**Slide 2:**
**Formulating and substantiating an argument**
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Based on Booth et al., Chapters 9-11.

**Slide 3: Introduction**
In the real world, an argument is a contentious disagreement or dispute about something. In the world of research, too, there is often dissent or contention on any given issue, but your "argument" is, in the academic sense, not a debate but rather the core of your research project. Your argument is your central idea, your thesis, your policy recommendation, your contribution. Research is not just about compiling all the known literature or data on a given issue, and then writing a report about it. Research is also about analyzing and synthesizing the material, the ideas, and the facts, and generating something new and unique in the debate. Your contribution to Homeland Security through your master's thesis will come not from your competence in rounding up everyone else's ideas, but from developing your own ideas and getting them out in a compelling fashion. Your ideas in the thesis will take the form of your argument; this module will walk you through the 5 components of a good argument.

**Slide 4: Strength of an Argument**
Of course, you cannot force your reader to accept on its face anything you write; this is especially true if one or more aspects of your research seems weak, irrelevant, illogical, or of suspect authenticity. But a strong (in other words, persuasive) research report *always* has a strong argument; without it, no other aspect of the report can save you. An argument is strong because it is compelling, and it is compelling because it is well-articulated, well-documented, logically presented, and supported by reasons and evidence the reader accepts as convincing and true.

**Slide 5: Components**
In a thesis, you make a central *claim* (as well as numerous smaller claims) – this is the essence of your argument. Each claim is made for a *reason* or reasons, and those reasons are supported by *evidence*. A smart researcher will also, in the process of making and supporting claims, *anticipate* the questions or challenges of the reader, and *respond* to them as well. Finally, you will have to provide a logical and definitive link between your claims and your reasons: such a link is called a *warrant*. Taken together, these comprise the 5 elements of an argument, which are connected in a very specific logical sequence, no matter how you present them stylistically:

1. Claims
2. Reasons
3. Evidence
4. Anticipation of challenges
5. Warrants

Your reader – or consumer – will ask these questions of your research, and so, too, must you:

1. What do you claim?
2. What reasons support that claim?
3. What evidence supports those reasons?

4. What are the most important and likeliest challenges to or questions about the preceding 3 items, and how do you respond?
5. What principle (warrant) justifies or confirms the link between your reasons and your claim?

To put it another way, this string of elements is the core of your argument:

**Claim** (because of) **Reason** (based on) **Evidence**

You'll see how elements 4 and 5 fit in later in the module.

**Slide 6: Claims**
At this fairly early point in the research process, you can probably make a tentative claim in your argument; that is, you probably have a tentative answer or solution to your research question or problem. Later on, once you complete the evidence-collecting and methodological steps of the analysis, you can modify it (or change it totally, as often happens) to your final and main claim.

The first step in building and articulating your claim is to determine what you want your reader to take from it. Are you making only a theoretical claim, such that your reader's beliefs or understanding of the issue will be modified? Or do you want your reader to *do* something with your research, in which case you are making a practical claim? Maybe both? Most of you will be making practical claims, in which you are asking your reader to change his or her understanding of a problem, and not only to accept your solution, but to implement it.

**Slide 7: Building a Claim**
Assuming this to be the case, your reader will expect you to make at least 2 conceptual claims: one that explains what causes the problem, and the other that explains how to fix it.

The criteria on which to base your argument can include:

- Whether your solution is feasible, and can be implemented in a determinate or reasonable period of time.
- Whether it will cost less to implement than the cost of the problem it purports to solve (think not just in fiscal terms, but also in other units of measurement).
- Whether it will not create a bigger problem than the one it solves.
- Whether it will cost less or work better than alternative solutions.

In addition to these specifications, there are two main things to keep in mind when building or testing a claim. First, it must be *specific*; second, it must be *significant*.

**Slide 8: Claims Should be Specific**
In general, the more specific your claim, the more compelling it will be. In order to fine-tune the specificity of a claim, you must pay attention to two things: *language* and *logic*.

