

Continuously Improving Students' Logical Argumentation Skills with Business/Management Undergraduate Juniors¹

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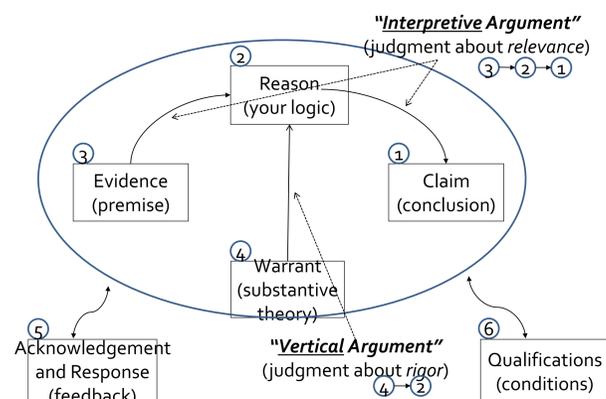
① Motivation

- Argument is difficult to teach and perhaps even more difficult to learn.
- Logic and Argument require practice and effective instructor feedback.
- Argument is an excellent example of a working skill that requires an incremental, stretch-based approach across the lower-division and upper-division matriculation course stream.
- Argument also relies on quality vocabulary-, sentence-, and paragraph-level skills, knowledge, and abilities. Therefore, we get to—simultaneously—expose latent capacity and develop existing ability in those “lower-order” composition domains as well.
- This past election cycle was infused with polemic, vapid discourse, and missing detail. This itinerant situation presents an enormous opportunity to assist our motivated student-professionals.

② Modified Toulmin Structure

- The model of informal reasoning developed by Prof. Steven Toulmin has remained dominant in many subject areas.
- I modify the model slightly to make it easier to use in business courses, especially for business case studies. In particular, I change the word “backing” to “warrant”. By “warrant”, I mean “theory”.
- Before the students submit their first, team-based, written case deliverable, the students do a low-stakes, interactive exercise.
- For each major analytical section (e.g., law, stat., acct, econ, strategy, ethics), each team circles the sentence in that report section that is the best example of a Claim, Reason, Evidence, Warrant, Acknowledge and Response (counter-argument), and Qualifications and Limitations.
- Other argument models/structures, as demonstrated here, are fine too.

③ An Argument that will Influence Professionals



④ Student Example: Toulmin Argument

Claim
 “As a result, *I felt harassed and discouraged* for most of my time with the company.”

Reasoning
 “In my situation, *my value was not based on the quality of my work, but on my failure to socialize.*” (emphasis added)

Evidence
 “Subsequently, *I began to experience* a series of negative consequences, [such as]...frequent quality reviews, unprofessional emails, and threats to terminate my employment due to vague reasons.” (emphasis added)

Warrant (Theory)
 “...management should always try to *lead by example* and provide all necessary tools for its employees to be successful.” (emphasis added)

Acknowledgement/Response (Counter-argument)
 “Initially, I was appreciative and excited of the invitations [to socialize] especially when they were paid by the owner.”

Qualifications (Limitations)
 “I had to opportunity to experience both sides of the business, as both an employee and part of management. However, I didn’t spend enough time with management.”

⑤ Student Example: The Logic of Informal Reasoning

Controversy (Problem)
 “During my four years with the agency, I was faced with the ongoing challenge of working under a supervisor who was a micromanager. Being inundated with requests for updates on deadlines, schedule changes, and my out-of-office whereabouts, as an employee, left me feeling untrustworthy, scrutinized, and frustrated with my job. The realization that this was to be my supervisor for the duration of my employment was a sour one and for the next two years, many of my workdays and at least two of my evaluations were less than gratifying.”

Issues (Questions)
 “The issue of micromanaging is a very difficult one to bring up without accusing your boss, the person in charge of your livelihood, of stifling you.”

Claim (Belief)
 “I reminded myself that I could not and would not be able to change the supervisor I had come to know. It was most likely around this time where I realized *I could* do something about my level of displeasure because I didn’t have to stay at this agency for the rest of my career.” (emphasis in the original)

Resolution (Action)
 “Although at times still hard to manage, a change of perspective helped ease some of the micromanaging expectations. As the employee I no longer wished to change my supervisor into the manager I wanted, but rather tried to understand her stance in the management hierarchy and work to appease what seemed like insecurities in her leadership style.”

Conjectural (Facts)
 “The performance evaluations were conducted by Marvin, the previous assistant manager.”

Definitional (Meaning)
 “Marvin had given subjective evaluations to a group of employees’ positive evaluations and others negative evaluations.”

Qualitative (Good/Bad)
 “The employees that had received positive evaluations were employees whom he was very close with. Thus, the group that had negative evaluations lacked effort throughout their daily shifts because they felt that their efforts were ignored.”

Translative (Place or Procedure)
 “As a result, I implemented three controls which were group incentive plans, objective performance evaluations on a quarterly basis, and job rotation.”

⑥ Student Example: Stasis (Equilibrium)

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⑦ Student Example: *Topoi* (Issues)

Ill (Problem)
 “I was a projectionist...I was dubbed ‘The Builder’ of the Projectionist Team...A single misplaced hand could wreck a reel, waste obscene amounts of money, and ruin the weekend for hundreds of hopeful moviegoers...Then came digital...”

Blame (Responsibility)
 “[One day] I completely forgot to add the license [that unlocks the content on the movie hard drive] to one of the one of the huge blockbusters that was opening the next day...Thankfully, the next projectionist had caught my mistake and was able to call the studio and upload the license to the theater server before show time, but I was really disappointed with myself...I was ‘The Builder’.”

Cure (Solution)
 “It was time for a wakeup call...I wanted to be good at my job...For my next building shift, I came up with a chart for myself. It included spaces for theater numbers, film titles, little checkboxes for trailers, time markers, and, of course, the license.”

Cost (Best Value)
 “I finished my duties in record time, and every theater was ready for the next day’s premieres...The chart was a success!...Another projectionist spotted the paper and made copies for the rest of the team...I changed my attitude and focused on what really mattered...I was a projectionist, after all.”

⑧ Related Concepts

Evidence
 Examples, Statistics, Tangible Objects, Testimony, Social Consensus

Credibility
 Personal Judgment (apparent ethos), Types of Sources, Formal Basis

Reasoning/Inference
 From Parts to Whole, Comparisons, Correlations, Cause to Effect, Commonplaces and Form

Speech-Act Theory
 Beliefs → Desires, Prior-decision → Decision-in-action, Intentionality → Understanding

Simplifying Assumptions
 Incrementalism, Cost-Benefit Analysis, Satisficing

⑨ References

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Lunsford, A., and Ruskiewicz, J. (2012), *Everything’s an Argument*, 6th ed., Bedford/St. Martins.

Williams, J., and Colomb, G. (2007), *The Craft of Argument*, 3rd ed., Pearson Education.

Zarefsky, D. (2005), *Argumentation: The Study of Effective Reasoning* 2nd ed., The Teaching Company.

¹This poster is available at: smithw.org/elementary-argument.pdf

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More?

See: <http://ocw.smithw.org/mgt360/writing-org-challenge-examples-positive-argument-elementary.ppt>
<http://ocw.smithw.org/mgt360/writing-org-challenge-examples-positive-argument-intermediate.ppt>