toulmin’s system acknowledges the

complications of life — situations when we qualify our thoughts with

words such as *sometimes*, *often*, *presumably*, *unless*, and *almost* — his

method isn’t as airtight as formal logic that uses syllogisms (see p. 123 in

this chapter and p. 67 in Chapter 4). But for that reason, Toulmin logic

has become a powerful and, for the most part, practical tool for understanding

and shaping arguments in the real world. We use his concepts

and terminology in subsequent chapters in Part 2.

Toulmin argument will help you come up with ideas and test them

and also figure out what goes where in many kinds of arguments. Let’s

take a look at the basic elements of Toulmin’s structure:

**Claim the argument you wish to prove**

**Qualifiers any limits you place on your claim**

**Reason(s)/ support for your claim**

**Evidence**

**Warrants underlying assumptions that support your claim**

**Backing evidence for warrant**

If you wanted to state the relationship between them in a sentence, you

might say:

**My claim is true, to a qualified degree, because of the following reasons,**

**which make sense if you consider the warrant, backed by these**

**additional reasons.**

These terms — claim, evidence, warrants, backing, and qualifiers — are

the building blocks of the Toulmin argument structure. Let’s take them

one at a time.

**Making Claims**

Toulmin arguments begin with **claims**, debatable and controversial

statements or assertions you hope to prove.

Many writers stumble when it comes to making claims because facing

issues squarely takes thought and guts. A claim answers the question

*So what’s your point?* or *Where do you stand on that?* Some writers

might like to ignore these questions and avoid stating a position. But

when you make a claim worth writing about, then it’s worth standing up

and owning it.

Is there a danger that you might oversimplify an issue by making too

bold a claim? Of course. But making that sweeping claim is a logical first

step toward eventually saying something more reasonable and subtle.

Here are some fairly simple, undeveloped claims:

**The filibuster tactic in the legislatures of both the United States and**

**Canada ought to be abolished.**

**It’s time to legalize the medical use of marijuana.**

**NASA should launch a human expedition to Mars.**

**Vegetarianism is the best choice of diet.**

**Same-sex unions deserve the same protections as those granted to**

**marriage between a man and a woman.**

Good claims often spring from personal experiences. You may have relevant

work or military or athletic experience — or you may know a lot

about music, film, sustainable agriculture, social networking, inequities

in government services — all fertile ground for authoritative, debatable,

and personally relevant claims.

Respond.

Claims aren’t always easy to find. Sometimes they’re buried deep within

an argument, and sometimes they’re not present at all. An important skill

in reading and writing arguments is the ability to identify claims, even

when they aren’t obvious.

Collect a sample of six to eight letters to the editor of a daily newspaper

(or a similar number of argumentative postings from a political blog). Read

each item, and then identify every claim that the writer makes. When you’ve

compiled your list of claims, look carefully at the words that the writer or

writers use when stating their positions. Is there a common vocabulary? Can

you find words or phrases that signal an impending claim? Which of these

seem most effective? Which ones seem least effective? Why?

**Offering Evidence and Good Reasons**

You can begin developing a claim by drawing up a list of reasons to support

it or finding **evidence** that backs up the point.

Evidence and Reason(s) So Claim

One student writer wanted to gather good reasons in support of an assertion

that his college campus needed more official spaces for parking

bicycles. He did some research, gathering statistics about parking-space

allocation, numbers of people using particular designated slots, and

numbers of bicycles registered on campus. Before he went any further,

however, he listed his primary reasons for wanting to increase bicycle

parking:

* **Personal experience:** At least twice a week for two terms, he was

unable to find a designated parking space for his bike.

* **Anecdotes:** Several of his friends told similar stories. One even sold

her bike as a result.

* **Facts:** He found out that the ratio of car to bike parking spaces was

100 to 1, whereas the ratio of cars to bikes registered on campus was

25 to 1.

* **Authorities:** The campus police chief told the college newspaper that

she believed a problem existed for students who tried to park bicycles

legally.

