

Chapter Eight

The Antithesis Exercise

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At a certain point in your research and writing process, you might find yourself quite attached to your topic and your working thesis. Perhaps you are so attached and focused on your topic that you have a hard time imagining why anyone would disagree with you.

This attachment is certainly understandable. After you have done so much hunting in the library and on the Internet and thinking about your working thesis, you might have a hard time imagining how anyone could possibly disagree with your position, or why they would want to.

But it is important to remember that not all of your potential readers are going to automatically agree with you. If your topic or take on an issue is particularly controversial, you might have to work hard at convincing almost all of your readers about the validity of your argument.

Solving Problems by Negotiating Differences

Writing Commons author Joe Moxley, writes about this type of logical argument using the Rogerian conciliatory approach.

How many times have you been in an argument that you knew you couldn't win? Are you reluctant to change your mind about certain social, political, or personal issues? Do you have an unshakable faith in a particular religion or philosophy? For example, are you

absolutely certain that abortion is immoral under all circumstances? Are you categorically against animal experimentation for advancements in medicine? Do you believe that criminals who have tortured and killed people should receive the death penalty? Do you believe that parents should have no more than two children because of the world population problem? Do you believe it is your patriotic duty to buy solely American products?

Some of our beliefs and arguments are based on faith, some on emotion, and some on logic alone. We all hold different religious, political, and personal beliefs that largely define who we are and how we think. Within the past fifty years, as the size of our global village has appeared to shrink with the use of television, fax, and jets, we have become increasingly more sophisticated and knowledgeable. As a result, most educated people now realize that few significant issues have simple solutions. Thanks to modern scholarship and research, we have come to realize that our personalities and thoughts are shaped to some degree by cultural expectations. Philosophers have challenged us to recognize that our worldviews - our assumptions about reality, what is good, what is possible - are influenced by our day-to-day experiences. We have realized that truth is not a fixed, static entity that can be carried into a battle like a banner.

One result of our increasingly sophisticated world is that you cannot assume that your readers will believe or even understand everything you say. On the contrary, you need to assume that your readers will doubt you. They will question the validity of your evidence and test the logic of your conclusions. Modern readers tend to be particularly contentious when you insist on assertions that they find objectionable. Because of this shift in audience attitude, writers need to develop compelling ways of organizing and presenting arguments.

When you wish to address an emotional and controversial issue and when your audience is likely to be threatened by your ideas, you will probably not be successful if you make your claim in the introduction of your essay (or verbal argument). No matter how thoroughly you go on to support your ideas with careful reasoning and to refute other claims (such as those held by your audience) respectfully, your readers have already decided to ignore you. For example, can you imagine how your roommate would respond if you remark that he or she is a terrible slob? Even if you follow up your comment with photographs of the dirty dishes, cluttered rooms, and soiled carpet left in his or her wake, can you imagine that the final outcome of your detailed presentation might be resolution? More likely you will face anger, bitterness, and denial. Watch your introductory prepositions!

Most of us tend to resist change and are threatened by ideas that challenge what we believe. Also, most of us dislike being told what to do and how to think, so even if our brains tell us to agree, our emotions (and egos) tell us to shut down and ignore what we are hearing. A male chauvinist who believes that women are intellectually inferior to men will be unlikely to listen to your argument that women are as intelligent as men. Your quotes from world-renowned educators and philosophers and your statistics from the Stanford-Binet or SAT, GRE, and MCAT scores would probably be dismissed as inaccurate because they threaten his assumptions. Of course, you could hope that the chauvinist would change his mind over time when he wasn't being pressed, yet you couldn't bet on this outcome.

Because conflict is inevitable, we need to seek creative ways to solve complicated

problems and to negotiate differences between opposing parties. Although there are no simple formulas for bringing opposing factions together, we do have a relatively new form of communication founded on Carl Rogers's client-centered therapeutic approach to one-on-one and group counseling. Essentially, the Rogerian problem-solving approach reconceptualizes our goals when we argue. Instead of assuming that an author or speaker should hope to overcome an antagonistic audience with shrewd reasoning, the Rogerian approach would have the author or speaker attempt to reach some common ground with the audience. Thus, in a very real way, Rogerian "persuasion" is not a form of persuasion so much as it is a way of opening communication for negotiating common ground between divergent points of view. In terms of writing, we could say that the Rogerian approach melds the techniques of informative analyses with those of persuasive reports. Your goal when you employ the tactics of Rogerian problem-solving is not for you to win and for your opponent to lose, a scenario that more often results in both parties losing. Instead, you explore ways that will allow both you and your audience to win.

Rogerian Argument

Written by Joe Moxley for *Writing Commons*

This Rogerian process started to make its way into textbooks in 1970. Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike's introduction of Rogerian psychology in their book *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* seeks to simplify some of Rogers's terminology and begin to present the process as a set of rhetorical objectives: "The writer who uses the Rogerian strategy attempts to do three things:

1. to convey to the reader that he is understood
2. to delineate the area within which he believes the reader's position to be valid
3. to induce him to believe that he and the writer share certain moral qualities (275)

Put like this, in such a simple and reductive way, the process of attaining and expressing Rogerian understanding seems almost easy.

