

Addressing Counterarguments

What does it mean to Address Counterarguments?

1. **Counterargument:** an argument against your argument; an argument that opposes your thesis.
2. **Refutation (rebuttal):** an argument that states why the counterargument is wrong or insignificant.

Example¹

1. Some may argue that students lack the responsibility to have drinks in class. 2. This, however, is not true. Students drink soda in the cafeteria all the time, and rarely is there a spill. Also there could be a compromise where students only bring in clear liquids. This would eliminate any attains if there was a spill. A final reason is that there could be a rule that all drinks had to have twist on or snap on lids. 3. These reasons eliminate the concern of our lack of responsibility.

Why address counterarguments when you write?

- Drafting: a good way to test your ideas while you still have time to revise them.
- Final Essay: a persuasive and disarming tactic. It allows you to anticipate doubts and pre-empt objections that a skeptical reader might have;
- Helps your ethos! It presents you as the kind of person who weighs alternatives before arguing for one, who confronts difficulties instead of sweeping them under the rug, who is more interested in discovering the truth than winning a point.

How to introduce the counterargument (the turn against)

To get you thinking about possible counterarguments, imagine a skeptical reader, or cite an actual source, who might resist your argument by pointing out

- a problem with your demonstration, e.g., that a different conclusion could be drawn from the same facts, a key assumption is unwarranted, a key term is used unfairly, certain evidence is ignored or played down;
- one or more disadvantages or practical drawbacks to what you propose;
- an alternative explanation or proposal that makes more sense.

Here are some ways you can introduce your counterargument:

1. Phrase:
 - *One might object here that...*
 - *It might seem that...*
 - *It's true that...*
 - *Admittedly,...*
 - *Of course, ...*
2. Anticipated challenging question:
 - *But how...?*
 - *But why...?*
 - *But isn't this just...?*
 - *But if this is so, what about...?*

• content adapted from <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/counter-argument> (Copyright 1999, Gordon Harvey (adapted from *The Academic Essay: A Brief Anatomy*), for the Writing Center at Harvard University the Writing Center at Harvard University)

• ¹Counterargument & Refutation Paragraph Example: http://msmallian.weebly.com/uploads/5/5/8/2/55823453/writing_-_persuasive_-_counterargument_example.pdf

• ²Boston Debate League Handout

• ³Examples Source: <http://www.shoreline.edu/doldham/101/html/what%20is%20a%20c-a.htm>

State the case against yourself as briefly but as clearly and forcefully as you can, pointing to evidence where possible. (An obviously feeble or perfunctory counterargument does more harm than good.)

How to refute the counterargument (the turn back)

After you offer the counterargument, you **MUST** refute it (show how it is wrong.) In reasoning about the proposed counterargument, you may

- Deny: tell why the counterargument is not true
- Reverse: tell why the counterargument helps your claim
- Minimize: agree with the counterargument but say why it is not very important
- Outweigh: agree with the counterargument but argue a supporting warrant is more important. ²

Here are some ways you can announce or frame your refutation:

1. Single word:

1. *but*
2. *yet*
3. *however*
4. *nevertheless*
5. *still*

2. Sentence frames:

- What this argument [overlooks/fails to consider/does not take into account] is ...
- This view [seems/looks/sounds/etc.] [convincing/plausible/persuasive/etc.] at first, but ...
- While this position is popular, it is [not supported by the facts/not logical/impractical/etc.]
- Although the core of this claim is valid, it suffers from a flaw in its [reasoning/application/etc.] ³

Where to Put a Counterargument

Counterargument can appear anywhere in the essay, but it most commonly appears

- as part of your introduction—before you propose your thesis—where the existence of a different view is the motive for your essay, the reason it needs writing;
- as a section or paragraph just after your introduction, in which you lay out the expected reaction or standard position before turning away to develop your own;
- as a quick move within a paragraph, where you imagine a counterargument not to your main idea but to the sub-idea that the paragraph is arguing or is about to argue;
- as a section or paragraph just before the conclusion of your essay, in which you imagine what someone might object to what you have argued.

But watch that you don't overdo it. A turn into counterargument here and there will sharpen and energize your essay, but too many such turns will have the reverse effect by obscuring your main idea or suggesting that you're ambivalent.

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Structures for the Counterargument

Caution! These structures are guidelines; the number of paragraphs, amount of evidence, etc. may vary depending on your essay's needs.

Structure A	Structure B	Structure C
<p>Begin each body paragraph with a claim and evidence. Then address and refute a relevant counterargument.</p>	<p>Begin each body paragraph with the counterclaim and then refute the counterclaim with a relevant claim and evidence.</p>	<p>Address a critical or overarching counterargument in one section of your essay.</p>
<p>Body Paragraph 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claim • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) • Counter-argument • Refutation <p>Body Paragraph 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claim • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) • Counter-argument • Refutation <p>Body Paragraph 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claim • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) • Counter-argument • Refutation 	<p>Body Paragraph 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument • Claim (as refutation) • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) <p>Body Paragraph 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument • Claim (as refutation) • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) <p>Body Paragraph 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument • Claim (as refutation) • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) 	<p>Body Paragraph 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claim • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) <p>Body Paragraph 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claim • Evidence (examples/quotes, etc.) <p>Body Paragraph 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterargument • Refutation <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>Place it in your introduction! If your counterclaim opposes your entire thesis, you can also consider addressing and refuting it in your introduction.</p>

Notes: