

What does it mean to *qualify* a claim or assertion?

QUALIFY [L *qualis* (of what kind)]

- To reduce from a general to a particular form; sometimes involves reducing “all” to “some” or from a general group to a particular group
- To limit or restrict a position (for or against), or to make less strict

It is often signaled by these types of phrases:

This part is right if... This is true, except when... This might work if... The reason this happens is because... The underlying issues are..."

<http://vlc.polyu.edu.hk/academicwriter/argument/qualifying.htm>

EXAMPLES

1. Anyone looking at the data would have to agree that lean production is a technique that is exportable across borders. **But** there might be important cultural factors that could limit its success in certain countries.
2. **Up to a point** we can agree with Blair when he argues that nationalization is an ineffective way to organize industry. However the track record of some newly privatized industries suggests that....
3. **In effect** the results show that further research is necessary before we can reach any firm conclusions in this area.
4. Despite this month's unemployment figures, we can be **more or less certain** that the economic downturn has completed its cycle.

Useful words

- So to speak
- To all intents and purposes
- To some extent
- Up to a point
- It is no exaggeration to say that
- In a way
- Almost
- In effect
- More or less
- Practically

<http://www.mals.duke.edu/Argument.pdf>

QUALIFICATIONS acknowledge the limits of your argument.

- CLAIM: **Most** Americans need to exercise more.
- SUPPORT According to the **latest** government figures, **most** Americans are overweight.
- Further Qualification: **However**, strenuous exercise is not appropriate for those with certain health conditions.

A qualification is a **limitation** on the scope or precision of your claim, often expressing degrees of confidence or probability. Academic argument is typically about probability and possibility, not certainty, and therefore uses a lot of qualifiers such as *many, some, few, possibly*.

Why would you want to qualify your argument? Usually as a way of anticipating potential objections or *innoculating* readers against counter-arguments.

While Jones is right about the decimation of Native Americans by Europeans in 17th century Virginia,
[concession]

*she is **most likely** wrong in ascribing to them a careful campaign of germ warfare against the native populations, because she does not **fully** take into account the fact that the same patterns of disease transmission which we now can analyze so exhaustively would have **likely** appeared random and unpredictable at the time, evidence more of God's judgment than man's activities.* [rebuttal]

[limitation of certainty]

*If we assume also that the reduction in native populations was caused at least as much by disease transmission among trading partners as it was by open warfare, [limiting conditions] then we cannot **confidently** say that white Virginians used disease as a weapon during this period.*

[limitation of scope]