On the basis of his preliminary listing of possible reasons in support of

the claim, this student decided that his subject was worth more research.

He was on the way to amassing a set of good reasons and evidence

that were sufficient to support his claim.

In shaping your own arguments, try putting claims and reasons together

early in the writing process to create enthymemes. Think of these

enthymemes as test cases or even as topic sentences:

**Bicycle parking spaces should be expanded because the number of**

**bikes on campus far exceeds the available spots.**

**It’s time to lower the drinking age because I’ve been drinking since I**

**was fourteen and it hasn’t hurt me.**

**Legalization of the medical use of marijuana is long overdue since it**

**has been proven an effective treatment for symptoms associated with**

**cancer.**

**Violent video games should be carefully evaluated and their use monitored**

**by the industry, the government, and parents because these**

**games cause addiction and psychological harm to players.**

As you can see, attaching a reason to a claim often spells out the major

terms of an argument.

Anticipate challenges to your claims.



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But your work is just beginning when you’ve put a claim together

with its supporting reasons and evidence — because readers are certain

to begin questioning your statement. They might ask whether the reasons

and evidence that you’re offering really do support the claim:

Should the drinking age really be changed just because you’ve managed

to drink since you were fourteen? They might ask pointed questions

about your evidence: Exactly how do you know that the number

of bikes on campus far exceeds the number of spaces available? Eventually,

you’ve got to address potential questions about the quality of

your assumptions and the quality of your evidence. The connection between

claim and reason(s) is a concern at the next level in Toulmin

argument.

**Determining Warrants**

Crucial to Toulmin argument is appreciating that there must be a logical

and persuasive connection between a claim and the reasons and data

supporting it. Toulmin calls this connection the **warrant**. It answers the

question *How exactly do I get from the data to the claim?* Like the warrant in

legal situations (a search warrant, for example), a sound warrant in an

argument gives you authority to proceed with your case.

Reason(s) So Claim

Since

Warrant

The warrant tells readers what your (often unstated) assumptions

are — for example, that any practice that causes serious disease should

be banned by the government. If readers accept your warrant, you can

then present specific evidence to develop your claim. But if readers dispute

your warrant, you’ll have to defend it before you can move on to the

claim itself.

Stating warrants can be tricky because they can be phrased in various

ways. What you’re looking for is the general principle that enables

you to justify the move from a reason to a specific claim — the bridge

connecting them. The warrant is the assumption that makes the claim

seem believable. It’s often a value or principle that you share with your

readers. Let’s demonstrate this logical movement with an easy

example:

**Don’t eat that mushroom: it’s poisonous.**

The warrant supporting this enthymeme can be stated in several ways,

always moving from the reason (*it’s poisonous*) to the claim (*Don’t eat that*

*mushroom*):

**Anything that is poisonous shouldn’t be eaten.**

**If something is poisonous, it’s dangerous to eat.**

Here’s the relationship, diagrammed:

Reason Claim

The mushroom So don’t

is poisonous eat it!

Since (Warrant)

Eating poisonous things is dangerous.

****

A simple icon — a skull and crossbones — can

make a visual argument that implies a claim, a

reason, and a warrant.

Perfectly obvious, you say? Exactly — and that’s why the statement is so

convincing. If the mushroom in question is a death cap or destroying

angel (and you might still need expert testimony to prove that it is), the

warrant does the rest of the work, making the claim that it supports

seem logical and persuasive.

Let’s look at a similar example, beginning with the argument in its

basic form:

**We’d better stop for gas because the gauge has been reading empty**

**for more than thirty miles.**

In this case, you have evidence that is so clear (a gas gauge reading

empty) that the reason for getting gas doesn’t even have to be stated: the

tank is almost empty. The warrant connecting the evidence to the claim

is also pretty obvious:

**If the fuel gauge of a car has been reading empty for more than thirty**

**miles, then that car is about to run out of gas.**

Since most readers would accept this warrant as reasonable, they would

also likely accept the statement the warrant supports.

