

Counter-Argument

When you write an academic essay, it is your chance to make an argument. You state your thesis, and then you find evidence to support that thesis. One useful tactic when writing an academic essay is to think about the possible arguments which could be made against your thesis. These are called **counter-arguments**. Thinking of counter-arguments yourself is a good way to test the strength of your thesis. It also allows you to think about the ways a reader may doubt your thesis, and gives you a chance to anticipate the reader's skepticism and develop ideas to rid your argument of its holes or flaws. One of the most effective ways to use counter-arguments is to present and confront the counter-argument within your paper. This writing tactic will make the reader more willing to accept that your argument is not one-sided and slanted, but rather well thought out. It shows that you, as a writer, are more concerned with presenting a clear, truthful argument, than simply winning a debate.

Not all counter-arguments are important, of course, and it is up to you as the writer to consider counter-arguments are worth acknowledging. It is not necessary to include a counter-argument in a paper merely for the sake of having one, however considering views other than your own or in contradiction to your own is usually an aspect of a quality essay. Instructors are generally happy to see a counter-argument within an essay, even if they did not specifically ask for one, because it shows how much the writer has thought about the topic.

The Turn Against

Using a counter-argument within an essay requires two key stages. First you challenge your own argument by using a counter-argument and then you play down the counter-argument, thus reaffirming your original argument. To do this, you must imagine a skeptical reader or source who might counter your original argument by stating:

- A problem with the development of your argument. Perhaps a different conclusion than your own could be drawn from the evidence given in your essay. Maybe you have taken a key word or phrase out of context within your paper. Or maybe you have even toned down or ignored certain points or facts to strengthen your argument.
- Realistic drawbacks to the argument you have proposed.
- A proposal, different than your own, which could make more sense.

The key with presenting counter-argument is to use certain catch phrases such as *One might think instead that...* or *It could appear that the opposite is true...* or even by using an anticipated challenging question such as *But is this the case?* Or *Can we consider this true?* Then you declare your stance against yourself, briefly but clearly, providing some evidence if possible. **Be sure that your counter-argument is presented with the same clarity as your actual argument. A poorly presented counter-argument will only hurt your paper!**

The Turn Back

Next you must return to your original argument—which you do by using words such as, *but, however, nonetheless, or however*—using clear and well thought out reasoning (never a short

dismissal) to defeat your presented counter-argument. In defending against your counter-argument you may:

- Refute it by showing why it is flawed.
- Note the argument's validity, but show why it is less important than your own argument.
- Admit the importance of the counter-argument, but restate your own argument in a way which is more exact, precise, and knowledgeable to make your argument the more important one.

Where to Use a Counter-Argument

Counter-arguments can be used anywhere within an essay, but most commonly are seen

- As a part of your introduction, before your thesis, where the acknowledgment of existing ideas sets up the necessity for your own idea.
- As a part of a paragraph after your introduction, where you state what may be the reader's expected reactions to your argument.
- As a fast action within a paragraph, not developing a large scale counter-argument but instead one to the sub-idea within the paragraph you are writing.
- In a paragraph before the conclusion of your essay, to show that your essay is not one-sided and other views have been considered.
- Be careful not to over use counter-arguments. One or two within a paper (depending on the paper's length) will show that you have carefully considered all viewpoints on your topic and have chosen to discuss the one which you feel is most important. Too many counter-arguments, however, will weaken your original argument and make your paper seem disjointed and confusing.

Using Counter-arguments in Pre-Writing and Revising

Thinking of counter-arguments is an important part of pre-writing (the planning stages before you actually begin to write an essay) as it allows the writer to develop several different ideas and choose the one which works best for the essay or is the most important. As you think of your argument, consider how someone else might argue against you. This will help strengthen your thesis for your paper. The argument you decide on for your thesis should be the one which has counter-arguments to it, but can be defended clearly in your essay through evidence, research, and your own quality writing.

Counter-arguments may also be developed during the revising stages of your paper. After your original draft is completed, it is a good time to go back and read over your essay to make sure that your argument is presented clearly. Ask a few people to read your paper and see if they agree with your argument. If they present a counter-argument you hadn't thought of, it may be wise to research their counter-argument and address it within your paper.