CHAPTER 5

How Is a Unit of Argument Created?

In argumentation, controversy over a proposition is disputed in terms of issues. The stock issues for fact, value, and policy help you find the important points for developing a prima facie case or arguing against one. Using the stock issues to discover actual issues gives you *main points* for the overall organization of your ideas. Each of those main points must be developed through one or more specific arguments that help the audience understand how and why that main point is probably true. Each individual argument that develops a main point can be thought of as a *unit of argument,* a building block in case construction.

For example, earlier in your life you may have been involved in a controversy over the policy proposition: *You should eat your vegetables*. A prima facie argument advocating this proposition probably included the main point: "Vegetables are necessary for your good health." This main point might have been developed through units of argument, headlined by two subpoints about the connection between veggies and health: "Vegetables have vitamins and minerals" and "Vitamins and minerals are vital to proper growth."

THE TOULMIN MODEL OF ARGUMENT

Whatever topic you choose to argue, your position as advocate or opponent emerges through a series of claims supported by grounds and warrant, terminology developed by British logician Stephen Toulmin (1958; Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1984) to classify the parts of an argument. There are many interpretations of how to use Toulmin's thinking on the structure of an argument. In this chapter, our interpretation is that the model should be used as a blueprint for creating your individual units of argument. We recommend that you develop your cases of advocacy and opposition by labeling the issues to be argued as *contentions* (argumentation jargon for a main point) and by using the Toulmin model to create one or more units of argument that will prove each contention's probable truth.

Claims

Argumentation begins when an advocate makes one or more claims. A **claim** is your own opinion, the conclusion you form from information on the topic. A claim is a conclusion that does not stand alone and something the listener or reader can ultimately agree or disagree with. In this sense, claims both begin and end the process of argumentation. Claims begin the process by showing where an arguer has taken a stand. Claims also end the process, showing what the listener or reader is expected to accept as true or probable. Disputes concerning claims center on whether they are capable of being supported by proof and reasoning and shown to be true-probable or untrue-improbable.

There are four categories of claims, each of which performs a different function:

factual claims argue what was, is, or will be
definitional claims argue how something is to be defined or categorized
value claims argue evaluation or pass judgment on something
policy claims argue that something should be done

Factual claims resemble propositions of fact in that they are concerned with things that can be verified. They are concerned with past, present, or future fact. The arguer asserts that something did exist, now exists, or will exist in the future, and then proceeds to offer whatever proof can be discovered to demonstrate it. Theoretically, the best proof of factual claims derives from direct observation and experimentation (Ehninger, 1974). Practically, most of us have to rely on print and electronic sources of information for material to prove our factual claims. What might you use to prove each of the following factual claims?

Failure to resolve the hostage crisis led to President Carter's defeat in 1980.
The "No Child Left Behind" policy is undermining K–12 education in the United States.
Motor vehicles will run primarily on alternative fuels by the year 2020.

The second type of claim common to argumentation is the *definitional claim*. Such claims are used when the precise definition of a term becomes a contested issue. Definitional claims are concerned with how something is defined, as a particular type or category of act, individual, object, or idea. The following are examples of definitional claims:

Mass media are commonly considered to be (are recognized as) television, radio, film, recordings, magazines, newspapers, and books.
Computer literacy is (defined as) the basic knowledge needed to use computers.
The U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 was (should be categorized as) a case of international aggression.

Like the value propositions they resemble, *value claims* show the arguer's evaluation or judgment. Value claims express an attitude toward something and are identified by the use of evaluative language. The following are examples of value claims:

Return of the King has the best special effects of the three films in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.
The social security system is a poor substitute for effective retirement planning.
Internet advertising is more effective than television advertising.

The *policy claim* is similar to the policy proposition. It states that an action should be taken or a behavior should be altered. Because policy claims advocate change, they always concern the future. The following are examples of policy claims:

You should floss your teeth once a day.
You should develop fluency in a second language.
You should register to vote.

Claims, regardless of type, are what arguments are about. Because they have a sentence structure similar to that of propositions, it is not surprising to discover that claims assert relationships between people, things, and ideas or actions. For example, in advancing the claim, "The social security system is a poor substitute for retirement planning," the arguer seeks to relate an institution (the social security system) to a judgment about it (is a poor substitute). Standing alone, this claim represents the arguer's opinion of the social security system. Opinion statements of this sort are usually insufficient to alter an audience's belief or behavior. More is required.

