

Counterarguments

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What is a counterargument and why is it important?

A counterargument is a writing technique most often used in persuasive essays. Counterarguments show that you understand both your opinion on a matter and the opinion of others because you are offering your reader others' arguments that may be incorrect or flawed compared to your own. Simply put, it strengthens your persuasive essay by showing your audience why they should consider your argument over others.

Where should I put a counterargument?

A counterargument can occur anywhere in a paper except for the conclusion.

- In your introduction: Put the counterargument before your thesis to show that there are different opinions on your paper topic.
- Part of a body paragraph: Include the counterargument in one of your body paragraphs only if it affects a sub-idea in your paper *but* not your main idea.
- Before the conclusion: This placement is most common. Use this paragraph to acknowledge that others might disagree with everything that you previously argued, refute the claims in the opposing arguments, then synthesize your argument in your conclusion.

Three Ways to Respond to Counterarguments

After you have stated your counterargument, you need to determine how to respond. Do you agree with the arguments that others have made? Do you disagree? Do you agree with part of the argument but disagree with another section? Below are some ways to respond depending on your stance.

1. Agree: It can be hard to admit that an argument may be valid, especially if it is in opposition to your own opinion and thesis; however, conceding to an argument shows that the issue is complex and that your stance is tentative. Additionally, the reader will have greater respect for you and they will weigh your argument more generously.
 - Key Phrases: I agree that X is correct about ____ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that ____.
X's ____ theory is important to consider because it sheds light on ____.
2. Disagree: Here you can show how the conclusion someone else reached is incorrect by questioning the argument's reasons and supporting evidence. You might also be examining the assumptions that prop up an argument.
 - Key Phrases: X is mistaken because they overlook ____.
X's claim that ____ rests on the questionable assumption of ____.
I disagree with the view of X about ____, because recent research shows ____.
X contradicts herself; on one hand she states ____, and on the other hand, she states ____.
By focusing on ____, X overlooks ____.
3. Both: When agreeing and disagreeing concurrently, acknowledge where you agree with the argument but also where you disagree. Be sure to explain why you both agree and disagree.
 - Key Phrases: Although I concede ____, I still insist that ____.
X is right that ____, but the argument remains unclear about ____.
While X is probably wrong about ____, they are right that ____.

* Section and templates adapted from Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say*

What parts are there in a counterargument?

The main idea of a counterargument has two parts: to challenge your own argument and to then re-affirm your argument again.

1. When challenging your argument, address issues such as a shortcoming or problem with your view, any disadvantages, and any alternative explanations or methods.
 - Examples:
 - (*Shortcoming*) A hindrance to the expansion of solar energy is the initial expenses of setting up an industry to collect, store, and distribute solar energy.
 - (*Disadvantage*) Using greener energy sources, including solar energy, is difficult because this newer industry has to compete against giant oil and coal burning companies who can produce this energy cheaper. Therefore, energy produced from oil and coal is easier and cheaper for Americans to access.
 - (*Alternative Methods*) Solar energy is only one of many industries producing clean energy instead of using nuclear or coal burning industries. Other technologies have been developed to provide wind, hydroelectric, and geothermal energy.
2. When reaffirming your argument, return to your original argument or claim with a transition such as *however, nevertheless, but, yet, or still*. Afterwards, show the weaknesses or mistakes of the opposing argument. Alternatively, you can show the validity of the opposing argument while also illustrating why your claim is more plausible or a logically better choice.
 - Examples:
 - (*Weakness*) Setting up the equipment for generating solar energy is initially time consuming and expensive; *however* the same is also true for other renewable energy sources.
 - (*Showing Validity*) The sun is an accessible resource over almost the entire earth, *whereas* other forms of renewable energy are dependent on specific weather or geographical conditions, making solar energy easier to access and a better choice.
3. Put the Two Together:
 - (**Challenge**) Dr. Science claims using energy derived from cold fusion would solve the world's energy crisis almost immediately because energy produced from burning fossil fuels and from other renewable resources would no longer be needed in such great quantities.
 - (**Reaffirm**) Yet, cold fusion is only hypothetically the best option, because it has only been hypothesized and never actualized, making energy produced by renewable resources, specifically from the solar energy industry, the best choice for future energy production.

What Not To Do:

1. Don't introduce a counterargument that is only a statement. Make sure that there is some logic or evidence to support the claim and that it actually makes an argument for a specific point of view.
2. Don't create a "straw man" or an easily defeated argument. Make sure the opposition's point is a serious one. It will make your paper and argument stronger!
3. Don't throw out counterarguments that cannot be refuted. Instead, consider how you might respond or even restructure your paper if you find your opinion changing. Sometimes a counterargument is too strong to disprove. This doesn't make your paper weaker. Instead, it shows your audience that you have considered the nuances and complexities of the argument you are discussing and it boosts your credibility.

Works Consulted:

The Harvard University Writing Center (<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/counter-argument>); UC San Diego Revelle College (https://www.google.com/url?q=https://revelle.ucsd.edu/humanities/writing-info/&sa=D&ust=1500401774856000&usg=AFQjCNGvVr5yMm9imscZD4_3n6P7n4Upiw); *They Say, I Say* (Graff and Birkenstein); *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, 5th ed. (Ramage, Bean, and Johnson)