It is important to note that these are not developmental steps intended as heuristics, that indeed there are no sequential stages to a Rogerian argument. They are instead objectives to be pursued independently and recursively with the probable effect of facilitating communication. As Young, Becker, and Pike write, "Rogerian argument has no conventional structure; in fact, users of the strategy deliberately avoid conventional persuasive structures and techniques because these devices tend to produce a sense of threat." This is not to say the argument has no structure, but rather that "the structure is more directly the product of a particular writer, a particular topic, and a particular audience" (275). The danger of argumentative form becoming an exclusionary force, silencing rather than evoking discussion, is therefore greatly reduced.

At this point, then, you may be wondering what Rogerian argument might actually look like in terms of an essay for a composition class. An essay modeled on Rogers's approach should include a few particular parts:

- a discussion of the problem from both points of view that uses value-neutral language
- a discussion of the writer's opponent's point of view and a selection of facts or assertions the writer might be willing to concede to his opponent
- a discussion of the writer's point of view and a selection of facts or assertions the writer's opponent might be able to accept about his point of view
- a thesis that establishes a compromise between these two points of view and represents concessions from both the writer and his opponent

Analyzing Pertinent Conventions

Below are some of the strategies that you can use to negotiate consensus between opposing parties. As usual, you should not consider the following to be a rigid formula. Instead, pick and choose from these strategies in light of your audience, purpose, and intended voice.

Present the Problem

In the introduction, identify the issue and clarify its significance. Because you need to adopt a nonthreatening persona throughout your essay, however, avoid dogmatically presenting your view as the best or only way to solve the problem. Unlike your strategy for shaping a conventional persuasive text, at this point in your discussion you will not want to lay your cards on the table and summarize your presentation. Instead, explain the scope and complexity of the issue. You might want to mention the various approaches that people have taken to solve the problem and perhaps even suggest that the issue is so complicated that the best you and your readers can hope for is consensus - or agreement on some aspect of the matter.

In your introduction and throughout your essay, you will want to explain the problem in ways that will make your audience say, "Yes, this author understands my position." Because the people whom you are writing for may feel stress when you confront them with an emotionally charged issue and may already have made up their minds firmly on the subject, you should try to interest such reluctant readers by suggesting that you have an innovative way of viewing the problem. Of course, this tactic is effective only when you can indeed follow through and be as original as possible in your treatment of the subject. Otherwise, your readers may reject your ideas because they recognize that you have misrepresented yourself.

Challenge Yourself to Risk Change

Rather than masking your thoughts behind an "objective persona," the Rogerian approach allows you to express your true feelings. However, if you are to meet the ideals of Rogerian communication, you need to challenge your own beliefs; you must be so open-minded that you truly entertain the possibility that your ideas are wrong, or at least not absolutely right.

According to Rogers, you must "run the risk of being changed yourself. You ... might find yourself influenced in your attitudes or your personality."

Elaborate on the Value of Opposing Positions

In this part of your argument you will want to elaborate on which of your opponent's claims about the problem are correct. For example, if your roommate's messiness is driving you crazy but you still want to live with him or her, stress that cleanliness is not the be-all-and-end-all of human life. Commend your roommate for helping you focus on your studies and express appreciation for all of the times that he or she has pitched in to clean up. And, of course, you would also want to admit to a few annoying habits of your own, such as taking thirty-minute showers or talking on your cell phone late at night while your roommate is trying to sleep! After viewing the problem from your roommate's perspective, you might even be willing to explore how your problem with compulsive neatness is itself a problem.

Show Instances When Your Assertions Are Valid

Once you have identified the problem in as nonthreatening a way as possible, established a fair-minded persona, and called for some level of consensus based on a "higher" interest, you have reached the most important stage in Rogerian negotiation: you can now present your position. At this point in your argument, you do not want to slap down a "But!" or "However!" and then come out of your corner punching. Remember the spirit of Rogerian problem solving: your ultimate goal is not to beat your audience, but to communicate with them and to promote a workable compromise. For example, in the sample argument with your roommate, rather than issuing an ultimatum such as "Unless you start picking up after yourself and doing your fair share of the housework, I'm moving out," you could say, "I realize that you view housekeeping as a less important activity than I do, but I need to let you know that I find your messiness to be highly stressful, and I'm wondering what kind of compromise we can make so we can continue living together." Yes, this statement carries an implied threat, but note how this sentence is framed positively and minimizes the emotional intensity inherent in the situation.

To achieve the nonthreatening tone needed to diffuse emotional situations, avoid exaggerating your claims or using biased, emotional language. Also, avoid attacking your audience's claims as exaggerated. Whenever you feel angry or defensive, take a deep breath and look for points in which you can agree with or understand your opponents. When you are really emotional about an issue, try to cool off enough to recognize where your language is loaded with explosive terms. To embrace the Rogerian approach, remember that you need to defuse your temper and set your pride and ego aside.