A final point about claims concerns how they are worded. Because claims express complete thoughts, they have the properties of formal sentences. Claims may be phrased as simple statements, with one relationship asserted, or as compound statements, with multiple relationships asserted. A compound sentence has two or more independent clauses in its predicate. Compare the following simple claim statements with their corresponding compound statements:

Personal income tax fraud is increasing. (factual claim)
Personal income tax fraud is the willful evasion of one's obligation to pay assessed taxes on salaries and remunerations. (definitional claim)
Personal income tax fraud is harmful to the well-being of society. (value claim)
Tax law enforcement should be strengthened to prevent personal income tax evasion. (policy claim)

A compound claim statement differs in that it argues more than one relationship in its assertion. Compare the following examples of compound claim statements with their simple counterparts:

Personal income tax fraud is increasing and becoming more difficult to prosecute.
Personal income tax fraud is the willful evasion of one's obligation to pay assessed taxes and a violation of federal and state laws.
Personal income tax fraud is harmful both to U.S. citizens and to institutions.
Tax laws should be revised to more equitably distribute the tax burden and more stringently punish the tax evader.

Recall that in discussing propositions, we indicated it was unwise to have multiple ideas stated in a single proposition. In wording claim statements that serve as subarguments, compound statements often make argumentation more economical. By offering a single claim to argue that tax fraud harms two entities, individuals and institutions, the arguer saves time and keeps related ideas together in her listener's or reader's mind. In addition, compound statements allow the arguer to set up patterns of reasoning through comparisons. "The seriousness of income tax evasion is demonstrated by the fact that tax fraud is increasing more rapidly than

crimes against persons and property." The types of crime are unrelated, but the compound statement gives the audience a basis for comparison and a measure of the extent of tax fraud.

The arguer's task in making a claim is to present a well-defined and supported position for the listener or reader to consider. In doing this, the arguer offers not only a claim but also the grounds and warrant that support it. The relationship between them is such that an argument is the movement from grounds, accepted by the listener or reader, through warrant to claim (Brockriede & Ehninger, 1960). These three elements make up the primary triad of a unit of argument in the Toulmin model. A unit of argument is the structure for forming opinions from information you have collected on the topic. This unit of argument corresponds to the rational processes people use in making decisions (J. L. Golden, Berquist, Coleman, Sproule, & R. Golden, 2007).

Although the arguments you hear or read may not have all three elements clearly identified, the elements of the primary triad are basic to the structure of all argument. They represent the reasoning process invoked when someone makes a statement that requires support before someone else is willing to accept it as true or probable. If we say, "X is the cause of Y" (a claim) and, to support this opinion, we add, "Y happens every time we find an X present" (information about the co-occurrence of X and Y), we have created a unit of thought about X and Y. If we were uncertain that the audience saw the connection between X and Y in the same way we did, we might state more of our thinking: "X has certain properties that result in the creation of a Y" (a statement about how one thing causes another thing).

If the audience accepted our opinion that X causes Y because it shared our opinion, there would be no argumentation over the relationship between X and Y. Because argumentation takes place when people have differences of opinion or want to test all the ways in which the relationship between X and Y might not hold up, stating a claim is usually not enough for a unit of argument to make sense. In the Toulmin model form, we would write up this unit of argument as shown in Figure 5.1.

Real people actually create units of argument when they need to build a case. Using the Toulmin model as a blueprint for creating arguments to change an audience's beliefs, so that in turn they would cease a particular behavior, the Board of Directors of a condominium association made a case against the popular practice of feeding wild birds. This example demonstrates how the concept of the prima

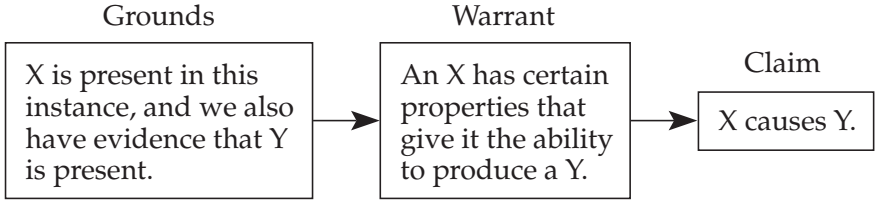

FIGURE 5.1
Toulmin Form of Unit of Argument

facie case comes together with the conventions *presumption* and *burden of proof* discussed in Chapter 2 as a case is developed through a series of units of argument. This example addresses the first stock issue of a policy proposition, the reason for change. It also demonstrates why claims alone are inadequate and require the support of grounds and warrant to make the message worthy of agreement.

