

The Structure of Argument*

We define *argumentation* as the process whereby humans use reason to communicate claims to one another. The focus on reason becomes the feature that distinguishes argumentation from other modes of rhetoric. When people argue with one another, not only do they assert claims, they also assert reasons that they believe the claims to be plausible or probable. Argumentation is a primary tool of debate, but it serves other activities as well. Argumentation is, for instance, an important tool in negotiation, conflict resolution, and persuasion. Debate is an activity that could not exist without argumentation.

Argumentation is critical in activities like negotiation and conflict resolution because it is the primary means people can use to help find ways to resolve their differences. But in some of these situations, differences cannot be resolved internally and an outside adjudicator must be employed. These are the situations we call debate. According to this view, debate is defined as the process of arguing about claims in situations where an adjudicator must decide the outcome.

This introduction focuses on those elements of argumentation central to debate. These include: evidence, reasoning, claims, and reservations.¹ These elements are those that philosopher Stephen Toulmin introduced in 1958 and revised 30 years later.

THE ELEMENTS OF ARGUMENT

The model we have chosen is only a rough approximation of the elements and their relationships to one another. It is not intended as a descriptive diagram of actual arguments for a variety of reasons. First, the model describes only those elements of an argument related to reasoning. It does not describe other important elements such as expressions of feelings or emotions unless these are directly related to reasoning. Second, the model describes only the linguistic elements of reasoning. It does not cover significant nonverbal elements of an argument. Third, the model applies only to the simplest arguments. If an argument is composed of a variety of warrants or a cluster of evidence related to the claim in different ways, the model may not apply well, if at all. Despite these shortcomings, this model has proven itself useful for describing some of the key elements of

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