Chapter 7 - Making Good Arguments

1. The second kind of support is the evidence on which you base your reasons. Now the distinction between reasons and evidence can seem just a matter of semantics, and in some contexts the words do seem interchangeable: You have to base your claim on good reasons. You have to base your claim on good evidence. But they are not synonyms, and distinguishing them is crucial in making sound arguments
2. To o=er a complete argument, however, you must add at least one more element and often a second: you must acknowledge other points of view and o=er what we call warrants, which show how a reason is relevant to a claim.
3. Careful readers will question every part of your argument, so you must anticipate as many of their questions as you can, and then acknowledge and respond to the most important ones. For example, when readers consider the claim that children exposed to violent TV adopt its values, they might wonder whether children are drawn to TV violence because they are already inclined to violence
4. As we'll see, it's not easy to decide when you even need a warrant. Experienced researchers state them only when they think readers might question whether a reason is relevant to their claim. If you think they will see its relevance, you don't need a warrant.
5. Only the evidence "stands alone," but even then you must explain where you got it and maybe why you think it's reliable, and that may require yet another argument
6. If, for example, you were making an argument about the relationship between in?ation and money supply to readers not familiar with economic theory, you would have to explain how economists de>ne "money." Serious arguments are complex constructions. Chapters 8–11 explain them in detail.
7. In so doing, they also judge the quality of your mind, even your implied character, traditionally called your ethos. Do you seem to be the sort of person who considers issues from all sides, who supports claims with evidence that readers accept, and who thoughtfully considers other points of view? Or do you seem to be someone who sees only what matters to her and dismisses or even ignores the views of others?
8. One of us was explaining to teachers of legal writing how being a novice makes many first- year law students feel like incompetent writers. At the end of the talk, one woman reported that she had been a professor of anthropology whose published work was praised for the clarity of her writing. Then she switched careers and went to law school. She said that during her first six months, she wrote so incoherently that she feared she was su=ering from a degenerative brain disease
9. You may oversimplify in a different way after you learn your field's typical problems, methods, schools of thought, and standard forms of argument. When some new researchers succeed with one kind of argument, they keep making it. They fail to see that their field, like every other, has a second kind of complexity: competing methodologies, competing solutions, competing goals and objectives—all marks of a lively field of inquiry.
10. So when you learn to make one kind of argument, don't assume that you can apply it to every new claim. Seek out alternative methods, formulate not only multiple solutions but multiple ways of supporting them, ask whether others would approach your problem di=erently