When humans and wildlife interact, significant problems can occur. Between 1980 and 2007, pilots reported over 82,000 bird strikes, and in January 2009, a flock of Canada geese migrating from Nova Scotia struck U.S. Airways Flight 1549 as it departed from LaGuardia airport. Disaster was only averted when the pilot was able to make an emergency landing in the Hudson River (Walsh, 2009). Our "Canada goose problem" began less dramatically, but over a few years, turned into what the Board saw as a substantial financial and health problem for the association. The condominiums are built around a spring-fed pond in an abandoned quarry in a wooded area that attracts a great variety of birds. Residents had become accustomed to setting up feeders and enjoying the many bird species that made the area their home. Five years ago, a pair of Canada geese made the pond their nesting area, but left with their goslings soon after they hatched for the safer, larger waters of Lake Superior. Several residents thought the goslings were cute and enjoyed watching the goose family for a few, brief weeks. The next spring the original pair returned to Quarry Pond for the nesting season. Hoping to entice the geese to hang around a bit longer, several residents put out bread, cereal, cookies, and other "human" food for the geese.

The geese quickly became full-time summer residents and over time the flock increased in size. In addition to the food provided by humans, the birds also ate the grass and fresh plantings. The Canada goose is a very large bird and each one leaves a significant amount of fecal matter in its wake, as much as one pound per goose per day (Walsh, 2009). Concerned about the increased costs of maintenance, along with the health hazards posed by the fecal matter and the growth of the flock, the Board wanted to ban all wildlife feeding and encourage residents to use all legal means to discourage the geese from extending their stay. They knew they had to make a compelling case for this change because many residents were ardent wildlife lovers and liked the idea of having the flock in residence for the summer.

PROPOSITION:	All condominium residents should refrain from artificially feeding the geese.
PRESUMPTION:	The existing state of affairs is that some residents have been feeding the geese "human" food and enjoy having them as neighbors. The Canada goose is native to the area. Presumption indicates that the geese are thriving and have made the pond their home. There is no reason to ban feeding the geese.
BURDEN OF PROOF:	As advocate, the Board must overcome the presumption that feeding Canada geese is an acceptable practice. They had to create arguments that, at face value, would be sufficient to overcome the pro-feeding residents' presumption that feeding the geese is acceptable. The Board created four

units of argument based on their analysis of the first stock issue for arguing policy, reason for change.

PRIMA FACIE CASE: As advocate, the Board seeks suspension of presumption by presenting arguments on the topic of "the consequences of artificially feeding wild birds" that demonstrates the inherency of "feeding the geese causes problems."

CLAIM 1: Feeding the geese harms them more than it helps them.

CLAIM 2: The geese cause damage to the common areas that belong to all residents.

CLAIM 3: The geese pose a health hazard.

CLAIM 4: The geese are a nuisance.

The pro-feeding residents would be unmoved by the four claim statements. To them, these statements represent the unsupported opinions of the Board. As the advocate for the ban on feeding geese, the Board would fail to establish a prima facie case if all they presented were these four claims. Generally, claims are not accepted at face value and the pro-feeding contingent would not be persuaded to change their behavior. By providing grounds and the warrant to support each claim, the combination of claim ➔ grounds ➔ warrant becomes a compelling reason to refrain from feeding the geese, a prima facie case.

CLAIM 1: Feeding the geese harms them more than it helps them.

SUPPORT: Artificially feeding the geese causes them to lose their fear of humans. Feeding encourages the geese to stay in our urban area where they are likely to be hit by cars. Feeding the geese food meant for human consumption alters their digestive systems and impairs their ability to gain nutrition from natural food.

CLAIM 2: The geese cause damage to the common areas that belong to all residents.

SUPPORT: The geese destroy lawns by eating the grass down to the bare ground. The geese produce fecal matter that contaminates the ground and the pond. Cleaning up after the geese is expensive. The appearance of the common areas is deteriorating, and the value of individual units will decrease.

CLAIM 3: The geese pose a health hazard.

SUPPORT: Fecal matter on the ground creates a health hazard to residents who use the common areas for recreation, especially children playing on the ground. Contaminated pond water presents further risks to swimmers and boaters. There is also a potential risk associated with avian flu posed by the presence of waterfowl.

CLAIM 4: The geese are a nuisance.