Naturally, factual information might undermine the whole argument:

the fuel gauge might be broken, or the driver might know that the car

will go another fifty miles even though the fuel gauge reads empty. But

in most cases, readers would accept the warrant.

Now let’s consider how stating and then examining a warrant can

help you determine the grounds on which you want to make a case.

Here’s a political enthymeme of a familiar sort:

**Flat taxes are fairer than progressive taxes because they treat all taxpayers**

**in the same way.**

Warrants that follow from this enthymeme have power because they appeal

to a core American value — equal treatment under the law:

**Treating people equitably is the American way.**

**All people should be treated in the same way.**

You certainly could make an argument on these grounds. But stating the

warrant should also raise a flag if you know anything about tax policy. If

the principle is obvious and universal, then why do federal and many

progressive state income taxes require people at higher levels of income

to pay at higher tax rates than people at lower income levels? Could the

warrant not be as universally popular as it seems at first glance? To explore

the argument further, try stating the contrary claim and warrants:

**Progressive taxes are fairer than flat taxes because people with more**

**income can afford to pay more, benefit more from government, and**

**shelter more of their income from taxes.**

**People should be taxed according to their ability to pay.**

**People who benefit more from government and can shelter more of**

**their income from taxes should be taxed at higher rates.**

Now you see how different the assumptions behind opposing positions

really are. If you decided to argue in favor of flat taxes, you’d be smart to

recognize that some members of your audience might have fundamental

reservations about your position. Or you might even decide to shift

your entire argument to an alternative rationale for flat taxes:

**Flat taxes are preferable to progressive taxes because they simplify**

**the tax code and reduce the likelihood of fraud.**

Here, you have two stated reasons that are supported by two new

warrants:

**Taxes that simplify the tax code are desirable.**

**Taxes that reduce the likelihood of fraud are preferable.**

Whenever possible, you’ll choose your warrant knowing your audience,

the context of your argument, and your own feelings.

**Examples of Claims, Reasons, and Warrants**

Smoking causes serious So the federal

diseases in smokers and government should

endangers nonsmokers ban smoking

as well.

Since

The Constitution was established to “promote the

general welfare,” and citizens are thus entitled to

protection from harmful actions by others.

The Electoral College So it should be

gives small states abolished.

undue influence.

Since

No states should have undue

influence on presidential elections.

I’ve been drinking since age So the legal age for drinking

fourteen without problems. should be lowered.

Since

What works for me should work for everyone else.

Be careful, though, not to suggest that you’ll appeal to any old warrant

that works to your advantage. If readers suspect that your argument

for progressive taxes really amounts to *I want to stick it to people who work*

*harder than me*, your credibility may suffer a fatal blow.

Respond.

At their simplest, warrants can be stated as “X is good” or “X is bad.” Return

to the letters to the editor or blog postings that you analyzed in the

exercise on p. 133, this time looking for the warrant that is behind each

claim. As a way to start, ask yourself these questions:

If I find myself agreeing with the letter writer, what assumptions

about the subject matter do I share with him/her?

If I disagree, what assumptions are at the heart of that disagreement?

The list of warrants you generate will likely come from these assumptions.

**Offering Evidence: Backing**

The richest, most interesting part of a writer’s work — backing — remains

to be done after the argument has been outlined. Clearly stated claims

and warrants show you how much evidence you will need. Take a look at

this brief argument, which is both debatable and controversial, especially

in tough economic times:

**NASA should launch a human expedition to Mars because Americans**

**need a unifying national goal.**

Here’s one version of the warrant that supports the enthymeme:

**What unifies the nation ought to be a national priority.**

To run with this claim and warrant, you’d first need to place both in

context. The case of space exploration has been debated with varying

intensity since the 1957 launch of the Soviet Union’s *Sputnik* satellite,

sparked after the losses of the U.S. space shuttles *Challenger* (1986)

and *Columbia* (2003), and revisited again after the retirement of the

Space Shuttle program in 2011. Acquiring such background knowledge

through reading, conversation, and inquiry of all kinds will be

necessary for making your case. (See Chapter 3 for more on gaining

authority.)