Present Your Claim in a Nonthreatening Way

Admittedly, it is difficult to substantiate an argument while acknowledging the value of competing positions. Yet if you have done an effective job in the early part of your essay,

then your audience perceives you to be a reasonable person - someone worth listening to. Consequently, you should not sell yourself short when presenting your position.

Because of the emotionally charged context of your communication situation, you still need to maintain the same open-minded persona that you established in the introductory paragraphs. Although your main focus in this section is to develop the validity of your claim, you can maintain your fair-minded persona by recalling significant counterarguments and by elaborating on a few limitations of your claim. You can also remind your readers that you are not expecting them to accept your claim completely. Instead, you are merely attempting to show that under certain circumstances your position is valid.

Search for a Compromise and Call for a Higher Interest

Near the conclusion of your essay, you may find it useful to encourage your audience to seek a compromise with you under a call for a "higher interest."

Writing Assignments

The Rogerian method of problem solving is designed for exploring controversial interpersonal, social, and political problems. You can use these techniques to help you begin or end a personal relationship or to help you effectively communicate with your professors, etc. Knowledge of the Rogerian method can help you deal with instances of sexual discrimination in the workplace or help you encourage insecure authorities to take the action that you want. You could use Rogerian approaches to encourage your classmates and other students at your school to be more sympathetic about social problems such as poverty and ecological issues. To select a subject for a Rogerian analysis, try reviewing your journal and freewrite about significant interpersonal problems you have dealt with in your life. Below are a few questions that may help you identify a subject:

1. Do I want to write about an interpersonal issue? For example, am I having trouble communicating with someone? Could the breakdown be linked to my failure to employ Rogerian strategies? Are there any major differences in belief that I could bridge by communicating with him or her in a Rogerian way?
2. Do I want to write about a social or political problem? Are there any on-campus or work-related problems that I wish to explore? For example, am I worried about an important national issue such as the federal deficit? Or could I promote harmony in a local or campus conflict?
3. Are there any sports-related topics that I could tackle? For example, do I want to convince skiers that short skis have carved up the mountain in an ugly way? Do I want to persuade tennis players that we need to throw away the wide-body power rackets and go back to the days of wooden rackets because power tennis is killing finesse tennis?
4. Consider playing the role of a marketing executive. Find a new product that you believe is superior to an established product and then write some advertising copy that explains why people should shift their loyalty to the new product.

Prewriting and Drafting Strategies

Analyze Your Communication Situation

To help you get a handle on which claims you are willing to relinquish and which you wish to negotiate, write a profile of your anticipated audience. Because awareness of the opinions and fears of your audience is so crucial to successfully negotiating differences among competing positions, you need to try to "become" your audience. As usual, this process involves asking, "What do my readers believe and know about the subject? Why do they think and feel my position is wrong?" Ideally, this process extends beyond merely considering your audience's needs to setting aside your thoughts and feelings and embracing the opposition's notions about the subject.

After you have gotten "under the skin" of your audience, freewrite an essay about your subject from their perspective. Doing this in a Rogerian way means that you truly challenge your own beliefs and present your opponent's viewpoints as strongly as you would your own. If you find yourself unwilling to explore the strengths of your opponent's position, then you should select a new subject.

Write an Outline

After freewriting about your opponent's positions as if they were your own, you will probably have excellent ideas about how best to shape your essay. You may find it useful to jot down your objectives as suggested in the following outline. Remember, though, don't let the outline control your thoughts. If insights occur while you are writing, experiment with them.

1. Explain the issue's significance and scope
2. In what ways are the major assumptions of the opposing position valid?
3. In what ways are your assumptions invalid and valid?
4. What consensus can you establish?

Revising and Editing Strategies

By analyzing the strengths and weaknesses that your classmates and instructor have identified in past papers, you can know what special problems you should look for when evaluating your persuasive essay. As always, give yourself as much time as possible between drafts. Below I have listed some questions that highlight special concerns you will need to address when writing your Rogerian essay.

Is the Subject Appropriate for a Rogerian Approach?

A day or so after you have completed the first draft of your essay, reread it from the perspective of your intended audience. To conduct an honest self-evaluation, try to answer the following questions:

1. In the introduction, have I truly been open-minded? Have I thoroughly reviewed the strengths of my opponent's counterarguments? Have I honestly challenged the weaknesses of my own position?

2. How could I change the essay to make it less emotionally charged?
3. Are the transitions from the opposing position to my position as smooth as possible?
4. When I present my claims, do I sound informed, intelligent, compassionate? What additional data would help my readers better understand my position? Do I need more facts and figures? Can I incorporate more outside quotations to substantiate my argument?
5. Have I successfully limited my analysis and elaborated on one specific, significant claim? Have I presented my position clearly and accurately?
6. Is the compromise I have suggested reasonable? Can I be more original in my call for a higher interest?

Read Your Work Aloud

Before submitting your essay to your peers or teacher, read it aloud to yourself several times. As you read, make a note of passages that seem difficult to read or sound awkward. Question whether the tone in the paragraphs is appropriate, given your audience and purpose. For example, can you find any passages that sound insincere or condescending?