SUPPORT: Feeding the geese has caused their behavior to change radically. They have become aggressive toward humans and pets. Instead of fleeing, they defend their territory and go on the attack. In other places, geese are known to have injured children and even adults. (Used by permission of the Shiras Pointe Condominium Association Board)

Grounds

Because a claim alone is insufficient to alter belief or behavior, you must consider the second major element of the Toulmin model: **grounds**. Grounding the claim provides the foundation of information on which an argument rests, the proof required for a rational person to accept the claim as true or probable. The relationship of claims to grounds is such that "the claim under discussion can be no stronger than the grounds that provide its foundation" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 26). *Grounding* is that element in the argument given to the listeners or readers that enables them to answer such questions as "What information supported this claim?" or "Upon what foundation is this claim based?" Common ground, which the audience already knows and accepts, may exist, and you may draw on it to support claims. You may also add information to it to increase the probability that the audience will accept your claim as true.

The pro-feeding audience for the proposal to ban feeding the geese has already observed the deterioration of the lawns around the condominium complex. They can see the bare spots for themselves. A simple statement of this fact can be used to ground claim 2.

CLAIM 2: The geese cause damage to the common areas that belong to all residents.
GROUNDS 1: The geese have eaten the grass down so short in some places that lawns have developed bare spots.

This bit of information, which the audience already possesses, may not be sufficient to ground the claim because the pro-feeding audience may see this as a problem easily solved by sprinkling some grass seed on the bare spots. To strengthen the support for the claim, the Board added a second fact, information about the way condo fees (the monthly assessment each owner pays for maintenance and other services) are spent, to strengthen the conclusion that the geese adversely affect the common areas of the complex. The revised unit of argument took this form:

CLAIM 2: The geese cause damage to the common areas that belong to all residents.
GROUNDS 1: The geese have eaten the grass down so short in some places that lawns have developed bare spots.
GROUNDS 2: The Association spends almost $25,000 of our dues to keep the common areas attractive and useable by the residents.
GROUNDS 3: The size of the goose population has grown since the initial pair first came to Quarry Pond.
GROUNDS 4: The growth of the goose population has increased the cost of maintenance over time and decreased the value of our mutually owned common areas and individually owned condo units.

We sometimes use the generic term *evidence* to classify all proof in the form of facts and opinions discovered through research and used to ground claims. Because other parts of the Toulmin model may also use evidence, this element in the primary triad is labeled *grounds* to avoid confusion. Experimental observations, statistics, expert opinion, personal testimony, matters

of common knowledge, or previously established claims make up the pool of material used as grounds in an argument. More specific information on the nature and application of evidence is provided in Chapter 6; however, a few general comments are in order at this point.

The *reliability* of the information you use to ground your claims is your first general concern. Your audience determines the reliability of evidence based on its accuracy and recency. You must determine whether or not the information you are relying on represents what its reporter observed as closely as possible. If grounds are to be believed to be reliable, they must be as credible as possible.

You also need to ensure accuracy in your use of information. When quoting someone, do not take statements out of context. Make sure you honestly portray what the source had to say. Sometimes it is neither practical nor desirable to present a source's entire statement verbatim in your argument. When paraphrasing, do so honestly, in a manner that accurately reflects the author's intent or frame of reference.

Much argumentation, and claim making of all kinds, is concerned with current events. Use recent sources of information to add potency to your arguments. This does not mean you should not research the history of your topic carefully. Knowing what has happened in the past helps you to hypothesize about what will happen in the future. However, relying on out-of-date sources to ground your claims may cause you to miss recent developments.

The *quality* of the information you use to ground your claims is your second general concern. There is a temptation to confuse gathering a large quantity of information with having high-quality information. Quality results when you ground your claims with information that best helps the audience understand how you have arrived at the conclusions implied by your claim making. Quality evidence is sufficient, representative, relevant, and clear.

Ideally, the best argumentation occurs when we know everything about our topic. Having all the facts is seldom possible, particularly in our information-intensive society. Nevertheless, it is your responsibility to research your topic sufficiently and support your claims in a way that makes it possible for your audience to accept them. Just be sure the grounds you select to support your claims are representative of the available information. Did you have to look long and hard, ignoring much of what you read, to find grounds for the point of view you are advancing? If so, there may not be adequate support for your point.

The grounds you offer are relevant if they are related to the claims you wish to support. In some cases, the relationship between grounds and claim in an argument is not always apparent. The reasoning process of the warrant, discussed later in this chapter, can help make this relationship more apparent, as can the use of additional information in the form of multiple grounds for a claim or backing for a warrant. The important thing to remember is that information that has little bearing on a claim will be of little use in supporting it.

Will the information you use to ground a claim be clearly understood by your audience? The advice on the importance of defining terms in such a way that they render a subject more understandable to your audience also pertains to the selection of grounds for an argument. Information that is too technical, or in some way beyond an audience's level of understanding, may be unsuitable. Vague or equivocal evidence will not contribute to your audience's acceptance of a claim it purports to support.

