

# The Basic Principle

## In a Nutshell

When you ask people to do or think something they otherwise would not, they quite naturally want to know why they should do so. In fact, people tend to ask the same five questions:

1. "What do you want to do or think?"
2. "Why should I do or think that?"
3. "How do I know that what you say is true?"
4. "What about this other idea, fact, or conclusion?"
5. And, sometimes, "Why should I accept that your reasons support your claim?"

When you make a good argument, you anticipate and respond to each of these questions:

1. The answer to *What do you want me to do or think?* is your **claim**: "I claim that you should do or think X."
2. The answer to *Why should I do or think that?* states your **reasons**: "You should do or think X because..."
3. The answer to *How do I know that what you say is true?* presents your **evidence**: "You can believe my reasons because they are supported by these facts..."
4. The answer to *What about this other idea, fact, or conclusion?* **acknowledges** that your readers might see things differently and then **responds** to that alternative view.
5. The answer to *Why should I accept that your reasons support your claim?* states your general principle of reasoning, called a **warrant**: "My specific reason supports my specific claim because whenever this general condition is true, we can generally draw a conclusion like mine."

Writing principles originally from Joseph M. Williams & Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Longman, 2007.