Share Your Work with People Who Disagree with You

Ask people with different viewpoints from yours to critique your work. Let them know that you are attempting to seek a compromise between your position and theirs and that you welcome their suggestions.

Do a Criteria-Based Evaluation

In addition to making notes on criticisms of your text and ideas for improving it, you may find the following criteria-based format a useful way of identifying and correcting any weaknesses in your peers' drafts or your own.

1. Rogerian Appeals
 - Author establishes an emphatic persona and avoid threatening challenges
 - Author clarifies instances in which opposing assertions are valid
 - Author show instances when assertions are valid
 - Author develops claim in as nonthreatening way as possible
 - Author seeks compromise and calls for an higher interest

Revisiting the working (and inevitably changing) thesis

The process of considering opposing viewpoints is the goal of this exercise, the Antithesis essay. Think about this exercise as a way of exploring the variety of different and opposing views to the main argument you are trying to make with your research project.

Chapter Five, "The Working Thesis Exercise," describes the process of developing a working thesis. Here is a quick review of the characteristics of a good thesis:

- **A thesis advocates a specific and debatable issue.**
- **A thesis can either be directly stated (as is often the case in academic writing) or implied.**
- **A thesis is NOT a statement of fact, a series of questions, or a summary of events.**
- **A thesis answers the two most basic reader questions "What's your point?" and "Why should I care?"**

While it is important that you start your research project with a working thesis that is as clear as you can possibly make it, it is also important to remember that **your working thesis is temporary and it will inevitably change as you learn more about your topic and as you conduct more research.**

Here are examples of some working theses:

- While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem.
- The international community should enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries and save endangered fish species around the world.
- *The Great Gatsby's* depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today.

Chances are, if you started off with a working thesis similar to one of these, your current working thesis has changed a bit. For example, let's consider the working thesis "While some computer hackers are harmless, most of them commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem." While the researcher may have begun with this thesis in mind, perhaps she changed it slightly, based on interactions with other students, her instructor, and her research.

Suppose she discovered journal articles and Web sites that suggested that, while many computer hackers are dangerous, many are also helpful in preventing computer crimes. She might be inclined then to shift her emphasis slightly, perhaps to a working thesis like, "While many hackers commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem, they can also help law enforcement officials to solve and prevent crime." This change is the same topic as the original working thesis (both are still about hackers and computer crime, after all), but it does suggest a different emphasis, from "hackers as threat and problem" to "hackers as potentially helpful."

Of course, these changes in the working thesis are not the only changes that were

possible. The original working thesis could have just as easily stayed the same as it was at the beginning of the process or research. Further, just because the emphasis of the working thesis may be in the process of changing doesn't mean that other related points won't find their way into the research project when it is put together. While this research writer might change her emphasis to write about "good" hackers as crime solvers, she still would probably need to discuss the fact that there are "bad" hackers who commit crimes.

The point here is simple: **your working thesis is likely to change in small and even large ways based on the research you do, and that's good.** Changing the way you think about your research topic and your working thesis is one of the main ways the process of research writing becomes educational, interesting, and even kind of fun.

Exercise 8.1

- Either as a short writing exercise or with a group of your peers, consider the evolution of your working thesis. Where did it start out and how has it changed to what it is now? What sparked these changes in your working thesis and your point of view on your topic? If your working thesis has not changed (yet), why do you think this is the case?

Why Write an Antithesis Essay?

One of the key tests of a working thesis is the presence of logical points of disagreement. There's not much point in researching and writing about how "computer crime is bad" or "fisheries are important" or similar broad arguments because everyone more or less would agree with these assertions. Generating an antithesis essay will help you:

- **test how "debatable" your working thesis actually is.** If you are able to arrive at and write about the ways in which readers might disagree with your working thesis, then chances are, your working thesis is one that readers need to be persuaded about and need evidence to prove.
- **consider ways of addressing the anticipated objections to your thesis.** There's nothing wrong with reasonable readers disagreeing with your point of view on a topic, but if you hope to persuade at least some of them with your research, you will also need to satisfy the objections some of these readers might have.
- **revise your working thesis into a stronger position.** If you're having a hard time coming up with any opposition to your working thesis, you probably have to do more work on shaping and forming your working thesis into a more arguable position.

Generating Antithetical Points in Five Easy Steps

Generating potential objections to your working thesis—the points you can use to develop your antithesis essay—is a simple process. In fact, if your working thesis is on a controversial topic and you've already done a fair amount of research, you might need very little help generating antithetical points. If you are doing research on gun control, you have undoubtedly found credible research on both sides of the issue, evidence that probably supports or rejects your working thesis.

In addition to those points that seem straight-forward and obvious to you already, consider these five basic steps for generating ideas to consider your antithesis: have a working thesis, think about opposing viewpoints, think about the alternatives, and imagine hostile audiences. Once you have generated some plausible antithetical arguments, you can consider different ways to counter these positions. Ideas on how to do that are offered in the section "Strategies for Answering Antithetical Arguments."

- **Step 1: Have a working thesis you have begun researching and thinking about.**

If you are coming to this chapter before working through the working thesis essay exercises in Chapter Five, you might want to take a look at that chapter now.