The *consistency* of your information with itself, with other information on the same subject, or with human understanding contributes to grounding your claim making. Information that seems atypical, for whatever reason, is likely to cause the audience to disbelieve the claim it supports. Consistency is assessed on two levels: internal and external.

Does your information contradict itself? A single source should not state contradictory positions. Except in instances in which a simple explanation can be provided, a piece of information that reports both an increase and a decrease, or a positive and a negative result, may pose serious problems of internal consistency when you attempt to use it to ground a claim.

External consistency is a matter of agreement with other sources of information on the subject. Although new discoveries are being made constantly, and two equally respected authorities in a field may interpret the same event very differently, we generally expect that, in most instances, any piece of information will be consistent with others on the same subject. One instance where you need to be careful not to dismiss dissenting points of view out of hand is when you are dealing with an area where research relies heavily on grant funding. Because the purpose of foundation and government grants is to discover information related to a particular value or policy agenda, only projects that meet that litmus test may get funded. This is not to suggest that foundations or the government try to buy answers favoring their agenda, just that they are only interested in asking questions related to it.

When another witness appearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests suggested that Dr. Thomas Bonnicksen, Department of Forest Science at Texas A&M University, was "outside the scientific consensus," he took exception to this characterization. He also went on to disagree with:

> this other point that was brought up earlier about all the scientific values and ecological values of old-growth that all the studies have demonstrated. I suggest to you as a scientist that if you were to pour millions of dollars into research on the other successional stages that are an integral part of a dynamic, functioning forest, you would find that each and every one of them has immeasurable scientific value rivaling anything anybody has found from old-growth.
>
> So just because that is where the money went does not mean that is what is really important scientifically or even ecologically. (*Forest Protection Initiatives and National Forest Policy*, 2001, p. 50)

Another part of our need for external consistency is our expectation that the grounds in an argument will conform to what we already know in general. There is a natural tendency for a reader or listener to reject something that seems not to fit. For example, because we expect the president of the United States to support American values and traditions, we might be skeptical when we hear the president quoted as condemning some intrinsic American value.

Audience acceptability is your last general concern about the information you use to ground your claim. Will your listener or reader accept the information? There is little utility in having the best information if the audience will not accept it, so what you use must be selected with the audience in mind. This does not mean you should be dishonest or distort information in such a way that the audience will

be forced to agree. It does mean, however, that audience values, predispositions, knowledge of the subject, and technical expertise must be taken into account as you determine how you will ground your claims.

The field in which argumentation takes place often influences the form and substance of individual arguments that make up a particular instance of argumentation. We have discussed law as one field that possesses features that make it unique, such as the artificial presumption of innocence. Knowing the field of argument gives you some insights into the kinds of evidence that appropriately ground claims and the expectations that surround the kinds of reasoning that warrant accepting claims based on such evidence.

Some aspects of argument, however, are independent of the particulars of a given field. Although a geologist and a criminal lawyer use different strategies in preparing and presenting their arguments, both need a structure to follow in building those arguments. The same is true when you begin to create your own arguments. This system for constructing arguments is transportable to any field, because argumentation is based on a series of common elements.

Claims must always be supported by grounds; claims alone are only tentative hypotheses until something supports their veracity. When the Board made the claim, "Feeding the geese harms them more than it helps them," pro-feeding residents could reasonably be expected to ask, "Why does feeding the geese harm them?" To these residents, putting out food for birds was a logical thing to do. That feeding the geese would harm them would seem illogical. Grounds used to support a claim are selected to provide specific information pertinent to that claim as distinct from all other possible claims. Grounds should always point toward the claim and lead the audience directly toward the conclusion specified by it. The Board needed to ground this claim with information that demonstrated that "human food" is not nutritionally beneficial for wild geese. Any other information about the Canada goose, such as how the bird got its name, would not logically fit the claim. Sometimes, the logical fit between a claim and the information that grounds it is clear in our own minds but may be a mystery to the reader or listener without further explanation. The third element of the primary triad in the Toulmin model provides such explanations.

Warrant

The third element in the primary triad is called the warrant. It shows why if one accepts the validity of the grounds, one can also safely accept the validity of the claim. The **warrant** indicates how, given the available grounds, it is reasonable for the listener or reader to make the inferential leap from them to the claim. "The assertor's task is normally to convince us not just that it was legitimate for him to adopt the initial claim for himself, but also that we should share it and so rely on it ourselves" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 46).

