

TOULMIN ARGUMENT

- Begins with a claim – the viewpoint or thesis that you want the readers to accept
- To accomplish a claim, you must provide compelling data (grounds or evidence) either taken from results of experiments, close observations, analyses, etc. (scientific, legal, forensic, testimonial / experimental, scholarly, statistical)
- Next, construct a warrant – a guarantee that the data is based on valid, sound sense (logical / scientific, ethical / forensic-based, emotional / artistic-based)
- Use backing, or further support, to elaborate and add “backing” to your warrant
- Lastly, add qualifiers to your claim – make an exception to show you acknowledge the other viewpoint. This prevents the claim from losing touch in complex situations.

To get started, imagine a situation:

While attending your last class on a Friday night, you look around and notice a very good-looking boy across the room. You don't know his name, what type of friends he has, which dorm he lives in, or anything about him. All you know is you'd like to get to know him! ... After class, a friend asks you to come with her to a party. You get ready quickly and head out, hoping to have some fun and meet some new people... At the party, you glance around to find some familiar faces, when to your incredible luck, you notice that boy from class! You grab your friend and whisper who he is. She sees that you would really like to get to know him, and humors you as you formulate a plan to get his attention and leave the party with him. You wouldn't think that English class would come in handy at a time like this. You are about to formulate a Toulmin argument.

CLAIM – thesis, premise, central assumption; open to public scrutiny
What is the main idea or goal for the night?...

You want to get to know and leave the party with this boy. (unqualified)

You would like to get to know and hopefully leave the party with this boy, *unless* he turns out to be unfriendly. (qualified)

A qualified thesis contains a qualifier, or an exception. If he is unfriendly, you wouldn't like to continue meeting him.

DATA – ensures that the supporting evidence validates the claim
Any reasons that he would want to get to know you? Anything in common?

- You are both single and looking for someone to spend time with
- You notice he is wearing a Yankee hat, which happens to be your favorite team
- He is in your English class, showing he has the same academic interests
- He is at the same party, showing that he is also sociable and outgoing
- He has dark hair, bright eyes, and a nice smile, features you are attracted to
- You would like to meet new people since it is only your freshman year in college
- The brand of his shirt, Famous, is a brand you often wear

Present the data accurately and unambiguously, but be detailed and insightful. This example lists the reasoning as to why you'd like to get to know him.

WARRANT and BACKING – assurance that the evidence brought in to support the claim is reliable and contributes to the claim (may be grouped together since backing is only extra support). The 3 warrants (logical, ethical, emotional) are similar to the 3 appeals in a classical argument (logos, ethos, pathos).

At this point, you feel comfortable enough with your reasons (data) to approach and introduce yourself. But wait! Small talk will get you started, but be prepared with appeals in order to make sure you leave with this boy (unless, as stated in your claim, you decide that he is unfriendly).

LOGICAL – Consider telling him basic facts while getting to know him – your name, year, major, interests, hobbies, etc. These may seem dry but they are an important part in getting to know him as well as appealing to the warrants.

ETHICAL – After talking for awhile and getting basic facts out of the way, you move onto deeper personality traits. Tell him about your values or standards, including honesty, integrity, compassion, etc. (without, of course, coming off cocky or dominating ;))

EMOTIONAL – Now you're really getting into a discussion, perhaps about past relationships or a hope for future ones. Tell him what you love and hate about people and/or traits.

QUALIFIER – shows a limiting in the range of the claim, though you have probably already started out by revising your unqualified claim into a qualified claim.

You're almost there! But he is human too, and he suspects that you're not ALWAYS 100% honest and compassionate. Include qualifiers, or exceptions, to anticipate a counterargument and defeat it before it crosses his mind.

- (remember your qualified claim): You would like to get to know and hopefully leave the party with this boy, *unless* he turns out to be unfriendly.
- You are trustworthy *unless* it involves going behind someone's back.
- You are compassionate *unless* it involves going against your standards.

Do not use too many qualifiers, or you run the risk of turning your Toulmin argument into a Rogerian argument (finds a common ground, "wishy-washy").
You don't want to come off as too indecisive, do you? Show him you're confident.

That's it! Notice how each of the steps builds off of the one preceding it. This forms a strong argument as it creates power and confidence. Needless to say, you did not leave the party alone. Just remember – claim, data, warrant / backing, qualifiers.