Specific *language* is a combination of detail and precision calibrated to the topic and to your consumer. We cannot tell you what to say or how to say it, but try to pay attention to how you phrase things: define your terms, provide persuasive and specific data, draw clear

parameters for your ideas or assertions; and avoid overwhelming your reader with extraneous detail that obscures your ideas.

By specific *logic*, we mean your claim should exhibit a certain degree of logical complexity and nuance. Compare these two statements:

> "The seam between homeland security and homeland defense must remain unambiguous."
>
> - vs.-
>
> "Although the need for cooperation in the fight against terrorism across all levels and among all agencies of government – including the military – is clear, the seam between homeland security and homeland defense must remain unambiguous, especially when issues of 3rd Amendment protections against billeting without consent are concerned."

Now, that second statement is silly in terms of content, but you can see how its richer, more nuanced logic and language, by virtue of specificity alone, makes it the more compelling claim.

You will notice the second statement contains mitigating or qualifying language: *although* and *especially*. Other examples of such language, referred to as "hedging," include: *only if, sometimes, often, some, many, seems*, or *appears*, instead of *always, never, all, none, is/is not*, etc. Judicious use of hedging is the mark of a nuanced claim, and of an intellectually honest researcher. After all, how many absolute claims can you think of to make about any issue? Hedging demonstrates to the reader that you know the limits of your own claims, and are acknowledging possible counter-claims preemptively. Be careful, however, not to take this too far, or you will seem hesitant, and your work too tentative to be useful.

**Slide 9: Claims Should be Significant**
In this context, the significance of a claim is not the same as its relevance, but rather more like its magnitude. An insignificant claim would be one that may be 100% accurate and correct, but contributes very little to the literature, or demands very little of the reader. A fairly significant claim would be one that contributes new knowledge to the field, and also settles some question, problem, or puzzle that had been to that point unresolved. A highly significant claim, finally, would be one that contributes knowledge to the literature and uses that knowledge or information to overturn or upset the debate – it demands a complete conceptual or operational revolution by the reader, or establishes a totally new conceptual framework.

Keep in mind, as you consider the significance of your main claim, that we know you all wish to make the most revolutionary, head-spinning, earth-shattering claim ever to hit homeland security. Go for it, but remember: you'll still have to prove it, and back it up. The more significant the claim, the more resistance you will encounter from your reader.

**Slide 10: Reasons**
Each of your claims must be supported by two things: reasons and evidence, the former predicated on the latter. Let's look first at reasons.

Reasons constitute, in a nutshell, the logical structure and flow of your claim. They are the *because* part of your claim, and your reader will look to reasons first in determining the strength of your argument. If your reasons are sound, and are buttressed by solid evidence, your reader is more likely to accept your claim.

Reasons provide a sort of logical map of your thesis, and tell the reader where you intend to go and why. They can, inversely, provide a useful tool for you to organize your thoughts and evidence, arrange the components of your project, and check the logic of your argument.

Try this: Create a "storyboard" of your project in which you write out your main claim, each sub-claim, the reasons for those claims, and the evidence supporting your reasons on separate index cards. Then arrange the cards on a blank wall, left to right, until the logical relationships are visible and the storyboard reflects your project as you understand it. Don't be afraid to try different arrangements, or to revise the order as you find new evidence, develop new ideas, or receive additional feedback  You may ultimately follow this order in the structure of your thesis (with each sub-claim or reason comprising a separate chapter, for example), but you are not obliged to do so. The idea here is to reduce your argument down to its component logical parts, and then reassemble it under the light of closer scrutiny. You'll be surprised at how hard it makes you think.

**Slide 11:  Evidence**
Excusing the pun, let us state explicitly what may seem to you self-evident:

Reasons are not the same as evidence.

As you get further into your project, and deeper into the recesses of your own muddled mind (this should happen around IR 5), you may well fall into the trap of conflating the two: another reason to construct your storyboard.

A reason is based on evidence, but evidence cannot be based on reasons. Your evidence is the foundation of your entire argument, and is most often the place a critic will look to discredit your work.

It is absolutely imperative that you view evidence skeptically, weigh it carefully, and report it thoroughly. Your evidence must be *authoritative, accurate, representative,* and *sufficient*.

