

Types of Claims: Establishing Purpose and Organization

Claims of Fact
Claims of Definition
Claims of Cause
Claims of Value
Claims of Policy



Five Types of Claims

Claims of Fact
Claims of Definition
Claims of Cause
Claims of Value
Claims of Policy

- Virtually all arguments can be categorized according to one of five types of claims.
- Claims can be identified by discovering the question the argument answers.
- As we browse the types, notice how the questions all invite different purposes and different points of view.
- They all lead to argument.

Claims of Fact:

- Did it happen?
- Does it exist?
- Is it true?
- Is it a fact?

Fact Claims

- These are central to court room debate since lawyers argue about what happened in order to prove innocence or guilt.
- Historians also argue about what happened as they sort through historical evidence to try to establish historical fact.

Fact Claims:

- Women are as effective as men in combat.
- The ozone layer is becoming depleted.
- Increasing population threatens the environment.
- Bigfoot exists in remote areas.
- Men need women to civilize them.

Claims of Definition:

- What is it?
- How should we define it?
- What is it like?
- How should it be classified?
- How should we interpret it?
- How does its usual meaning change in a particular context?

Definition Claims:

- The entire argument can center around the definition of a term.
- When you argue that an athlete who receives compensation for playing a sport is “professional,” and thereby loses “amateur” status, you are making a claim of definition.

Definition Claims:

- We are considering definition claims that dominate the argument as a whole.
- Definition is also used as a type of support, often at the beginning, to establish the meaning of one or more key words.

Definition Claims: Examples

- Marriage as an institution needs to be redefined to include modern variations on the traditional family.
- Some so-called art exhibits could more accurately be described as pornography exhibits.
- The fetus is a human being, not just a group of cells.

Claims of Cause:

- What caused it?
- Where did it come from?
- Why did it happen?
- What are the effects?
- What will probably be the results over the short and the long term?

Cause Claims:

- When you claim that staying up late at a party caused you to fail your exam the next day or that your paper is late because the library closed too early, you are making claims of cause.
- People often disagree about what causes something to happen, and they also disagree about the effects.

Clause Claims: Examples

The cause-effect relationship is at issue in these statements

- Overeating causes disease and early death
- A healthy economy causes people to have faith in their political leaders
- Sending infants to day care results in psychological problems later in life
- Inadequate funding for AIDS research will result in a disastrous worldwide epidemic
- Crime is caused by lack of family values

Cause Claims:

- Effects may be described and then the cause or causes.
- The effects of censorship may be described before the public efforts that resulted in that censorship.
- You may also encounter refutation of other actual or possible causes or effects.

Claims of Value:

- Is it good or bad?
- How bad?
- How good?
- Of what worth is it?
- Is it moral or immoral?
- Who thinks so?
- What do those people value?
- What values or criteria should I use?

Value Claims

- When you claim that sororities and fraternities are the best extracurricular organizations for college students to join, you are making a claim of value.
- Claims of value, as their name implies, aim at establishing whether the item being discussed is either good or bad, valuable or not valuable, desirable or not desirable.

Value Claims

- It is often necessary to establish criteria for goodness or badness in these arguments and then to apply them to the subject to show why something should be regarded as either good or bad.

Value Claims: Examples

- Public schools are better than private schools
- Science Fiction novels are more interesting to read than romance novels
- Dogs make the best pets
- Mercy killing is immoral
- Computers are a valuable addition to modern society
- Viewing television is a wasteful activity

Claims of Policy:

- What should we do about it?
- How should we act?
- What should our future policy be?
- How can we solve this problem?
- What concrete course of action should we pursue to solve the problem?

Policy Claims

- When you claim that all new students should attend orientation or that all students who graduate should participate in graduation ceremonies, you are making claims of policy.
- A claim of policy often describes a problem and then suggests ways to solve it.

Policy Claims: Examples

- We should stop spending so much on prisons and start spending more on education
- Children in low-income families should receive medical insurance from the government
- Social security should be distributed on the basis of need rather than as an entitlement

Mixed Claims

- In argument one type of claim may predominate, but other types may also be present as supporting arguments or subclaims.
- It is not always easy to establish the predominant claim in an argument, but close reading will usually reveal a predominant type, with one or more other the other types serving as subclaims.

Mixed Claims

- For example, a value claim that the media does harm by prying into the private lives of public figures may establish the fact that this is a pervasive practice, may define what should be public and what should be private information, may examine the causes or more likely the effects of this type of reporting, and may suggest future policy for dealing with this problem.

Mixed Claim

- When planning and writing argument, you will more easily focus on the main purpose for your argument when you have established the predominant claim and have identified its type.
- You can use other types of claims as subclaims if you need to.