# Claim - Data – Warrant
**(adapted from the work of Stephen Toulmin)**

## Claims

*Definition:* A claim states your position on the issue you have chosen to write about.

- A good claim is not obvious.  Why bother proving a point nobody could disagree with?
- A good claim is engaging.  Consider your audience's attention span and make interesting claims which point out new ideas: teach the reader something new.
- A good claim is not overly vague.  Attacking enormous issues whole leads only to generalizations and vague assertions; refrain from making a book-size claim.
- A good claim is logical; it emerges from a reasonable consideration of evidence. (Note: this does not mean that evidence has only one logical interpretation.  Reasonable people often disagree.)
- A good claim is debatable.  Claims that are purely factual and claims that are only opinion fail this requirement.
- A good claim is typically hypotactic (i.e., it uses subordinate clauses).  Simple sentences rarely comprehend enough complexity to do justice to a well-conceived opinion.

*Exercise***: Which of the following sentences make(s) a good claim?**

1. Teachers are posed with many problems today.

2. Polls show that today more minorities own businesses than ever before.

3. We must strive with every ounce of our national vigor to ensure that America has a bright future and that truth and justice will abide with us forever.

4. Ophelia is my favorite character in Hamlet because she is the most interesting.

5. If we can put humans on the moon, we can find a cure for the common cold.

6. Though they seem mere entertainment, Hollywood movies are actually responsible for reinforcing cultural stereotypes in America.

# Data

*Definition*: the evidence which you cite to support your claim.  Like a lawyer presenting evidence to a jury, you must support your claim with facts; an unsupported claim is merely an assertion.

Data can include:

- Facts or statistics: objectively determined data about your topic. (Note: just what constitutes "objective" may be open to debate.)
- Expert opinion: the media and our essays are full of learned opinions which you should cite frequently, both to support your argument and to disagree with.  Authors must be quoted and properly cited in your paper.
- Personal anecdotes: the most difficult kind of data to use well, for doing so requires a persuasive argument that your own experience is objectively grasped and generalizable. Personal experience can, however, help bring an argument to life.

# Warrant

*Definition*: the warrant interprets the data and shows how it supports your claim.  The warrant, in other words, explains why the data proves the claim. In trials, lawyers for opposing sides often agree on the data but hotly dispute the warrants. (And a defense attorney's failure to offer strong warrants may result in a warrant for the defendant's arrest.) A philosopher would say that the warrant helps to answer the question, "What else must be true for this proposition to hold?"

- A good warrant will be a reasonable interpretation of facts.
- A good warrant will not make illogical interpretive leaps.
- A good warrant will not assume more than the evidence supports.
- A good warrant may consider and respond to possible counter-arguments.

***Exercise*:** Think of a warrant which would interpret the data to support the claim.

Claim: We should build a 10-foot-high concrete wall along the US-Canada border.

Data: Every year, more than 1000 people cross illegally into the US from Canada.

Warrant: