

CSC: CoR: Chapter 11: Warrants

The 10 salient sentence strings presented below are lifted from the chapter as is, without modification (except, perhaps, for a bit of punctuation here or there). They are presented in order of appearance in the chapter.

Ten Salient Sentence Strings

1. When you write for experts in a field, you can leave most of your warrants unstated, because your readers will usually know them already and take them for granted. [...] A warrant is a principle that connects a reason to a claim. Warrants are important because readers may challenge not just the validity of a reason but its *relevance* as well. In this chapter, we explain how warrants work, how to test them, and when and when not to state them. The basic principle is this: state your warrants only if your readers will not be able to understand your reasoning without them, or if you anticipate that your reasoning will be challenged.
2. Most proverbs describe a situation made up of two distinct parts: a circumstance (*Where there's smoke, . . .*) and its consequence (*. . . there's fire*). If the connection between the circumstance and consequence is true or reasonable in general, it must also be true or reasonable in specific instances.
3. We use proverbs to justify many kinds of everyday reasoning: cause and effect (*Haste makes waste*); rules of behavior (*Look before you leap*); reliable inference (*One swallow does not a summer make*). But such proverbs are not our only examples of everyday warrants. We use warrants everywhere: in sports (*Defense wins championships*); in cooking (*Serve oysters only in months with an "r"*); in definitions (*A prime number can be divided only by itself and one*); even in research (*When readers find an error in one bit of evidence, they distrust the rest*).
4. [...] in contrast to proverbs and other everyday warrants, academic warrants can be difficult to manage—especially for researchers new to a field—for three reasons. First, academic warrants aren't commonplaces we all share. They are specific principles of reasoning that belong to particular communities of researchers, and they are countless. A fact of life is that it just takes time for new researchers to grasp the warrants of their fields.
5. Second, experienced researchers rarely state their warrants explicitly when they write for specialized readers in their fields because they can safely assume that these readers already know them. (To state the obvious would seem not helpful but condescending.) This practice serves specialized readers well. But it poses a challenge to novices, who have to figure out what makes some reasons relevant to claims and others not, something those experts take for granted. That's why beginners in any field struggle with the *logic* of arguments written for specialists.
6. [...] whether or not a warrant gets stated explicitly depends not only on the argument but also on the audience. Experts state principles that are obvious to other experts only when they communicate with non-experts—or when challenged. Third, academic warrants are often stated in ways that compress their circumstances and consequences. In most proverbs, these parts are distinct:

Where there's smoke, circumstance there's fire. consequence But we can also compress those two parts into one short statement: *Smoke means fire*. That's something we rarely do with proverbs but that experts often do with their specialized warrants.

7. If someone objects that the reason [of an argument] seems *irrelevant* to the claim, the person making the argument would have to justify the connection with a warrant consisting of two parts: (1) a general circumstance that lets us draw a conclusion about (2) a general consequence. *When a nation's labor force shrinks,* general circumstance *its economic future is grim.* general consequence. Both the circumstance and consequence have to be more general than the specific reason and claim.
8. [...] if [you want your] readers to accept that warrant, [you] must ask [your]self five questions before [your] readers do: 1. Is that warrant reasonable? 2. Is it sufficiently limited? 3. Is it superior to any competing warrants? 4. Is it appropriate to this field? 5. Is it able to cover the reason and claim?
9. Most warrants are reasonable only within certain limits. For example, that warrant about gun ownership seems to allow no exceptions: In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, valuable objects were listed in wills. That version is too broad; it might seem more plausible if it were qualified: In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, **most** household objects **considered valuable by their owners** were **usually** listed in wills. But once you start qualifying a warrant with words like *most* and *usually*, you then have to show that its exceptions do not exclude your reason and claim: *What frequency are most and usually? Were guns always considered valuable?*
10. The most difficult arguments to make are those that challenge not just the claims and evidence that a research community accepts but also the warrants it embraces. No argumentative task is harder, because when you challenge a community's warrants, you ask readers to change not just *what* they believe but *how* they reason. To challenge a warrant successfully, you must first imagine how those who accept it would defend it. Warrants can be based on different *kinds* of supporting arguments, so you have to challenge them in different ways. [These include challenging warrants based on experience, authority, and systems of knowledge, challenging general cultural warrants, challenging methodological warrants, and challenging warrants based on articles of faith.]