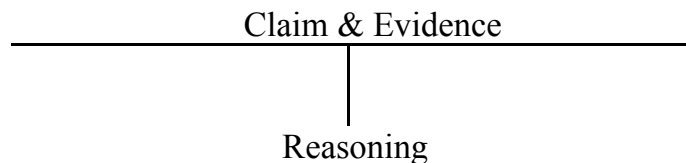# Making an Airtight Argument

When you want to persuade someone about something you use an "argument." That doesn't mean you have to fight with the person, though! An argument is a group of claims, or statements, used to convince someone. Claims are supported by evidence and reasoning—otherwise they aren't very persuasive at all. For example, imagine that you want your parents or guardian to let you go on a road trip with a friend who has their license. You'll need to come up with some really good claims to get them to let you go! For example, you might say:

Claim and evidence: My friend is really responsible; her GPA is practically a 3.8!
Reasoning: Getting a good GPA is an example or sign of responsibility

The evidence is usually a provable fact helps you make your claim. The reasoning supports the whole thing. It's the "reason" your claim makes sense in the first place.

Claim & Evidence
|
Reasoning

But if you really want to convince someone of something, you need to include several claims *and* several types of reasoning. That way even if your parent doesn't agree that your friend's grades have anything to do with whether or not you should get to go on the road trip, you have another strong claim you can use to support your argument. Here's another claim you could use to support your case. It has a different type of evidence and a different type of reasoning than your last claim.

Claim and evidence: My friend drives to Janesville to work three days a week, so she's a
                        really good driver.
Reasoning: causal—a lot of experience driving will cause someone to become a
                        better driver

As long as they don't contradict each other, the more claims you can make with varied pieces of evidence and types of reasoning, the stronger your argument will be—and the more likely you are to go on that road trip!

<u>Over</u>

Types of Reasoning

Keep in mind that every type of reasoning has a *possible pitfall*—something that could make the whole claim collapse. That's why it's a good idea to include a number of claims with many types of reasoning in any argument. That way if someone can poke a hole in one of your claims, you can still support your point of view.

Moral values	the evidence relates to a value or a ranking of values which you believe your audience shares Example: "protecting our freedoms is important than protecting our safety" Possible pitfall: the value or ranking of values isn't really something your audience agrees with.
Rule or principle	the evidence is connected to some general rule or principle Example: "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Possible pitfall: the rule isn't always true or doesn't apply in your case
Causal	x causes y Example: Increased carbon emissions have led to global warming. Possible pitfall: might not be true that x causes y
Incompatibility	x and y can't both be true Example: "An honest reporter can't leave out important facts" Possible pitfall: any time the two things can exist at the same time, e.g. an honest reporter might leave out the name of their secret sources.
Authority	the evidence is from an experts or important sources in a given field Example: "According to Harvard Physicist Richard Feynman . . ." Possible pitfall: the source or expert isn't that good
Example of or sign of	The evidence is an example or sign of something where those features that are shared characterize the whole Example: "The loss of Louisa Small's house is yet one more example of the problems caused by poor planning for Hurricane Katrina." Possible pitfall: the part does not accurately represent the whole, e.g., Louisa's house fell due to poor construction rather than poor hurricane planning
Similar to	The evidence is similar to another case in important and relevant ways, the differences are irrelevant to this case Example: "Saying that the U.S. should not send troops to protect innocent civilians in Darfour is like saying that we should not have fought in WWII." Possible pitfall: the two things really aren't all that similar, or have really important differences
Category splitting	separating one category into two, usually to question one and uphold the other Example: "the needy" split into the "deserving poor" and the "undeserving poor" Possible pitfall: it might not be valid to split the groups apart