Analyzing Arguments

The Toulmin approach to argumentation uses six core elements:

Qualifier

Grounds (data)        Claim

Warrant

Rebuttal

Backing

Example:

Fine print says product must be used for six months
(Qualifier)

Studies show that teeth are 50% whiter after using our product
(Grounds)

You should buy our teeth whitening product
(Claim)

People want whiter teeth
(Warrant)

Unless you don’t want to attract people
(Rebuttal)

Whiter teeth make people more attractive
(Backing)
Using the Toulmin model to analyze a visual advertisement, answer the following questions:

1. **What assumptions have been made in this ad, and what can those assumptions tell us about the audience?** (Consider: what source did this ad come from? Who generally reads it? Does the ad identify the product it is selling, or the brand it is promoting, or does it assume you are familiar with it? Does the ad use photos of famous people or locations? If so, does it name them or assume you recognize them?)

2. **What is the ad claiming?** Each advertisement may have multiple implicit and/or explicit claims. Choose ONE to discuss for this exercise. (Consider: What argument does the ad make? Does it want you to buy something? Feel a strong emotion? Give to a charity? Believe that a product is the best/fastest/most powerful of its kind and you can’t live without it?)

3. **On what grounds? If grounds are not explicitly presented, can you think of any ground that might make the argument more persuasive?** (Consider: What data does the ad present? Or does it simply ask viewers to make assumptions?)

4. **Is there a qualifier?** (Consider: Does the ad specify that the product will only work in certain situations, or for certain individuals? I.e., a weight loss drug ad may specify that optimum results will only be achieved with the addition of an exercise plan.)

5. **What is the warrant? Is it implicit or explicit?** (Consider: What connects the grounds with the claim?)

6. **What rebuttals could you make?** (Consider: Do you have any questions the ad hasn’t answered? What issues might lead you to question the claim? Has the ad convinced you to buy the product? If not, why?)

7. **What backing is required to justify the claim?** (Consider: Does the ad provide any evidence that the claim is true? What support would the ad need to include to counter your rebuttals?)
Lesson Plan

Prior to assigning this exercise, introduce the Toulmin model to students in class. (Depending on the text and/or handouts you are using, you might assign reading about the Toulmin approach prior to class.) Present an example of an enthymeme and walk through the steps of identifying the six core elements of the Toulmin model.

[One method, suggested by the authors of Writing Arguments (see http://cwabacon.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/ramage2_ab/chapter0/deluxe.html), involves presenting a sample issue followed by three sample enthymemes. Two of the three enthymemes should be logical, and the third should be less reasonable. Ask students to identify the assumptions in each enthymeme, then work through the process of identifying the claim, stated reason, and warrant for each enthymeme. Next, have students articulate why the third enthymeme sounds less persuasive. Lead them to a discussion of backing, and ask what grounds and backing might make this enthymeme into a sound argument.]

Once you have worked through an example(s), present an example of an advertisement and walk through the process of identifying an argument made by the visual. (I have provided an example below using a Nike ad featuring Maria Sharapova.) Have students separate into groups of three to four by counting off and pairing the ones with ones, twos with twos, etc. Place an ad on the overhead, or provide a copy of the same ad to each group and give them a stated time to work through the exercise above.

Reconvene the entire class and have them articulate the elements of the Toulmin model they identified. Once you have filled in all six items in the Toulmin schema, have the class discuss the following questions: Does the ad make a convincing argument? Why and/or why not?

Here is a completed sample exercise that could be used as the class model that introduces this exercise.

Using the Toulmin model to analyze a visual advertisement, answer the following questions:

1. **What assumptions have been made in this ad, and what can those assumptions tell us about the audience?** (Consider: what source did this ad come from? Who generally reads it? Does the ad identify the product it is selling, or the brand it is promoting, or does it assume you are familiar with it? Does the ad use photos of famous people or locations? If so, does it name them or assume you recognize them?)

   **Example:** The Nike ad came from Self magazine. It assumes you recognize both the Nike logo and Maria Sharapova. Since Self readers are predominately young, physically fit women, the ad creators have assumed viewers of this ad will be likely to purchase athletic wear and will be familiar with Nike, and with Maria Sharapova’s accomplishments and pop culture celebrity status.

2. **What is the ad claiming?** Each advertisement may have multiple implicit and/or explicit claims. Choose ONE to discuss for this exercise. (Consider: What argument does the ad make? Does it want you to buy something? Feel a strong emotion? Give to a
charity? Believe that a product is the best/fastest/most powerful of its kind and you can’t live without it?)

**Example:** The Nike ad shows Maria Sharapova wearing Nike shoes. An (implicit) claim is that Maria Sharapova is a great tennis player because she wears Nike.

3. **On what grounds? If grounds are not explicitly presented, can you think of any ground that might make the argument more persuasive?** (Consider: What data does the ad present? Or does it simply ask viewers to make assumptions?)

**Example:** The Nike ad does not present any data—it assumes you know the brand and trust it without explicit data. To make this a persuasive argument, the ad would need to provide grounds that prove that wearing Nike is THE factor that makes Maria Sharapova a great athlete.

4. **Is there a qualifier?** (Consider: Does the ad specify that the product will only work in certain situations, or for certain individuals? I.e., a weight loss drug ad may specify that optimum results will only be achieved with the addition of an exercise plan.)

**Example:** The Nike ad mentions that Maria also put hard work into her years of training, so the claim is qualified and can be restated as: Maria Sharapova is a great tennis player mostly because she wears Nike.

5. **What is the warrant? Is it implicit or explicit?** (Consider: What connects the grounds with the claim?)

**Example:** The warrant in the Nike ad is implicit. It could be stated as: You should buy the shoes because wearing them will make you a great tennis player just like Maria Sharapova.

6. **What rebuttals could you make?** (Consider: Do you have any questions the ad hasn’t answered? What issues might lead you to question the claim? Has the ad convinced you to buy the product? If not, why?)

**Example:** If Maria Sharapova was simply born with natural talent, how will wearing her shoes make me a great player?

7. **What backing is required to justify the claim?** (Consider: Does the ad provide any evidence that the claim is true? What support would the ad need to include to counter your rebuttals?)

**Example:** The Nike ad could provide evidence that Maria Sharapova wins more games wearing Nike than wearing another brand.