Warrants provide us with specific information about how the arguer reasons. By showing the relationship between grounds and claim, warrants demonstrate that making the mental leap from one to the other is rational. The easiest way to show this relationship is to verbalize how you reasoned from the grounds to the claim in forming an opinion. Chapter 7 explains more about the reasoning process, but we can return to our "X causes Y" example for a simple

demonstration of how to explain your reasoning process as the warrant step in a unit of argument.

CLAIM: X causes Y.
GROUNDS: X is present in this instance, and we also have evidence that Y is present.
WARRANT: An X has certain properties that give it the ability to produce a Y.

Look very carefully at the wording of the warrant. The warrant describes how reasoning from cause is done. For one thing to be the cause of another, it must have the ability or properties to make the second thing occur. We can explain why we believe that X causes Y with the information that the two always occur together (the temporal property of causal reasoning). The mental leap that takes us from this property—X and Y being connected in time—to the claim that X causes Y is the cue to the reader or listener on the nature of causal reasoning. This provides additional support for our mental leap: X has certain properties above and beyond the temporal connection to Y, making it capable of bringing about Y.

A warrant does not always have to describe how you reasoned in forming a claim statement based on the grounds. You may draw on what the audience knows as material for the warrant. Warrants are found in things already accepted as true as a part of common knowledge, values, customs, and societal norms. In addition, natural laws, legal principles, statutes, rules of thumb, or mathematical formulas may establish warrants. Warrants take the form of information that shows a relationship between a claim and the grounds used to support it.

Consider how the Board warranted their claim about the connection between the goose population and property damage.

CLAIM 2: The geese cause damage to the common areas that belong to all residents.
GROUNDS 1: The geese have eaten the grass down so short in some places that lawns have developed bare spots.
GROUNDS 2: The Association spends almost $25,000 of our dues to keep the common areas attractive and useable by the residents.
GROUNDS 3: The size of the goose population has grown since the initial pair first came to Quarry Pond.
GROUNDS 4: The growth of the goose population has increased the cost of maintenance over time and decreased the value of our mutually owned common areas and individually owned condo units.
WARRANT: The bare spots on the common-area lawns, the increased amount of money needed for maintenance, and the decreased value of the property are all attributable to one source: the growing goose population.

Note the use of the term *cause* in the claim statement. Use of this term signals that the reasoning in this unit of argument is causal reasoning: X (the growing goose population) causes Y (the increase in maintenance costs and the decrease in property value). Claim statements are often phrased to reflect the pattern of reasoning the arguer uses in a unit of argument. In the Board's units of argument for the first stock issue, most of the reasoning was based on such causal connections between the geese and the problems they created. The Board wanted to prove, as a

prima facie case for change, that a cause–effect relationship existed between feeding the geese (cause) and a series of problems that resulted from their presence (effect). They also wanted to prove a cause–effect relationship between the practice of feeding and the growth in the size of the flock.

The warrant justifies movement from the grounds to the claim by describing how you reasoned to connect grounds to claim or by calling on commonly accepted belief to demonstrate the connection. In the ebb and flow of everyday argument, warrants are often unstated. The audience must discover the warrants for themselves. Very often, it is the warrant that defines the locus of controversy between advocate and opponent. We reason from claim to grounds or grounds to claim, and it is the warrant that specifies the reasoning. Thus, a claim stands or falls on the validity of the warrant. If you have ever confronted a claim and the grounds that purported to support it and felt that it just did not make sense, it may have been because you were unable to find a warrant reasonably linking one to the other.

JEANNE: Phil really isn't a very good student.
KATHY: Why?
JEANNE: Because he's on the football team.

Kathy probably wonders, "Why does being a football player automatically make Phil a poor student?" Her question arises from the lack of a sensible warrant.

From this facetious example, we can learn two things about the nature and use of warrants. First, warrants are a vital part of argumentation. If a clear link between grounds and claim is not provided, the audience's rationality may prevent it from accepting the claim. Second, the arguer should always select a warrant that the audience is likely to understand and accept as rational. It "makes sense" that a flock of geese may damage lawns. It "makes no sense" that being on the football team equates to poor academic achievement. The warrant is essential in argument, but it is helpful only to the extent that it is understood by the intended audience.

Summary of the Elements of the Primary Triad

1. A *claim* is a conclusion that does not stand alone but requires further proof before the audience is willing to accept it as verified.
2. *Grounds* are information of fact or opinion used to provide verification for the claim, commonly labeled *evidence*.
3. *Warrant* is the reasoning that justifies the mental leap from grounds to claim, certifying that given the grounds, the claim is true or probable.

