

the situation and reckless in terms of your chances of winning the debate. All your opponents have to do is to find one example where everything worked rather smoothly—or, as in the example above, outline the likely chaos that would ensue from your suggestion—and your artfully constructed case will collapse under its own weight.

Make claims that are comfortably supported by the evidence you have presented and the warrants you have deployed. Your claim should be *reasonable*; it should be supported by the evidence you have presented without requiring your audience to assume a large number of other factors that have not featured in your speech. Your claim should also be *credible*; however solid your reasoning for an immediate migration of the population of planet Earth to Mars, it isn't going to happen. Finally, it should be *acceptable*; your audience is unlikely to follow you to conclusions that lie on the outskirts or fringes of political or social thought. Even some claims that experts accept as true often sound improbable to the point of absurdity to a lay audience. In essence, the top of your pyramid of argument, the claim, should both be within reach of those climbing it and should not be so massive or so improbable as to damage the underlying structure. Remember, debating isn't just about your being right, it's about others accepting that you're right.

Putting the Pieces Together

How you build an argument from the three component parts is, to a certain extent, a matter of style. As we saw in Chapter 1, the sequence of *evidence* → *warrant* → *claim* is very easy to follow and helps the listener see what you're trying to achieve. It also helps you follow the chain of your own logic because you can mentally check the stages of your argument. However, this sequence is not always the one that comes most naturally when we speak. Also, as the debate continues, the listener may find a constant barrage of apparently identical arguments repetitious.

What is frequently more natural is to start with the claim and then present the evidence and warrant. For example, "We believe there are solid grounds for banning smoking in public [claim]. The basis for this is the proven link between smoking and cancer [evidence], but we would ask you to consider this within the more general point that we expect the state to act when the safety of innocents [warrant] is threatened by the selfishness of a minority."

Alternatively, you could start with a warrant: "In many walks of life, members of society will expect government to protect them from unnecessary harm—we don't allow polluters to dump waste wherever they choose but require them to dispose of waste in a way that minimizes harm to the public [warrant]. In the same way, we expect government to