There’s no point in defending any claim until you’ve satisfied readers that

questionable warrants on which the claim is based are defensible. In Toulmin

argument, evidence you offer to support a warrant is called **backing**.

**Warrant**

**What unifies the nation ought to be**

**a national priority.**

**Backing**

**Americans want to be part of**

**something bigger than themselves.**

**(Emotional appeal as evidence)**

**In a country as diverse as the United States, common purposes and**

**values help make the nation stronger. (Ethical appeal as evidence)**

**In the past, government investments such as the Hoover Dam and the**

***Apollo* moon program enabled many — though not all — Americans to**

**work toward common goals. (Logical appeal as evidence)**

In addition to evidence to support your warrant (backing), you’ll need

evidence to support your claim:

**Argument in Brief (Enthymeme/Claim)**

**NASA should launch a human expedition to Mars because Americans**

**now need a unifying national goal.**

**Evidence**

**The American people are politically divided along lines of race, ethnicity,**

**religion, gender, and class. (Fact as evidence)**

**A common challenge or problem often unites people to accomplish**

**great things. (Emotional appeal as evidence)**

**A successful Mars mission would require the cooperation of the entire**

**nation — and generate tens of thousands of jobs. (Logical appeal as**

**evidence)**

**A human expedition to Mars would be a valuable scientific project for**

**the nation to pursue. (Appeal to values as evidence)**

As these examples show, appeals to values and emotions can be just as

appropriate as appeals to logic and facts, and all such claims will be

stronger if a writer presents a convincing ethos. In most arguments

appeals work together rather than separately, reinforcing each other.

(See Chapter 3 for more on ethos.)

**Using Qualifiers**

Experienced writers know that qualifying expressions make writing

more precise and honest. Toulmin logic encourages you to acknowledge

limitations to your argument through the effective use of **qualifiers**. You

can save time if you qualify a claim early in the writing process. But you

might not figure out how to limit a claim effectively until after you’ve

explored your subject or discussed it with others.

**Qualifiers**

few more or less often

it is possible in some cases perhaps

rarely many under these conditions

it seems typically possibly

some routinely for the most part

it may be most if it were so

sometimes one might argue in general

Never assume that readers understand the limits you have in mind. Rather,

spell them out as precisely as possible, as in the following examples:

Reason(s) So (Qualifier) Claim

Since

Warrant

Your LSAT scores are in So (it is likely) you will

the 98th percentile . get into law school.

Since

High LSAT scores are an important factor in law school admissions.

**Unqualified People who don’t go to college earn less than those who do.**

**Claim**

**Qualified *In most cases,* people who don’t go to college earn less than**

**Claim those who do.**

**Understanding Conditions of Rebuttal**

In the Toulmin system, potential objections to an argument are called

**conditions of rebuttal**. Understanding and reacting to these conditions

are essential to support your own claims where they’re weak and also to

understand the reasonable objections of people who see the world differently.

For example, you may be a big fan of the Public Broadcasting

Service (PBS) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and prefer

that federal tax dollars be spent on these programs. So you offer the following

claim:

**Claim The federal government should support the arts.**

You need reasons to support this thesis, so you decide to present the

issue as a matter of values:

**Argument The federal government should support the arts because**

**in Brief it also supports the military.**

Now you’ve got an enthymeme and can test the warrant, or the premises

of your claim:

**Warrant If the federal government can support the military, then**

**it can also support other programs.**

But the warrant seems frail: you can hear a voice over your shoulder saying,

“In essence, you’re saying that *Because we pay for a military, we should*

*pay for everything!*” So you decide to revise your claim:

**Revised If the federal government can spend huge amounts of**

**Argument money on the military, then it can afford to spend moderate**

**amounts on arts programs.**

Now you’ve got a new warrant, too:

**Revised A country that can fund expensive programs can also**

**Warrant afford less expensive programs.**

This is a premise that you can defend, since you believe strongly that the

arts are just as essential as a strong military is to the well-being of the

country. Although the warrant now seems solid, you still have to offer

strong grounds to support your specific and controversial claim. So you

cite statistics from reputable sources, this time comparing the federal

budgets for the military and the arts. You break them down in ways that

readers can visualize, demonstrating that much less than a penny of

every tax dollar goes to support the arts.

But then you hear those voices again, saying that the “common defense”

is a federal mandate; the government is constitutionally obligated

to support a military and support for the arts is hardly in the same

league! Looks like you need to add a paragraph explaining all the benefits

the arts provide for very few dollars spent, and maybe you should

suggest that such funding falls under the constitutional mandate to

“promote the general welfare.” Though not all readers will accept these

grounds, they’ll appreciate that you haven’t ignored their point of view:

you’ve gained credibility by anticipating a reasonable objection.

Dealing with conditions of rebuttal is an essential part of argument.

But it’s important to understand rebuttal as more than mere opposition.

Anticipating objections broadens your horizons, makes you more open

to alternative viewpoints, and helps you understand what you need to

do to support your claim.

Within Toulmin argument, conditions of rebuttal remind us that

we’re part of global conversations: Internet newsgroups and blogs provide

potent responses to positions offered by participants in discussions;

instant messaging and social networking let you respond to and challenge

others; links on Web sites form networks that are infinitely variable

and open. In cyberspace, conditions of rebuttal are as close as your

screen.



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Respond.

Using a paper that you’re writing, do a Toulmin analysis of the argument.

When you’re done, see which elements of the Toulmin scheme are represented.

Are you short of evidence to support the warrant? Have you

considered the conditions of rebuttal? Have you qualified your claim adequately?

Next, write a brief revision plan: How will you buttress the argument

in the places where it is weakest? What additional evidence will you

offer for the warrant? How can you qualify your claim to meet the conditions

of rebuttal? Then show your paper to a classmate and have him or

her do a Toulmin analysis: a new reader will probably see your argument

in different ways and suggest revisions that may not have occurred to you.

**Outline of a Toulmin Argument**

Consider the claim that was mentioned on p. 139:

**Claim The federal government should ban smoking.**

**Qualifier The ban would be limited to public spaces.**

**Good Smoking causes serious diseases in smokers.**

**Reasons Nonsmokers are endangered by secondhand smoke.**

**Warrants The Constitution promises to “promote the general**

**welfare.”**

**Citizens are entitled to protection from harmful actions**

**by others.**

**Backing The United States is based on a political system that is**

**supposed to serve the basic needs of its people, including**

**their health.**

**Evidence Numbers of deaths attributed to secondhand smoke**

**Lawsuits recently won against large tobacco companies,**

**citing the need for reparation for smoking-related health**

**care costs**

**Examples of bans already imposed in many public places**

**Authority Cite the surgeon general.**

**Conditions Smokers have rights, too.**

**of Rebuttal Smoking laws should be left to the states.**

**Such a ban could not be enforced.**

**Responses The ban applies to public places; smokers can smoke in**

**private.**

**The power of the federal government to impose other**

**restrictions on smoking (such as warning labels on cigarettes**

**and bans on cigarette advertisements on television)**

**has survived legal challenges.**

**The experience of New York City, which has imposed**

**such a ban, suggests that enforcement would not be a**

**significant problem.**

**A Toulmin Analysis**

You might wonder how Toulmin’s method holds up when applied to an

argument that is longer than a few sentences. Do such arguments really

work the way that Toulmin predicts? In the following short argument,

well-known linguist and author Deborah Tannen explores the consequences

of a shift in the meaning of one crucial word: *compromise.* Tannen’s

essay, which originally appeared as a posting on Politico.com on

June 15, 2011, offers a series of interrelated claims based on reasons, evidence,

