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. 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
arguments and how they function together. The diagrams shown on the following pages illustrate the Toulmin Model.

The Toulmin Model identifies four basic elements of argument: claim, evidence, warrant, and reservation. We can explain it by this travel analogy: Evidence is the argument’s starting point. The claim is the arguer’s destination. The warrant is the means of travel, and the reservation involves questions or concerns the arguer may have about the arrival at the destination. Toulmin’s model can be used to diagram and then understand the structure of relatively simple arguments.

**STRUCTURE OF AN ARGUMENT**

**Simple Argument**

A simple argument consists of a single claim leading from a single piece of evidence following along a single warrant and accompanied by perhaps (but not always) a single reservation. The following shows Toulmin’s diagram of a simple argument:

![Simple Argument Diagram](image)

Toulmin illustrates this diagram using a simple argument claim that Harry is a British citizen because he was born in Bermuda. Here is how Toulmin diagrammed the structure of that argument:

**Simple Argument**

![Simple Argument Diagram](image)

Although this diagram clearly illustrates how an argument moves from evidence to a claim via a warrant, very few arguments are ever this 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 convergent and independent arguments. Although these do not even begin to exhaust all potential argument structures, they are some of the more common ones you will encounter in debate.

**Convergent Arguments**

A convergent argument is one wherein two or more bits of evidence converge with one another to support a claim. In other words, when a single piece of evidence is not sufficient, it must be combined with another piece of evidence to support the claim. The following diagram illustrates the structure of a convergent argument:

![Convergent Argument Diagram]

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

To illustrate a convergent argument, we have chosen a claim that “Placebos should not be used in medical research.” According to this argument, the use of placebos (e.g., a sugar pill) in drug testing research involves lying because some of the subjects are led falsely to believe they are receiving real drugs. Therefore, researchers should not use placebos unless they are the only method available to test potentially life-saving drugs. The following diagram presents this argument:

![Convergent Argument Example Diagram]
This particular argument begins with two pieces of evidence. The first involves the value statement that “lying generally is considered an immoral act.” This evidence is a statement consistent with the audience’s values about lying. The second piece of evidence is the factual statement that “the use of placebos in medical research involves a form of lying.” The evidence involves the fact that when a researcher gives a placebo to a group of subjects in a study of a potentially life-saving drug, she is lying to those subjects because they are led to believe that they are receiving a drug that may save their lives. The warrant then combines the evidence with a familiar pattern of reasoning—if an act in general is immoral, then any particular instance of that act is likewise immoral. If lying is immoral in general, then using placebos in particular is also immoral.

The claim results from a convergence of the pieces of evidence and the warrant. In some instances, the debater may not wish to hold to this claim in all circumstances. If she wishes to define specific situations in which the claim does not hold, then she adds a reservation to the argument. In this case, a reservation seems appropriate. Even though the arguer may generally object to lying and to the use of placebos, she may wish to exempt situations where the use of a placebo is the “only method of testing a potentially life-saving drug.”

The unique feature of the convergent argument 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 audience does not accept any one piece of evidence, the entire argument structure falls. On the other hand, the next argument structure—the independent argument—is such that 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 Independent Argument Structure]

Take, for instance, the following argument against capital punishment:

For both moral and practical reasons, capital punishment should be abolished. On moral grounds, capital punishment ought to be abolished. If a society considers a murderer immoral for taking a human life, how can that society
then turn around and take the life of the murderer? Beyond moral grounds, capital punishment ought to be abolished because, unlike other punishments, it alone is irreversible. If evidence is discovered after the execution, there is no way to bring the unjustly executed person back to life.

This argument about capital punishment can be represented in the following diagram:

**Independent Argument**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Capital punishment takes a human life.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warrant</td>
<td>If a murder is wrong because it takes a life, capital punishment is wrong for the same reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim</td>
<td>Capital punishment ought to be abolished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Capital punishment leaves no possibility for correction of an incorrect verdict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrant</td>
<td>Mistakes in judgment should be correctable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This independent argument is based on two pieces of evidence, either of which is strong enough to support the claim that capital punishment ought to be abolished. The first piece of evidence concerns the value of taking a human life, while the second involves the value of being able to correct a mistake. According to this argument, capital punishment should be abolished even if the audience believes only one of the items of evidence. The moral stricture against taking a life is, by itself, a sufficient reason to oppose capital punishment, as is the danger of making an uncorrectable mistake. The strategic advantage of this form of argument structure is obvious. Whereas with convergent structures, the loss of one part of the argument endangers the entire argument, in the independent structure, the argument can prevail even if only a part of it survives.

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 this argument structure make it even more useful. Still, the model has its shortcomings. One difficulty with the Toulmin Model is that it does not provide any details regarding some of these questions:

- What are the different kinds of claims?
- What are the different forms of evidence?
- What are the different kinds of argumentative warrants?
• What distinguishes good arguments from bad ones?
• How can different claims be combined to support various propositions?

The chapters that follow answer these questions.