



Parts of An Argument: Claims, Counterclaims, Reasons, and Evidence

Lesson Transcript

To effectively write an argument, you need to know the four basic parts. In this lesson, you will learn the definitions of the four basic parts and why you need them in an argument.

Parts of an Argument

How would you like to be able to win any argument? Today we're going to learn about the parts of an argument necessary to win one! The **purpose of an argument**, whether it's in a paper or a speech, is to convince or persuade. The main parts of an argument are:

- Claims
- Counterclaims
- Reasons
- Evidence

Claims

'Mom, I really need a new cell phone!' If you've ever said this or something like it, you've made a claim. Making a **claim** is just a fancy way of saying that you're stating your main point. In a formal paper, you might say something like, 'It is necessary for me to obtain a new cell phone.' Claims are not just opinions. A claim tells what you think is true about a topic based on your knowledge and your research. If you're ever going to convince your mom to get that new cell phone that's just perfect for you, you're going to have to move beyond mere opinions. You're going to need to support your claim to get rid of that crummy, old, obsolete phone that's holding you back.

Counterclaims

But there are two sides to every argument. In your argument for a new cell phone, your mom stands on the other side. She has something to say against your claim that you need a new cell phone, and it goes something like, 'No, you don't.'

That's your mom's counterclaim. A **counterclaim** is just the opposite of a claim. In a more formal way, she might say, 'Your current situation does not require a new cell phone.' Counterclaims are also provable and supportable by reasons and evidence. Not just, 'Because I said so.' When you're

planning an argument, you need to know what the counterclaim might be so that you can make sure that you disprove it with your reasons and evidence.

Reasons

After your mom's counterclaim, she'll probably ask, 'Why is that you think you need a new cell phone?'

Then it's time for the reasons you've prepared well in advance, because you know exactly what she'll ask. 'My cell phone doesn't have Internet access.'

That's a reason. A **reason** tells why. A reason makes someone care and tells the importance of the claim and the argument. 'Because I said so,' doesn't work, and 'Just because,' doesn't work - until you're a parent. In an argument, your, 'My cell phone doesn't have Internet access,' would need to be beefed up a little, to, 'My current cell phone doesn't provide Internet access, which is necessary for me to complete all my homework.' That is provable, because your phone is so old it barely has texting!

Evidence

After giving your reason, if your mom is anything like mine, she'll probably say, 'So?' Then, it's time for your evidence, which, again, you have thoughtfully and thoroughly prepared. You really want a new cell phone, after all. Knowing that your mom could care less about the newest games, appeal to what she thinks is important - your grades. 'My friends that have Internet access make the Honor Roll.'

That's evidence. **Evidence** tells your reader how your claim is proved. If you've ever watched a detective show, then you know evidence. It's how the detective is able to put the criminal in jail. Evidence is usually some kind of research. In the detective show, evidence is usually physical - like DNA or fingerprints.

In our example, you would need to give or cite some concrete evidence like, 'According to research, students with Internet access on their phones are more likely to make the Honor Roll.' Evidence should be from a source that's reliable, and it makes your argument even better if you have evidence from multiple sources. When you're preparing an argument, make sure to note where you got your evidence. Not only will people need to know where you got your evidence, they might even want to see it. If I told my mom that bit about the Internet access and the Honor Roll, you can bet she would make me prove it by showing it to her.

Lesson Summary

Your argument can be summed up quickly. Your claim is that you need a new cell phone. Your mom's counterclaim is that you don't need one. Your reason is because yours doesn't have Internet access, and your evidence says that students with Internet access make better grades.

So, there you have it - the four parts of an argument: claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence. A **claim** is the main argument. A **counterclaim** is the opposite of the argument, or the opposing argument. A **reason** tells why the claim is made and is supported by the evidence. **Evidence** is the facts or research to support your claim. I hope you win your next argument!

Learning Outcomes

Following this lesson, you should be able to:

- Identify the purpose of an argument
- Describe the four main parts of an argument
- Explain why it is important to develop each of these parts in an argument