and warrants that culminate in the last sentence of the essay. She

begins by showing that the word *compromise* is now rejected by both the

political right and the political left and offers good reasons and evidence

to support that claim. She then moves back to a time when “a compromise

really was considered great,” and offers three powerful pieces of

evidence in support of that claim. The argument then comes back to the

present, with a claim that the compromise and politeness of the nineteenth

century have been replaced by “growing enmity.” That claim is

supported with reasoning and evidence that rest on an underlying warrant

that “vituperation and seeing opponents as enemies is corrosive to

the human spirit.” The claims in the argument — that “compromise” has

become a dirty word and that enmity and an adversarial spirit are on the

rise—lead to Tannen’s conclusion: rejecting compromise breaks the trust

necessary for a democracy and thus undermines the very foundation of

our society. While she does not use traditional qualifying words, she

does say that the situation she describes is a “threat” to our nation,

which qualifies the claim to some extent: the situation is not the “death”

of our nation but rather a “threat.” Tannen’s annotated essay is on the

following page.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Why Is Compromise Now a DirtyWord?**  **DEBORAH TANNEN** | |
| Contextual  information  leading up to  initial claim  Initial claim  Reason  Evidence  Warrant  Claim  Reason  Evidence  Claim  Rebuttal  Evidence  Evidence  Claim  Reason  Evidence  Warrant  Claim  Reason  Reason  Conclusion | When did the word “compromise” get compromised?  When did the negative connotations of “He was  caught in a compromising position” or “She compromised  her ethics” replace the positive connotations of  “They reached a compromise”?  House Speaker John Boehner said it outright on  *60 Minutes* last year. When talking about “compromise,”  Boehner said, “I reject the word.”  “When you say the word ‘compromise,’” he explained,  “. . . a lot of Americans look up and go, ‘Uh-oh, they’re  gonna sell me out.’” His position is common right now.  In the same spirit, Tony Perkins wrote in a recent  CNN.com op-ed piece, “When it comes to conservative  principles, compromise is the companion of losers.”  The political right is particularly vehement when it  comes to compromise. Conservatives are now strongly  swayed by the tea party movement, whose clarion call  is a refusal to compromise, regardless of the practical  consequences.  But the rejection of compromise is more widespread  than that. The left regularly savages President Barack  Obama for compromising too soon, too much or on the  wrong issues. Many who fervently sought universal health  coverage, for example, could not celebrate its near accomplishment because the president gave up the public option.  The death of compromise has become a threat to our  nation as we confront crucial issues such as the debt  ceiling and that most basic of legislative responsibilities:  a federal budget. At stake is the very meaning of what  had once seemed unshakable: “the full faith and credit”  of the U.S. government.  Back when the powerful nineteenth-century senator  Henry Clay was called “the great compromiser,” achieving  a compromise really was considered great. On three occasions, the Kentucky statesman helped the Senate preserve the Union by crafting compromises between the  deadlocked slave-holding South and the Northern free  states. In 1820, his Missouri Compromise stemmed the  spread of slavery. In 1833, when the South was poised to  defy federal tariff laws favored by the North and the federal government was about to authorize military action,  Clay found a last-minute compromise. And his Compromise of 1850 averted civil war for at least a decade.  It was during an 1850 Senate debate that Clay stated  his conviction: “I go for honorable compromise whenever  it can be made.” Something else he said then holds a key  to how the dwindling respect for compromise is related  to larger and more dangerous developments in our  nation today.  “All legislation, all government, all society,” Clay said, “is  formed upon the principle of mutual concession, politeness,  comity, courtesy; upon these, everything is based.”  Concession, politeness, comity, courtesy — none of  these words could be uttered now with the assurance of  listeners’ approval. The word “comity” is rarely heard; “concession” sounds weak; “politeness” and “courtesy” sound quaint — much like the contemporary equivalent, “civility.”  