**Slide 12: Authoritative and Accurate**
Are your sources trustworthy? Are they experts in their field, are they professional, moderated journals, or commonly-cited and respected books? As you drill more deeply into your sources – both primary and secondary – you will begin to run across certain individuals and works frequently. The mere fact that a scholar is famous and considered expert, or a book, journal, fact, or data set is cited throughout the literature does not guarantee its accuracy; indeed, many an "expert" or "fact" has been proven wrong. But sticking to the better-known, highest-level, or more frequently-cited sources will afford you some level of protection against flawed evidence.

Despite the growing literature on homeland security, you are pioneering this field, and many of you will have to forge your own paths, identify your own experts, or create from scratch your own data sets and relevant literatures. That's the most exciting kind of research, but it also demands the most exacting and precise use of evidence.

Establish protocols or habits now to double-check and cross-check your work, whether it's quoting someone verbatim, writing a written source correctly, taking accurate notes, or re-running calculations. Take your time. Evidence does not have to be comprehensive or air-tight to be very useful, but you must be 100% accurate in how you report it.

**Slide 13: Representative and Sufficient**
One cow does not make a herd. Similarly, one quotation, data point, personal experience, or other bit of evidence does not make your case (though the converse is true: one piece of evidence can disprove a claim). Your evidence does not have to be – and will not be – comprehensive or definitive: the scope of this project limits the quantity and spectrum of evidence you will be able to collect. Nevertheless, find the best, most relevant evidence you can, and ensure that it is to the best of your knowledge representative of the full volume and range of evidenciary variations.

If your evidence is not totally representative or is in some ways insufficient, but is the best or most available, you may still use it if you are clear with your reader about its limits. Honesty will "buy" you the credibility to make an educated guess, create a prototype policy, or extrapolate from the evidence in creative ways that would otherwise be intellectually irresponsible.

**Slide 14: Anticipation and Response**
In order to build a sound and compelling argument, it is important not only to have a claim explained by a reason based on evidence, but to anticipate your reader's challenges, questions, or even areas of ignorance and respond to them preemptively. In doing so, you will once again raise your credibility by demonstrating intellectual flexibility and honesty.

There are generally 2 kinds of challenges to anticipate: those that question the intrinsic soundness of your argument or any of its components, and those that accept the merit of your argument on the whole, but question its strength because it didn't address alternative explanations, interpretations, policies, or evidence the reader has in mind.

Without driving yourselves crazy and wasting time trying to anticipate every single possible challenge or question (of which there are almost an infinite number, so you'll be sitting there awhile), you would do well to question your own work in order to strengthen it. In much the same way that a muscle grows stronger through resistance, your argument, claims, reasons, and evidence can only benefit from subjection to tough questions.

**Slide 15: Questions and Challenges**
Booth, chapter 10 provides a list of effective questions and challenges to use as your starting point. You will all obviously function as your own best critics, since you can develop much more focused and relevant questions or challenges to pose in addition to these.

- What makes you so sure there's a problem, or that it's so important as to merit a big, potentially expensive or disruptive solution?

- If there is indeed a problem, it's this other thing over here. Why have you framed the problem this way?

- What kind of problem is this – conceptual or pragmatic?

- Is your solution conceptual or practical?

- There are exceptions or limitations to your claim – you have overstated or oversimplified it.

- Why is your solution or answer better than others'? (If it's conceptual) - It is incongruent with established and conventional ways of thinking. (If it's practical) - It will cost too much or be too difficult to implement.

- You should have used a different kind of evidence: numbers vs. testimony, examples rather than abstractions, etc.

- This isn't accurate: your numbers don't add up.

- This is not precise: what does "many" mean?

- This is not current: there is more recent research on this.

- This is not authoritative: X is not an expert on this/has been discredited by this other source.

- This is not sufficient. You don't have enough here to establish a pattern or justify your solution.

- There are other causes in addition to or instead of the one you identify.

- There are other counterexamples that discredit your claim.

- Your reader does not define, understand, or use a key term the way you do.