You also need to have at least some preliminary research and thinking about your working thesis done before you consider the antithesis. This research is likely to turn up evidence that will suggest more clearly what the arguments against your working thesis might actually be.

- **Step 2: Consider the direct opposite of your working thesis.** Assuming you do have a working thesis that you've begun to research and think about, the next step in generating ideas for a working thesis is to consider the opposite point of view. Sometimes, this can be as simple as changing the verb or modifying term from positive to negative (or vice-versa). Consider these working theses and their opposites:

Working Thesis

Drug companies *should* be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV.

The international community *should not* enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries.

The Opposite

Drug companies *should not* be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV.

The international community *should* enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries.

This sort of simple change of qualifiers can also be useful in exposing weak working theses because, generally speaking, the opposite of positions that

everyone simply accepts as true are ones that everyone accepts as false. If you were to change the qualifying terms in the weak working theses "Drunk driving is bad" or "Teen violence is bad" to their opposites, you end up with theses for positions that are difficult to hold. After all, just as most people in modern America need little convincing that drunk driving or teen violence are "bad" behaviors, few credible people could argue that drunk driving or teen violence are "good" decisions.

Usually, considering the opposite of a working thesis is more complex than simply changing the verb or modifying term from positive to negative (or vice-versa). For example:

Working Thesis

While many hackers commit serious computer crimes and represent a serious Internet security problem, they can also help law enforcement officials to solve and prevent crime.

The Opposite(s)

Computer hackers do not represent a serious threat or Internet security problem.

There is little hackers can do to help law enforcement officials solve and prevent computer crime.

Both opposites are examples that counter the working thesis, but each takes a slightly different emphasis. The first one questions the first premise of the working thesis about the "threat" of computer hackers in the first place. The second takes the opposite view of the second premise.

- **Step 3: Ask "why" about possible antithetical arguments.** Of course, these examples of creating oppositions with simple changes demand more explanation than the simple opposite. You need to dig further than that by asking and then answering-- the question of *why*. For example:

Why should drug companies not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs? Because...

- The high cost of television advertising needlessly drives up the costs of prescriptions.
- Television commercials too frequently provide confusing or misleading information about the drugs.
- The advertisements too frequently contradict and confuse the advice that doctors give to their patients.

Why should the international community enact strict conservation measures to preserve fisheries? Because...

- Without international cooperation, many different kinds of fish will become extinct in the coming decades.
- Preventing over-fishing now will preserve fish populations for the future.
- Unchecked commercial fishing causes pollution and other damage to the oceans' ecosystems.
- **Step 4: Examine alternatives to your working thesis.** For example, consider the working thesis "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on television because the commercials too often contradict and confuse the advice that doctors give their patients." This working thesis assumes that drug ads are an important cause of problems between doctors and patients. However, someone could logically argue that there are other more important causes of poor communication between doctors and patients. For example, the number of patients doctors see each day and the shortness of each visit certainly causes communication problems. The billing and bureaucracy of insurance companies also often complicates doctor/patient communication.

Now, unlike the direct opposite of your working thesis, the alternatives do not necessarily completely invalidate your working thesis. There is no reason why a reader couldn't believe that *both* drug advertisements on television *and* the bureaucracy of the insurance companies are the cause of bad doctor/patient communication. But it is important to consider the alternatives within your research project in order to convince your readers that the position that you are advocating in your working thesis is more accurate (see especially the "Weighing Your Position Against the Opposition" strategy later in this chapter for answering these sorts of antithetical arguments).

- **Step 5: Imagine hostile audiences.** Whenever you are trying to develop a clearer understanding of the antithesis of your working thesis, you need to think about the kinds of audiences who would disagree with you. By thinking about the opposites and alternatives to your working thesis, you are already starting to do this because the opposites and the alternatives are what a hostile audience might think.

Sometimes, potential readers are hostile to a particular working thesis because of ideals, values, or affiliations they hold that are at odds with the point being advocated by the working thesis. For example, people who identify themselves as being "pro-choice" on the issue of abortion could be hostile to an argument for laws that restrict access to abortion; people who identify themselves as being "pro-life" on the issue of abortion could be hostile to an argument for laws that provide access to abortion.

At other times, audiences are hostile to the arguments of a working thesis because

of more transparent reasons. For example, the pharmaceutical industry disagrees with the premise of the working thesis "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" because they stand to lose billions of dollars in lost sales. Advertising companies and television broadcasters would also be against this working thesis because they too would lose money. You can probably easily imagine some potential hostile audience members who have similar reasons to oppose your point of view.

Of course, some audiences will oppose your working thesis based on a different interpretation of the evidence and research. This sort of difference of opinion is probably most common with research projects that are focused on more abstract and less definitive subjects. A reader might disagree with a thesis like "*The Great Gatsby's* depiction of the connection between material goods and the American dream is still relevant today" based on differences about how the book depicts "the American dream," or about whether or not the novel is still relevant, and so forth.

