

THE FIVE PARTS OF ARGUMENT

Question 1: What do you think?

Every argument is based on some **Claim**—a statement that readers do not already accept and that they will not accept without good reason.

Question 2: Why do you think that?

You cannot expect readers to accept your claim just because you say so. They look for you to support it with **Reasons**—statements that, taken together, give readers a basis for accepting your claim.

Question 3: How do you know (your reasons are true)?

Readers may not accept your **Reasons** unless you support them with **Evidence**—statements, numbers, photographs, or other representations of states of affairs that your readers accept without question, at least for the purposes of the argument.

Question 4: Why do you think your Reasons support your Claim?

Readers may not see why your **Reasons and Evidence** support your **Claim**. In this case, you need to supply a **Warrant**—a general principle usually drawn from background knowledge shared by you and your reader that connects your **Reasons** to your **Claim**. Think of the **Warrant** as the foundation on which your argument rests. If your reader does not accept your Warrant, s/he will most likely not accept your **Claim or Reasons**. Since it is so fundamental, a **Warrant** is most effective when it does not need to be stated—when you can reasonably assume that your reader will accept your **Warrant**. Sometimes, however, a **Warrant** is articulated for the first time in a paper.

Question 5: But what about this . . . alternative claim (reason, evidence or warrant) that does not support the claim in question?

A reader may have counter-claims (and counter-reasons, evidence, or warrants) that dispute the claim made in your argument. You must acknowledge the reader's skepticism and respond to it. Hopefully your response will be convincing enough so that it dispels the reader's doubts. We call this process **Acknowledgment and Response**. This may also be called a **Rebuttal**.

Example

Question 1: What do you think?

Stronger laws on handgun possession are needed in the United States.

Question 2: Why do you think that?

Mass shootings occur far too often.

Question 3: How do you know (your reasons are true)?

According to the United States Department of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the number of mass shootings in the United States has increased 16.8%

Question 4: Why do you think your Reasons support your Claim?

The number of deaths due to mass shootings are the result of the many handguns owned by citizens in the U.S. If the laws make it harder to possess a handgun, then the number of deaths in mass shootings will decrease. Since we all cherish the right to life and happiness, it is necessary for governments—local, state, and federal—to provide for the safety of its citizens so their right can be realized.

Question 5: But what about this . . . alternative claim (reason, evidence or warrant) that does not support the claim in question?

Opponents would argue that the number of mass shootings occur from guns that are possessed illegally. However, government agencies demonstrate a direct correlation between the number of privately owned handguns and the increase in shooting incidents in the U.S. Therefore, even though illegal handguns do play a role in gun violence in the U.S., the government's ability to curtail legal sales will have a positive impact.

Example

Question 1: What do you think? (Claim)

Think to yourself: What is my subject? Is my verb accurate? What is my “what”? What is the “So what”?

In her essay “On Compassion,” Barbara Ascher establishes a bond between writer and reader that allows for a thoughtful and sympathetic understanding of the homeless problem in America.

Question 2: Why do you think that? (Reasons)

Think to yourself: “I believe the claim in my topic sentence is true because . . .”

She uses personal experience to make the reader feel that she knows something about the issue. This allows the reader to trust Ascher as an authority, or at least someone who can speak to the problems that face the homelessness everyday.

Question 3: How do you know (your reasons are true)? Evidence/Data

Think to yourself: “I know my reason is true because . . .”

When she implies that homelessness can happen to anyone, even herself, she also implies that homelessness could “happen to just about anyone, something that one never thinks of seriously while living with middle-class comforts but comes face to face with in the most extraordinary of circumstances that are often outside our control. The disease of homelessness in America comes to us, as Hemingway once said, both gradually and suddenly” (Ascher 34).

Question 4: Why do you think your Reasons support your Claim? Warrant

Think to yourself: “My reason support my claim because . . .”

By talking about herself as someone who could easily become homeless due to economic conditions outside her control, she connects with the audience as an ordinary person. Consequently, we see her as one of us and that allows us to sympathize more with the problem. The problem of homelessness is a human problem. It affects everyone, even those who have a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Example

Question 1: What do you think? (Claim)

Think to yourself: What is my subject? Is my verb accurate? What is my “what”? What is the “So what”?

The New York Giants will fail to make the playoffs this year, bringing into question whether Ben McAdoo is the right person to lead the team

Question 2: Why do you think that? (Reasons)

Think to yourself: “I believe the claim in my topic sentence is true because . . . “

They have lost the first four games of the year, and they don’t have the coaching or team leadership to win twelve games in a row. Neither the offense nor the defense has a clear vision of how to work together as united team.

Question 3: How do you know (your reasons are true)? Evidence/Data

Think to yourself: “I know my reason is true because . . .”

According to the ESPN History in Football website, the only team in the NFL to make it to the playoffs after losing the first four games is the San Diego Chargers. Teams that make it to the playoffs demonstrate leadership and communication both on and off the field.

Question 4: Why do you think your Reasons support your Claim? Warrant

Think to yourself: “My reason support my claim because . . .”

With a coaching staff this year that constantly bickers over vision, personnel, and game strategy, the Giants seem destined to sit on the sidelines during the playoff season. Players need to feel that all of their coaches have a single vision for the season. If the coaches undermine each other, then the players have no leadership to guide them. This will lead to miscommunication on the field, bad plays, and ultimately turnovers. While it is possible for the Giants to reverse course and win the majority of the remaining games, their weaknesses are so deep that a winning season seems horribly out of reach.