Argumentation is the process whereby humans use reason to engage in critical decision-making. The focus on reason distinguishes argumentation from other modes of rhetoric and persuasion. When people use arguments to persuade, not only do they assert claims, they also assert reasons why they believe their claims are 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. Some activities in which argumentation is used could still exist without argumentation as a central element. However, debate is an activity that could not exist without argumentation.

Argumentation is important in activities like negotiation and conflict resolution because argumentation is the primary means that people use to help find ways to resolve their differences. But in some situations, differences cannot be resolved internally, and an outside adjudicator must be employed. Those situations involving outside adjudication are the most clear-cut examples of what we call debate. Sometimes debate occurs without the presence of an outside adjudicator, such as, in legislative debate, but the clearest instance of debate is one in which someone other than the participants themselves adjudicate the disagreement. According to that view, debate can be defined as a process of arguing about claims in situations where an adjudicator is usually called upon to decide the outcome of the dispute.

Chapters 15, 16, and 17 discussed four elements of an argument: claims, evidence, links, and reservations. This chapter will show how those elements are related to one another in what has become known as the “Toulmin Model” of argument. The model is only a rough approximation of the four elements of argumentation and their relationships to one another. The model may not provide a complete or perfectly accurate description 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 those 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. Despite those shortcomings, the model has proven itself useful for describing some of the key elements of arguments and how they function together.

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1 As stated earlier, Toulmin’s terms are changed slightly in this text for purposes of clarity. He used the terms “claim, data, warrant, and reservation,” whereas, this text uses the terms “claim, evidence, link, and exception.”
The figures shown on the following pages illustrate the Toulmin Model, which will be used to diagram and understand the structure of relatively simple arguments.

Simple Arguments

Toulmin’s Model, in its original form, described only a simple argument consisting of a single claim linked to a single piece of evidence and, perhaps (but not always), accompanied by an exception. The following shows Toulmin’s diagram of a simple argument:

Toulmin illustrates this diagram using a simple argument claim that Harry is a British citizen because he was born in Bermuda. Below, his example has been revised to illustrate the claim that He Jing is an American Citizen because she was born in Los Angeles, California. Here is a diagram of the structure of that argument:
In the above illustration, an arguer *claims* that He Jing is a United States citizen because of the *evidence* that she was born in the United States. The *link* between the claim and the evidence is the statement that “people born in the United States generally are United States citizens.” Links are sometimes only implicit in an argument. In this particular case, one could easily envision the argument being made without a stated link: “He Jing is a United States citizen because she was born in Los Angeles.” The link is so generally accepted that the arguer may not even need to include it in the actual argument. Although the link is generally accepted, an arguer might not wish to support this claim in all situations. In other words, the arguer may want to include an *exception* to the claim. One of those exceptions is spelled out in diagram above. In that example, the arguer suggests that the claim is a reasonable one unless He Jing’s parents were Chinese citizens. If her parents were Chinese citizens, she might either be a United States citizen or a Chinese citizen depending on choices made by her parents.

The illustration below presents an example more related to what might be an actual debate about education policy:
In that example, the **claim** is that all children under the age of 16 should be required to attend school. The claim is supported by **evidence** suggesting that people who attend school are less likely to be poor than people who do not attend school. That evidence might come in the form of a statistic or an empirical study. The evidence does not lead directly to the claim because the argument contains nothing to suggest that requiring children to attend school will have any effect on their actual attendance. Thus, a **link** is drawn suggesting that laws requiring children to attend school will help ensure their attendance. Such a link probably takes the form of a causal relationship, indicating that certain laws (the cause) lead to more children attending school (effect), as discussed in Chapter 17. That link connects the evidence to the claim in a way that makes the claim plausible. The illustration also contains an **exception** regarding children who might need to be exempt from attendance because of medical or religious exemptions.

One subtlety needs to be added to the discussion of the four elements of argument. In many instances, **evidence** may consist of a previously supported **claim**. For instance, in the above example regarding education, a debater may have previously constructed a cause and effect argument that had as its claim, “people who attend school are less likely to be poor.” Then, that claim is used in an argument as evidence to support a new claim that “all children under 16 should be required to attend school.”

Although the above diagrams clearly illustrate how arguments move from evidence to claim via links, very few arguments are ever that simple. For this reason, we have adapted Toulmin’s Model to illustrate a few different argument structures. In addition to the simple
argument structure above, other structures include combined and independent arguments. Although they do not even begin to exhaust all potential argument structures, they are some of the more common ones encountered in debate.