**Slide 16: Actions and Responses**
For all of these questions and challenges, you have an array of possible actions and responses:

- ✓ If you can ask a question above to which you do not know the answer, you can:
  - stop until you find the answer;
  - continue with your research in the hope that you will find it;
  - acknowledge up front that you do not/cannot know the answer, but respond that a) you can defensibly compensate for it in another way, b) the unknown factor is not critical to your claim, c) this represents an area for future research, outside the proper bounds of your current project, or d) this makes your argument unacceptable in its totality, but still valuable in pointing the way toward a possible solution.

- ✓ If a question or challenge points to a weakness that does not really exist, you have not adequately or fully explained something. Go back and clarify or expand.

- ✓ If an important, reasonable, and likely question or challenge arises that does not belong to one of the two preceding categories, integrate it into your argument, claim, reason, or evidence. Focus your argument more carefully. Qualify or limit your claim. Define your terms with precision. Reference alternative solutions, lines of argument,

counterexamples, or evidence, and then explain why you have rejected or excluded them.

**Slide 17: Warrants**
Warrants are undoubtedly the most abstract, difficult aspect of an argument to grasp and work with. We will not go into great depth or detail about warrants, but you should have a rudimentary understanding of what they are and how they are used.

A warrant is basically a confirmation or proof, especially of authenticity. (You can perhaps imagine why the word is used to describe the proof of authority necessary sometimes to place someone under arrest.) In the academic sense, a warrant usually takes the form of a general principle – divided into a condition and a consequence – that if accepted (and it is usually a widely-accepted principle), "confirms" or "proves" the connection between your claim and your reason.

Wait, you say – you didn't think you had a problem between your claim and your reason. Well, you might, and that brings us to the most common use and necessity of warrants: if your reader accepts your evidence and your reason(s), but does not think they're relevant to your claim, he or she will reject the claim. In such a case, a warrant is the glue that binds any potentially wobbly causative or correlative links between your claim and your reason(s).

A warrant may be a common-sense guideline, a generally-accepted principle, a definition, or a number of other things, but it will always contain an "if/then" logic, called the condition/consequence sequence.

**Slide 18: Argument and Challenge**
Here is an excellent example taken from Booth, 11.4:

<u>Argument</u>:

"We believe that, contrary to popular belief, gun ownership was not widespread in the first half of the nineteenth century in America or before *(= Claim*), because guns were so rarely mentioned in wills *(= Reason*). A review of 4,465 wills filed in seven states from 1750-1850 shows that only 11 percent of them mention a long gun or a handgun *(= report of Evidence*)."

<u>Challenge</u>:

Because of the politically-charged nature of the issue of gun ownership, many people would be disinclined to believe that gun ownership was not ubiquitous in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period, and will resist this argument. Be attuned to the potential political implications of your arguments.

Even if someone is open to accepting this claim, and accepts the validity of the author's reason and evidence, a careful reader would reasonably object that just because an object is not listed in a will does not mean the person didn't own it. Where's the logical or causative link between the claim and the reason/evidence?

**Slide 19: Warrant Response**

A good researcher will anticipate this challenge, in this particular example because it *does constitute, from the reader's perspective*, a flaw in the argument. The researcher would preempt the challenge by beginning with a warrant to link the two elements:

"In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most household objects were regularly listed in wills, especially if they were valuable objects like guns. So when someone failed to mention such an object, he probably did not own one."

A warrant is sometimes a common-sense principle of which the reader needs to be reminded. In this case, the warrant was a specific piece of information the reader probably lacked.

Warrants draw our attention to the value of knowing one's reader, or "consumer," as we've sometimes been calling him or her: not just so you can produce research that's intrinsically valuable or useful, but so you can present it in ways appropriate to your reader's level of interest, knowledge, or expertise. If our researcher in the example above were writing to her community of eighteenth-century historians, she might not need to add the warrant, because her readers would already understand the implicit link between the claim and the reason. If her work is directed to even a general audience, on the other hand, unfamiliar with the period or culture in question, she'd better reinforce her claim with all the warrants and evidence available.