

## A DEFINITION OF *PROOF*

Because formal logic is incapable of absolute proof, the necessity of forcing verbal argument into mathematical models loses its luster. Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, in their classic 1965 book *Decision by Debate*, were the first to suggest that debaters abandon the formal logical model in favor of a more modest and useful approach. Their definition of *proof* is as follows: “Proof is the process of securing belief in one statement by relating it to another statement already believed.” This definition abandons any claim that argument can provide absolute proof. We should simply admit, said Ehninger and Brockriede, that proof starts from belief and attempts to move a listener to a higher level of belief.

## THE TOULMIN MODEL

Ehninger and Brockriede introduced debaters to the informal logical model of Stephen Toulmin, a British philosopher of science. Now almost every modern debate text uses the Toulmin Model as the method of teaching argument. Toulmin first explained this model in his 1958 book *The Uses of Argument*.

Toulmin suggested that every argument (if it deserves to be called an argument) must consist of three elements: data, warrant, and claim.

The claim answers the question “What are you trying to get me to believe?”—it is the ending belief. Consider the following unit of proof: “Uninsured Americans are going without needed medical care because they are unable to afford it. Because access to health care is a basic human right, the United States should establish a system of national health insurance.” The claim in this argument is that “the United States should establish a system of national health insurance.”

Data (also sometimes called *evidence*) answers the question “What have we got to go on?”—it is the beginning belief. In the foregoing example of a unit of proof, the data is the statement that “uninsured Americans are going without needed medical care because they are unable to afford it.” In the context of a debate round, a debater would be expected to offer statistics or an authoritative quotation to establish the trustworthiness of this data.

Warrant answers the question “How does the data lead to the claim?”—it is the connector between the beginning belief and the ending belief. In the unit of proof about health care, the warrant is the statement that “access to health care is a basic human right.” A debater would be expected to offer some support for this warrant. Such support might come from the United Nations Universal