Warrants: Overview

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What is a Warrant?

“[S]ometimes called a commonplace a common sense generalization about the world that everyone considers self-evident: Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.

[S]ome warrants are so specific to a particular community that they virtually define its special habits of mind: When different species share little DNA, we can conclude that they diverged earlier than species that share more DNA.

Like all commonplaces and habits of mind, we sometimes make them explicit, but more often we take them for granted.

How Warrants Work?

Example argument:
Despite Congress’s doubling the budget to reduce drug smuggling, the amount of drugs smuggled into this country has risen. Clearly, we are wasting our money.  

Problem:
Why should the fact that smuggling has increased despite a bigger budget to prevent it mean that we are wasting money?

General rule (warrant):
When more resources are invested to prevent something but its incidence goes up, those resources have been wasted.

Use of warrants for evidence:
Warrants also work for connecting evidence to a reason (reasons are actually sub-claims)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General circumstance</th>
<th>Probability leads to</th>
<th>General consequence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When more resources are invested to prevent something but its incidence goes up,</td>
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<td>Those resources have been wasted.</td>
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<td>Despite Congress's doubling the budget to reduce drug smuggling, the amount of drugs smuggled into this country has risen</td>
<td>Therefore</td>
<td>We are wasting our money.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Specific circumstances</th>
<th>It is true</th>
<th>Specific consequence</th>
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What Warrants Look Like?

Warrants take the form of classical syllogisms:
When(ever) X then Y: IF X THEN Y

Forms:
- Cause-effect (Rain causes wet streets)
- One-thing-is-the-sign-of-another (Cold hands, warm heart)
- A rule of behavior (Look both ways before you cross the street)
- A definition (A three-sided figure is a triangle)
- A principle of reasoning (Sufficient representative data are necessary for any reliable generalization)
- In general: Any principle that links a condition and a consequence

Knowing When to State a Warrant

Warrants for many types of reasons do not have to be stated either because they are foundational to a field or because they are obvious.

Three cases where warrants may be needed:
- Use of principle or reasoning that is new to a field (e.g. respond by citing an authority that uses the same principle)
- When readers in a field may be unfamiliar with the kind of reason (This may happen if you are in an interdisciplinary environment and use expertise not in the domain of publication)
- When readers may be biased against the claim you are making in the first place
Testing Your Warrants

Is your warrant true and appropriately limited?

Does it apply to the reason and claim?

Is it appropriate to your readers' research community?

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Example in field of law:

General expectation: When someone does another an injustice, our legal institutions should correct it.

Legal axiom: When you fail to meet legal obligations, even inadvertently, you must suffer the consequences.

Consequence argument: When old people forget to pay real estate taxes, others can buy their house for back taxes and evict them.

You may be faced with competing warrants:

When unions want to express their political views, they have a constitutionally protected right to do so. The local teachers union believes real estate taxes should be raised, so they have a right to picket the school board meeting.

When there is no unanimous agreement in a group, the group should not express a controversial opinion. Not every member of the local teachers union thinks real estate taxes should be raised, so it should not picket the school board meeting.

Challenging the Warrants of Others

Arguments that challenge current paradigms need to imagine the counter

Example: The population of Zackland must be controlled because it is outstripping its resources and heading for disaster. When a population grows beyond its resources, only a reduction in population will save the country from collapse.

Extended warrant: When countries A, B, and C exceeded their means, each collapsed. They tried to prevent collapse by every means other than population control, but it did not go good. When societies reach a point where their population exceeds their resources, the only way they can prevent collapse is to reduce their population.

Religious counter argument/warrant: It doesn’t make any difference what the economic consequences might be; it is immoral to discourage married couples from having children. When people are advised to defy God’s will as revealed in our holy books, that advice is sinful.

Alternate counter argument/warrant: Whenever we put our minds to a problem of limited resources, we can solve it.
<table>
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<th>Strategies to Challenge Warrants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Warrants based on experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Find counterexamples that cannot be dismissed as special cases</td>
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<td>• Challenge the reliability of their experience</td>
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<td>• Argue that the evidence is not relevant to the warrant</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Warrants based on authority</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Argue that the authority may not have relevant information or that the domain is outside the authority's expertise</td>
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<td><strong>Warrants based on systems of knowledge and beliefs</strong></td>
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<td>• Either challenge the system or show that the case is not covered by the warrant</td>
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<td><strong>General cultural warrants</strong></td>
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<td>• Show that cultural models can vary over time and place. Use competing cultural warrants</td>
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<td><strong>Methodological warrants</strong></td>
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<td>• Generalization: When many cases of X have the quality Y, then X is characterized by Y.</td>
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<td>• Analogy: When X is like Y in certain respects, then X will be like Y in other respects.</td>
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<td>• Cause-effect: When Y occurs if and only if X occurs first, then X may cause Y.</td>
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<td>• Sign: When Y regularly occurs before, during, or after X, Y is a sign of X.</td>
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<td>• Pointless to challenge these. Try to reframe or acknowledge as differing viewpoint</td>
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