Claim, grounds, and warrant do not always provide sufficient proof and reasoning to establish the argument. Because arguers face the need to be clear, accurate, and specific, it is sometimes necessary to build in additional support and qualification for the claim using the elements of the secondary triad of the Toulmin model: backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals. These constitute the things that show an argument's strength or force. Backing is not always required to build an effective argument, but we recommend that you use backing while learning argumentation skills. Qualifiers and rebuttals are necessary when you must show your audience the limitations on the probable truth of your claims.

Backing

The audience may require more information before they agree that given the grounds, and in light of the warrant, the claim should be accepted. Warrants sometimes require clarification and additional information. Because "warrants are not self-validating" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 62), the effective arguer demonstrates that the warrant supplied should be believed. **Backing** offers explicit information to establish the reliability of the warrant used in arguing the claim. "An argument will carry real weight and give its conclusions solid support only if the warrants relied on in the course of it are both sound and also to the point" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 63). Backing your warrant offers support that your point can be made using a particular kind of reasoning or by drawing on what the audience already knows to help them make the mental leap from grounds to claim.

The type of information the arguer must use to provide backing may be either general or specific, depending on the requirements of the situation. As the warrant serves as justification for making the leap from grounds to claim, backing justifies belief in the warrant itself. Like the warrant, backing may be unstated, left to the imagination of the listener or reader. If the audience is knowledgeable on the subject being argued or familiar with the grounds used, backing, and even the warrant, may be unnecessary. However, in circumstances where the audience may not have much prior knowledge, the arguer is well advised to supply both warrant and backing to increase the believability of the position, as shown in Figure 5.2.

In the Board's argument, providing both warrant and backing is not argumentative overkill. They help the pro-feeding audience understand the impact their behavior is having on both the value of the jointly owned property and their own units. If after analyzing your audience you are undecided about whether to include warrant and backing, it is usually wisest to go ahead and include both. Claims seek to alter belief or behavior, and people are predisposed to resist change. Including grounds, warrant, and backing in each unit of argument makes that unit of argument clearer for the audience. Clear arguments and specific information is more likely to lead to success in advocating or opposing propositions. Warrants and backing help an audience to interpret and understand the factual basis on which your claim rests.

Qualifiers

The second element of the secondary triad in the Toulmin model helps the arguer indicate the force or strength of the claim. Not all arguments have the same strength. **Qualifiers** show the degree of force the arguer believes the claim possesses. Not all claims must be qualified; in some instances the arguer is certain of the correctness and strength of the claim. If in investigating a topic you discover exceptions or instances that disconfirm your claim, you will have to account for those exceptions in your argument. Consider the following examples of qualified and unqualified claims:

Qualified: In some cases, feeding wild birds harms them more than it helps them.

Unqualified: Feeding wild birds harms them more than it helps them.