But there are also different opinions about evidence for topics that you might think would have potentially more concrete "right" and "wrong" interpretations. Different researchers and scholars can look at the same evidence about a subject like conservation of fisheries and arrive at very different conclusions. Some might believe that the evidence indicates that conservation is not necessary and would not be effective, while other researchers and scholars might believe the completely opposite position.

Regardless of the reasons why your audience might be hostile to the argument you are making with your working thesis, it is helpful to try to imagine your audience as clearly as you can. What sort of people are they? What other interests or biases might they have? Are there other political or social factors that you think are influencing their point of view? If you want to persuade at least some members of this hostile audience that your point of view and your interpretation of the research is correct, you need to know as much about your hostile audience as you possibly can. Of course, you'll never be able to know *everything* about your hostile audience, and you certainly won't be able to persuade all of them about your point. But the more you know, the better chance you have of convincing at least some of them.

Exercise 8.2

- Working through these steps, try to sketch out in more detail the antithetical points to your working thesis. Consider the opposites and the alternatives to your working thesis.
- Try to imagine as clearly as you can potentially hostile readers. Make a list of readers that might be hostile to your thesis and note the reasons for their hostility.

Finding Antithetical Points on the Internet

The best (and worst) thing about the Internet is that almost anyone can say almost anything. This makes the Internet fertile territory for finding out what the opposition thinks about the position you are taking in your working thesis.

A search of the Web on almost any topic will point you to web sites that take a wide variety of stances on that topic. When you do a search for "computer hackers" or "computer crime" on the Web, you are just as likely to find links to law enforcement agencies and articles on Internet security as you are to find links to sites that argue computer hackers are good, or even instructions on how to commit various computer crimes.

Keep in mind that information you find on the Internet always has to be carefully considered. This is particularly true with newsgroups, which have much more in common with forums like talk radio or "letters to the editor" in the newspaper than they do with academic research. This doesn't mean this information is automatically unreliable, but you should be cautious about the extent to which you can or should trust the validity of anything you find on the Internet.

Strategies for Answering Antithetical Arguments

It might not seem logical, but directly acknowledging and addressing positions that are different from the one you are holding in your research project can actually make your position stronger. When you take on the antithesis in your research project, it shows you have thought carefully about the issue at hand and you acknowledge that there is no clear and easy "right" answer.

There are many different ways you might incorporate the antithesis into your research project to make your own thesis stronger and to address the concerns of those readers who might oppose your point of view. For now, focus on three basic strategies: directly refuting your opposition, weighing your position against the opposition, and making concessions.

Directly Refuting Your Opposition. Perhaps the most obvious approach, one way to address those potential readers who might raise objections to your arguments is to simply refute their objections with better evidence and reasoning. To answer the argument that the international community should not enact measures to preserve fisheries, demonstrate with your evidence that it has indeed been effective. Of course, this is an example of yet another reason why it is so important to have good research that supports your position: when the body of evidence and research is on your side, it is usually a lot easier to make a strong point.

Answering antithetical arguments with the research that supports your point of view is also an example of where you as a researcher might need to provide a more detailed evaluation of your evidence. The sort of questions you should answer about your own research— who wrote it, where was it published, when was it published, etc.— are important to raise in countering antithetical

arguments that you think come from suspicious sources. For example, chances are that an article about the problems of more strict drunk driving laws that appears in a trade journal for the restaurant industry is going to betray a self-interested bias.

Weighing Your Position Against the Opposition. Readers who oppose the argument you are trying to support with your research might do so because they value or "weigh" the implications of your working thesis differently than you do. Those opposed to a working thesis like "Drug companies should not be allowed to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might think this because they think the advantages of advertising drugs on television—increased sales for pharmaceutical companies, revenue for advertising agencies and television stations, and so forth—are more significant than the disadvantages of advertising drugs on television. Those who would argue against the working thesis "Tougher gun control laws would be of little help in the fight against teen violence" probably think that the advantage of having fewer guns available to teenagers to use for violence is less important than the disadvantageous effects stronger gun control laws might have on lawful gun owners.

Besides recognizing and acknowledging the different ways of comparing the advantages and disadvantages suggested by your working thesis, the best way of answering these antithetical arguments in your own writing is to clearly explain how you weigh and compare the evidence. In other words, even if the readers who oppose your point of view are in some ways correct, the advantages you advocate in your working thesis are much more significant than the disadvantages.

For example, a writer might argue that any of the loss of profit to pharmaceutical companies, advertising agencies, and television stations would be a small price to pay for the advantages of banning prescription drug TV ads. A writer with a working thesis like "Tougher gun control laws would be of little help in the fight against teen violence" might have to defend his arguments against a hostile audience by suggesting that in the long-run, the costs of infringing the right to bear arms and our other liberties would far outweigh the few instances of teen violence that might be stopped with stronger gun control laws.

Making Concessions. In the course of researching and thinking about the antithesis to your working thesis and its potentially hostile audiences, it may become clear to you that these opposing views have a point. When this is the case, you may want to consider revising your working thesis or your approach to your research to make some concessions to these antithetical arguments.