**Combined Arguments**

A combined argument is one in which two or more bits of evidence are joined to support a claim. When a single piece of evidence is insufficient, it must be combined with another piece of evidence to support the claim. The following diagram illustrates the structure of a combined argument:

![Combined Argument Diagram]

The feature that distinguishes a combined argument from a simple one is that more than one piece of evidence is required to infer the claim. Thus, the above diagram uses two pieces of evidence connected to one another with a plus (+) sign to indicate that both pieces of evidence must be added to one another to get to the claim.

To illustrate a combined argument, we have chosen a claim that “Nations of the world should reduce their dependence on nuclear power.” The following diagram illustrates the argument:
That particular argument suggests a claim that nations of the world should reduce their dependence on nuclear power. The claim is supported by two pieces of evidence both of which might come in the form of expert testimony. The first piece of evidence is that nuclear power is a dangerous alternative. Any astute debater would quickly notice that that first piece of evidence is not, by itself, sufficient to support the suggestion to reduce the use of nuclear energy, because so far, the argument has not suggested that safer, less dangerous alternatives exist. Thus, a necessary second piece of evidence, perhaps also in the form of testimony, is introduced: alternative sources of energy are less dangerous than nuclear power. Neither of the two pieces of evidence alone supports the claim. The claim is only supported when a debater successfully produces both pieces of evidence.

Then, to fully support the claim, a link is added to suggest that safer alternatives should replace dangerous ones. The claim results from a combination of two pieces of evidence that are then linked to the claim. In some instances, the debater may not wish to hold to this claim.
in all circumstances. In those situations, the debater may suggest a reservation such as the one presented in the illustration.

The unique feature of the combined argument structure is that the arguer produces a collection of evidence that, if taken together, supports the claim. The structure of the argument is such that the audience must believe all of the evidence in order to support the argument. If the debater fails to convince the audience of even one piece of evidence, the entire argument structure falls. On the other hand, using the next argument structure—the independent argument—any single piece of evidence can provide sufficient support for the argument.

**Independent Arguments**

An arguer using an independent argument structure presents several pieces of evidence, any one of which provides sufficient support for the argument. In other words, a debater may present three pieces of evidence and claim that the members of the audience should accept the claim even if they are convinced only by a single piece of evidence. The following diagram illustrates the structure of an independent argument:

![Diagram of an independent argument structure]

The illustration presents three pieces of evidence that are independently joined to the claim by one or more links—hence, the name “independent argument.” Unlike the combined argument, the pieces of evidence are not joined by a plus (+) sign. The absence of the plus sign indicates that each piece of evidence can work, even without the others.
An independent structure can be illustrated by using the nuclear power example:

Using that example, a debater can make the claim that nuclear power is dangerous using three independent pieces of evidence, any one of which, properly argued, can be sufficient to support the claim. If nuclear power has a risk of accidents (the first piece of evidence), then it is dangerous whether or not it creates waste or emits low-level radiation. Similarly, if nuclear energy produces dangerous waste (the second piece of evidence), then it is dangerous even without the risk of accidents or low-level radiation. Additionally, if nuclear power emits low-level radiation (the third piece of evidence), it is dangerous even if it does not risk accidents or create waste. Thus, the three pieces of evidence operate independently of one another.

Of course, each of the pieces of evidence must be connected to the claim using a link as suggested in the illustration. Although it does not contain a reservation, it is easy to imagine how one might be introduced into the argument. The advantage of the independent argument structure is obvious. With combined structures, the loss of one piece of evidence endangers
the entire argument, whereas, with the independent structure, the argument can prevail even if only one of the pieces of evidence survives.

Summary

The previous three chapters described the individual elements of an argument: claim, exception, evidence and link. This chapter went a step further to describe how these individual elements are related to one another to form various argument structures. Although the Toulmin Model was originally illustrated using only a simple argument consisting of a single piece of evidence, a claim and a link, this chapter has illustrated how the model can be used to illustrate other kinds of argument structures, as well. A combined argument structure joins two or more pieces of evidence to support a claim. In a combined argument, all of the different pieces of evidence are necessary to provide convincing support for the claim. An independent argument structure includes two or more pieces of evidence to produce a claim that can be supported by any one of the pieces of evidence.

The Toulmin Model is useful because it illustrates the various parts of an argument and shows how they function together as a whole. Modifications of that argument structure, illustrating combined and independent arguments, make it even more useful.
Structure of Arguments

Terms and Concepts From Chapter 18

- Simple argument
- Combined argument
- Independent argument

Discussion Questions For Chapter 18

- Why is a series of independent arguments likely to be more effective than a combined argument?
- Can an independent argument be thought of as multiple simple arguments? Why?

Exercise For Chapter 18

Start with one of the motions used in this text. Construct at least three arguments in support of that motion. One of the arguments should follow the “simple argument” structure; one should follow the “combined argument” structure; and the other should be an “independent argument.”