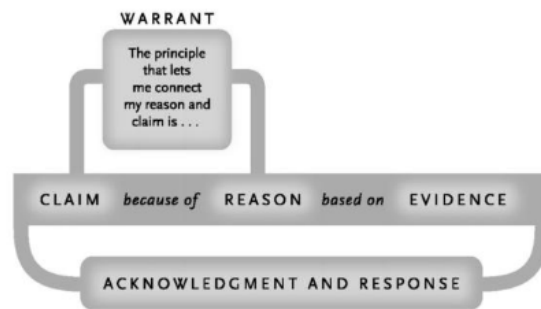


Marshalling your arguments

Booth et al, in the “Craft of research”^{*} suggest that in a reporting of research you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you **claim**?
- What **reasons** support that claim?
- What **evidence** supports these reasons?
- Do you **acknowledge** this alternative/complication, objection, and how do you respond?
- That **principle (warrant)** justifies connecting your reasons to your claim?

Booth et al represent this as a diagram:



Should you follow this formula in every paragraph of your writing? There are no blanket rules. Sometimes a paragraph might contain a lot of claims and not much else, for example here's a paragraph from the introduction of a paper:

*This paper offers an analysis of a little studied area of doctoral education: students' negotiation of the administrative requirement to report on progress. Progress reports have become a common tool for managing research candidature in Australia and else- where in the world (Mewburn, Tokareva, Cuthbert, Sinclair, & Barnacle, 2013). **(claim)** Practices vary from institution to institution, but most universities ask research students and their supervisors to make a written periodic report on progress towards completion of the degree. **(claim)** Practices vary as to the exact composition of the reporting forms, but the progress report may also include the opportunity to request extra resources, report problems and assess overall student (and sometimes supervisor) performance. **(claim)** Progress reports are high stakes documents, which may be used by the institution in a number of ways to directly affect student outcomes, for example, as evidence in grievance processes and in applications for extensions of time. **(claim)** Inger Mewburn, Denise Cuthbert & Ekaterina Tokareva , Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management (2014): Experiencing the progress report: an analysis of gender and administration in doctoral candidature, Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*

We could contrast this paragraph with one from the same paper's results section:

*Paper work was seen by most of our participants as a way to solve resourcing issues and make requests for materials, but the progress report, as a formal 'channel', was not used to solve all problems students encounter during candidature. **(claim)** All students in our study were reluctant to use these formal reporting mechanisms to address 'people problems'. **(evidence)** The formal channels were seen to be too blunt to do the necessary emotional work – soothing hurt feelings and easing interpersonal tensions that arose between supervisors and students. **(evidence)** Students, supervisors and administrators all searched for ways to solve problems that avoided official paperwork, with varying degrees of success. In our previous paper, we called this practice 'working the back channels'. **(evidence)** We saw the back channel as a proxy for how much agency each student felt they had in the community in which they were located. **(claim)***

Why the difference? In the start of the paper the writers are trying to put forward an argument and in the results they are trying to convince you to accept it. Understanding the rhetorical purpose of each part of your writing will help your writing be less mechanical.

Take a paper you admire and try to label the parts of the argument as above. What do you notice?

Note: This handout is released under the creative commons share alike attribution license. You may circulate and change it, but be cool – acknowledge Dr Inger Mewburn as the original author.

^{*}Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G, Williams, J.C (2003) The craft of research (2nd ed), University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London.