Sometimes, student researchers make concessions to the point of changing sides on their working thesis—that is, in the process of researching, writing, and thinking about their topic, a researcher moves from arguing a working thesis like "Most computer hackers are criminals and represent a great risk to Internet security" to one like "Most computer hackers are merely curious computer enthusiasts and can help solve problems with Internet security."

This sort of shift in thought about an issue might seem surprising, but it makes

perfect sense when you remember the purpose of research in the first place. When we study the evidence on a particular issue, we often realize that our initial and uninformed impression or feelings on an issue were simply wrong. That's the role of research: we put more trust in opinions based on research than in things based on gut instinct or feelings.

Usually, most concessions to antithetical perspectives on your working thesis are less dramatic and can be accomplished in a variety of ways. You might want to employ some qualifying terms to hedge a bit. For example, the working thesis "Drug companies should **not be allowed** to advertise prescription drugs on TV" might be qualified to "Drug companies should **be closely regulated** about what they are allowed to advertise on TV." The working thesis "The international community should enact **strict** conservation measures to preserve fisheries and **save** endangered fish species around the world" might be changed to "The international community should enact **stronger** conservation measures to preserve fisheries and **help** endangered fish species around the world." Both of these are still strong working theses, but they also acknowledge the sort of objections the opposition might have to the original working thesis.

But be careful in using qualifying terms. An over-qualified working thesis can be just as bad as a working thesis about something that everyone accepts as true: it can become so watered-down as to not have any real significance anymore. For example, theses like "Drug company television advertising is sometimes bad and sometimes good for patients" and "While there are good reasons for enacting stronger conservation measures for protecting endangered fish species, there are also good reasons to not make new conservation laws" are both over-qualified to the point of taking no real position at all.

Exercise 8.3

- Once you understand the antithetical arguments to your working thesis, how might you answer them? On a sheet of paper or in a word processing program, create two columns. In the left column, write a brief summary of as many antithetical arguments as you can, arguments you came up with on your own or from Exercise 6.2. In the right column, answer each of the antithetical arguments listed in the left, referring to the strategies noted in this section or other fitting approaches.

But You Still Can't Convince Everyone...

If you are using research to convince an audience about something, then you must understand the opposite side of the argument you are trying to make. That means you need to include antithetical positions in your on-going research, you should think about the opposites and alternatives to the point you are making with your working thesis, you have to imagine your hostile audience as clearly as possible, and you should employ different strategies to answer your hostile

audiences’ objections.

But even after all this, you still can’t convince everyone that you’re right. You probably already know this. We have all been in conversations with friends or family members where, as certain as we were that we were right about something and as hard as we tried to prove we were right, our friends or family were simply unwilling to budge from their positions. When we find ourselves in these sorts of deadlocks, we often try to smooth over the dispute with phrases like “You’re entitled to your opinion” or “We will have to agree to disagree” and then we change the subject. In polite conversation, this is a good strategy to avoid a fight. But in academic contexts, these deadlocks can be frustrating and difficult to negotiate.

A couple of thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher and rhetorician Aristotle said that all of us respond to arguments based on three basic characteristics or appeals: *logos* or logic, *pathos* or emotional character, and *ethos*, the writer’s or speaker’s perceived character. Academic writing tends to rely most heavily on *logos* and *ethos* because academics tend to highly value arguments based on logical research and arguments that come from writers with strong “character-building” qualifications—things like education, experience, previous publications, and the like. But it’s important to remember that *pathos* is always there, and particularly strong emotions or feelings on a subject can obscure the best research.

Most academic readers have respect for writers when they successfully argue for positions that they might not necessarily agree with. Along these lines, most college writing instructors can certainly respect and give a positive evaluation to a piece of writing they don’t completely agree with as long as it uses sound logic and evidence to support its points. However, all readers—students, instructors, and everyone else—come to your research project with various preconceptions about the point you are trying to make. Some of them will already agree with you and won’t need much convincing. Some of them will never *completely* agree with you, but will be open to your argument to a point. And some of your readers, because of the nature of the point you are trying to make and their own feelings and thoughts on the matter, will never agree with you, no matter what research evidence you present or what arguments you make. So, while you need to consider the antithetical arguments to your thesis in your research project to convince as many members of your audience as possible that the point you are trying to make is correct, you should remember that you will likely not convince all of your readers all of the time.

Assignment: Writing the Antithesis Essay

Based on the most current and most recently revised version of your working thesis, write a brief essay where you identify, explain, and answer the antithesis to your position. Keep in mind that the main goal of this essay is to think about an audience of readers who might not agree with you and to answer at least some of the questions and complaints they might have about your research project. Be

sure to include evidence about both the antithesis and your working thesis, and be sure to answer the objections hostile readers might have.