That Clay lauded both compromise and civil discourse  in the same speech reveals the link between, on  the one hand, the word “compromise” falling into disrepute, and, on the other, the glorification of aggression  that I wrote about in my book, *The Argument Culture:*  *Stopping America’s War of Words.*  Today we have an increasing tendency to approach  every task — and each other — in an ever more adversarial  spirit. Nowhere is this more evident, or more destructive,  than in the Senate.  Though the two-party system is oppositional by nature,  there is plenty of evidence that a certain (yes) comity has  been replaced by growing enmity. We don’t have to look as  far back as Clay for evidence. In 1996, for example, an  unprecedented fourteen incumbent senators announced  that they would not seek reelection. And many, in farewell  essays, described an increase in vituperation and partisanship that made it impossible to do the work of the Senate.  “The bipartisanship that is so crucial to the operation  of Congress,” Howell Heflin of Alabama wrote, “especially  the Senate, has been abandoned.” J. James Exon of  Nebraska described an “ever-increasing vicious polarization of the electorate” that had “all but swept aside the former preponderance of reasonable discussion.”  But this is not happening only in the Senate. There is a  rising adversarial spirit among the people and the press. It  isn’t only the obvious invective on TV and radio. A newspaper story that criticizes its subject is praised as “tough”; one that refrains from criticism is scorned as a “puff piece.”  The notion of “balance” today often leads to a search  for the most extreme opposing views — so they can be  presented as “both sides,” leaving no forum for subtlety,  multiple perspectives or the middle ground, where most  people stand. Framing issues in this polarizing way reinforces the impression that Boehner voiced: that compromising is selling out.  Being surrounded by vituperation and seeing opponents  as enemies is corrosive to the human spirit. It’s  also dangerous to our democracy. The great anthropologist  Margaret Mead explained this in a 1962 speech.  “We are essentially a society which must be more  committed to a two-party system than to either party,”  Mead said. “The only way you can have a two-party system is to belong to a party formally and to fight to the  death . . .” not for your party to win but “for the right of  the other party to be there too.”  Today, this sounds almost as quaint as “comity” in  political discourse.  Mead traced our two-party system to our unique revolution: “We didn’t kill a king and we didn’t execute a  large number of our people, and we came into our own  without the stained hands that have been associated  with most revolutions.”  With this noble heritage, Mead said, comes “the obligation  to keep the kind of government we set up” — where  members of each party may “disagree mightily” but still  “trust in each other and trust in our political opponents.”  Losing that trust, Mead concluded, undermines the  foundation of our democracy. That trust is exactly what  is threatened when the very notion of compromise is  rejected. |

**What Toulmin Teaches**

As Tannen’s essay demonstrates, few arguments you read have perfectly

sequenced claims or clear warrants, so you might not think of Toulmin’s

terms in building your own arguments. Once you’re into your subject, it’s

easy to forget about qualifying a claim or finessing a warrant. But remembering

what Toulmin teaches will always help you strengthen your

arguments:

* Claims should be clear, reasonable, and carefully qualified.
* Claims should be supported with good reasons and evidence.

Remember that a Toulmin structure provides the framework of an

argument, which you fill out with all kinds of data, including facts,

statistics, precedents, photographs, and even stories.

* Claims and reasons should be based on assumptions that readers will

likely accept. Toulmin’s focus on warrants can be confusing because

it asks us to look at the assumptions that underlie our arguments —

something many would rather not do. Toulmin pushes us to probe the

values that support any argument and to think of how those values

relate to particular audiences.

* Effective arguments respectfully anticipate objections readers might

offer. Toulmin argument acknowledges that any claim can crumble

under certain conditions, so it encourages a complex view that

doesn’t demand absolute or unqualified positions.

It takes considerable experience to write arguments that meet all these

conditions. Using Toulmin’s framework brings them into play automatically.

If you learn it well enough, constructing good arguments can become

a habit.