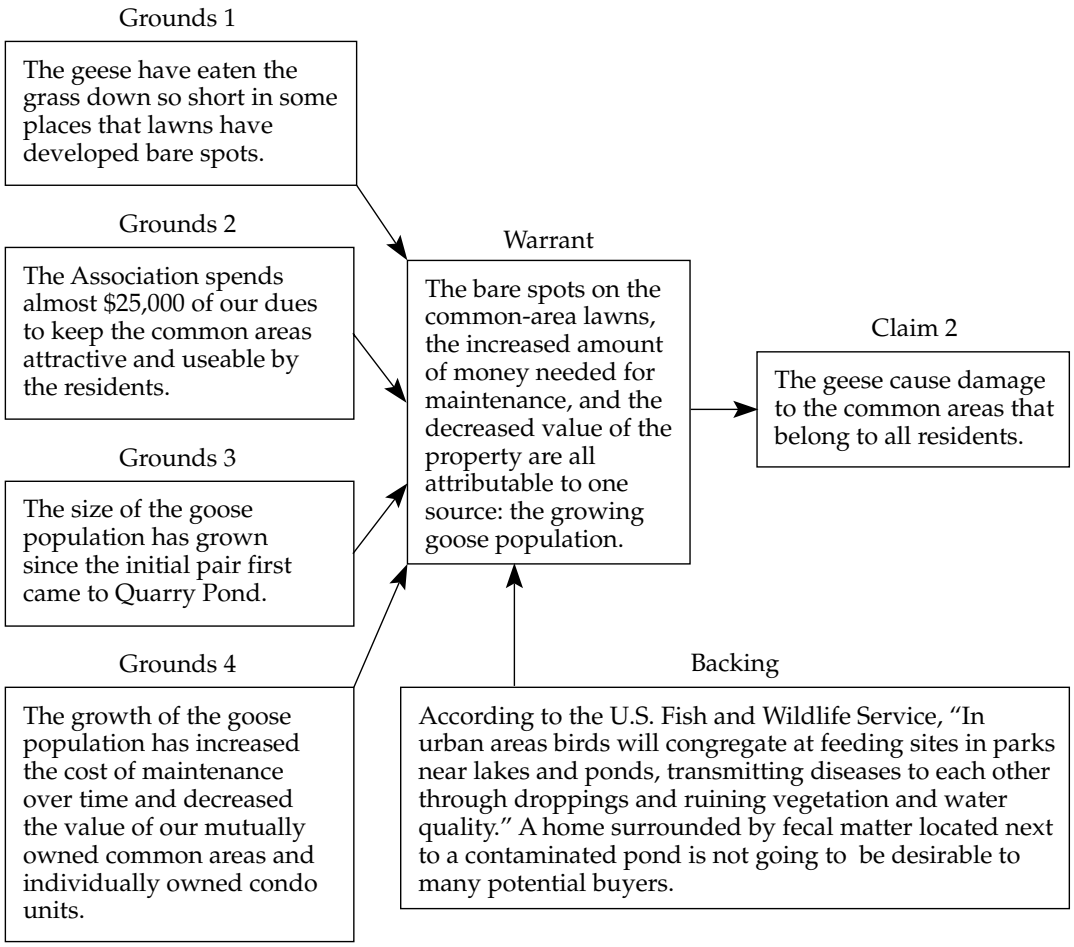

FIGURE 5.2
Use of Warrant and Backing

The limitation of the first claim is suggested by the modal qualifier "in some cases." The qualified claim is more compelling for the pro-feeding audience because they provide bird feed to attract robins, cardinals, chickadees, cedar waxwings, hummingbirds, and other small birds common to the area. There has never been a problem with feeding these birds. Modal qualifiers are "phrases that show what kind and degree of reliance is to be placed on the conclusions, given the arguments available to support them" (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 85). Modal qualifiers typically take the form of adverbs, adverbial phrases, or prepositional phrases that modify the action suggested by the claim's verb. The following are examples of frequently used qualifiers:

sometimes	maybe
presumably	in certain cases
necessarily	at this point in time
certainly	with the exception of
perhaps	in all probability

The use of such qualifying terms indicates the strength or limitation of your claim. Qualified claims provide the arguer with a means of advancing an argument in circumstances where the reliability or applicability of the claim is not absolute or universal. The arguer using qualified claims is communicating honestly, alerting the listener or reader to the fact that the claim is not valid in all instances or is not absolutely true. The use of a qualified claim does not necessarily signal that the opinion it states is unsound, merely that it is not absolutely verified or verifiable.

Rebuttals

The final element of the secondary triad in the Toulmin model also provides a means of accommodating the limitations of claims. A **rebuttal** is added to claim statements that need to be limited to indicate the circumstances under which they may not be valid. Strategically, the use of a rebuttal anticipates objections to the claim. Rebuttals help us avoid errors in reasoning and reflect that we are dealing with what is generally true, not absolutely true.

In our example, attachment of a rebuttal to the claim might result in a stronger argument than merely attaching the qualifier "in some cases," given the experience and knowledge of the pro-feeding audience. Residents are familiar with seed mixes designed to attract various bird species that have been certified as nutritionally sound by the Audubon Society.

Feeding wild birds harms them more than it helps them.
Feeding wild birds harms them more than it helps them, unless the food is designed to meet their nutritional needs.

You may feel that using qualifiers and rebuttals is not a very good idea, because they seem to diminish the strength of arguments. The use of qualifiers and rebuttals acknowledges that argumentation is not an exact science and that human affairs are seldom discussable in absolute terms. There are two circumstances in which the use of rebuttals is particularly important if you are truly committed to being honest with your audience.

The first circumstance exists when grounds, warrant, and backing support the claim only under certain conditions. This occurs in our example. The second circumstance occurs when grounds, warrant, and backing provide only partial support for the claim. What if a ban on feeding the geese were insufficient to overcome all harm to the birds? The claim would have to be restricted, stated in terms of that part of potential harm to the geese that would be overcome by abiding with a ban on feeding them.

Summary of the Elements of the Secondary Triad

1. *Backing* provides the credentials that help establish the legitimacy of the inferential leap from grounds to claim.
2. *Qualifiers* show the amount, or degree, of force that a claim possesses.
3. *Rebuttals* limit claims, showing circumstances under which they may not be true and anticipating objections to the claim.

The Toulmin model provides a useful system for creating individual units of argument. Individual arguments, however, are seldom sufficient to advocate or