Questions to consider as you write your first draft

- Have you revisited your working thesis? Based on the research and writing you have done up to this point, how has your working thesis changed?
- Have you done enough research on the antithetical position to have a clear understanding of the objections? (You might want to review the work you've done with your annotated bibliography at this point). What does this research suggest about the opposition's points and your points?
- What sort of brainstorming have you done in considering the antithesis? Have you thought about the "opposite" of your thesis and the reasons why someone might hold that point of view? Have you considered the "alternatives" to your working thesis and why someone might find one or more of these alternative viewpoints more persuasive than your points?
- Have you clearly imagined and considered what your "hostile audience" is like? What sorts of people do you think would object to your working thesis? What kind of motivations would hostile audiences have to disagree with you?
- In considering the objections to your working thesis, do you believe that the evidence is on your side and you can refute hostile audiences' objections directly with the research you have done?
- When you compare the points raised by the antithesis to the points of your working thesis, do you think that the advantages and values of your working thesis outweigh those of the antithesis?
- Are there some concessions that you've made to your working thesis based on the points raised by the antithetical point of view? How have you incorporated these concessions into your revised working thesis?

Revision and Review

During the peer review process, you should encourage your readers to review your rough draft with the same sort of skeptical view that a hostile audience is likely to take toward your points. If your readers already disagree with you, this won't be difficult. But if they more or less agree with the argument you are trying to make with your research, ask them to imagine for a moment what a hostile reader might think as they examine your essay. You might even want to help them with this a bit by describing for your reviewers the hostile audience you are imagining.

- Do your readers clearly understand the antithetical positions you are focusing on in your essay? Do they think that the antithetical positions

you are focusing on in your essay are the most important ones? Do they believe you have done enough research on the antithetical positions to adequately discuss them in your essay?

- What other objections to the argument you are trying to make with your working thesis do your readers have? In other words, have they thought of antithetical arguments that you haven't considered in your essay?
- Do your readers think that you have clearly answered the antithetical arguments to your working thesis? Do they accept the logic of your arguments? Do they believe incorporating more evidence into the essay would make your answer to the antithetical arguments better?

Imagining themselves as members of the "hostile audience," do your readers find themselves at least partially persuaded by the answers you have to the antithetical arguments in your essay? Why or why not?



A Student Example:
“Are Casinos Good For Las Vegas? Defending Legalized Gambling,” by Kerry Oaks

For this assignment, the instructor asked students to write a short essay that addressed a few of the main antithetical arguments to each student’s working thesis. Kerry Oaks’ research up to this point had focused almost exclusively on the positive aspects of gambling in Las Vegas. “Researching the other side of this argument was an important step for me,” Oaks said. “I still think that gambling—particularly in a place like Las Vegas—is good for the economy and everything else. But my research for the antithesis assignment also made me think that maybe casinos should spend more money on trying to prevent some of the problems they’re causing.”

Are Casinos Good For Las Vegas? Defending Legalized Gambling
Antithesis Essay Assignment

Few places in this country are as exciting as Las Vegas, Nevada, a city known for its “party” atmosphere and legalized gambling. My working thesis, which is “Casinos and legalized gambling have had a positive economic effect on Las Vegas,” has explored how and why Las Vegas became such a popular tourist destination. Needless to say, there are a lot critics who disagree with my working thesis. While these antithetical positions are important, I believe that they can be answered.

Some critics say that the economic and employment gains offered by legalized gambling are exaggerated. In an excerpt published on the PBS documentary show *Frontline* web site, John Warren Kindt says the economic benefits of legalized gambling have been exaggerated. While gambling initially leads to more jobs, it ultimately is a bad business investment.

However, the same sort of economic problems that Kindt describes happening in other parts of the country haven’t happened in Las Vegas. In fact, Las Vegas remains one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. For example, as Barbara Worcester wrote in her article, “People Flock to Las Vegas for Relocation, Employment,” the unemployment rate in Las Vegas in December 1999 was 3.1 percent, which is the lowest



unemployment rate since August 1957, when it was 2 percent.

(44).

Another argument is that casinos in the Las Vegas area cause crime, suicide, and murder. According to Jay Tolson's article "Face of the Future?" "Clark County has almost 70 percent of the population of a state that leads the nation in its rates of suicide, high school dropouts, death by firearms, teenage pregnancies, and death from smoking." (52).

Clearly, this is a real problem for the area and for the state, but it cannot all be blamed on the casinos. Frank Fahrenkopf, President of the American Gambling Association, said in an interview with the PBS documentary show *Frontline* that there's nothing about gambling in itself that creates crime and these problems. As Fahrenkopf was quoted on the *Frontline* web site, "Any enterprise that attracts large numbers of people. The crime rate at Orlando went up. It wasn't anything that Mickey and Minnie were doing that caused it, it was just that it was a draw of people to a community."

Even with these negative effects of crime and such, legalized gambling has still greatly improved the lives of people in Las Vegas. As Tolson writes, "there is still a sense that Las Vegas is a place where working people can realize the American Dream" (50) made possible in part by taxes on gambling instead of property or income.

Certainly, Las Vegas has all kinds of problems, but they are the same ones as those associated with any major and rapidly growing city in the United States. But on the whole, I think the benefits of casinos in Las Vegas outweigh the disadvantages of gambling. After all, there wouldn't be much of anything in Las Vegas if it weren't for the casinos that thrive there.



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Exercise 8.4

The Works Cited page entries above are not correct for the updated MLA 8th Edition handbook. Update the citations so that they are in proper MLA format.

