



COUNTER-ARGUMENT AND REBUTTAL

➤ What is a counter-argument?

A counter-argument is an argument opposed to your thesis or part of your thesis. It expresses the view of a person who disagrees with your position (Oldham).

➤ Where do I put a counter-argument?

A counter-argument can appear anywhere in your 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 counter-argument 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. (Harvey)

➤ How do I introduce a counter-argument?

Counter-argument in an essay has two stages. In this first stage, you turn against your argument to challenge it. The following is a listing of ways to approach introducing counter-arguments and templates for structuring them:

1) Imagine a **skeptical reader**

- Yet some readers may challenge the view that _____.
- After all, many believe _____.
- Indeed, my own argument that _____ seems to ignore _____ and _____.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that _____.

- 2) **Cite an actual source, critic or group of critics**, who might resist your argument
- Here many *feminists* would probably object that _____.
 - But *social Darwinists* would certainly take issue with the argument that _____.
 - Nevertheless, both *followers and critics of Malcolm X* will probably argue that _____.
- 3) **Look at your arguments** themselves for possible:
- **problems** with your conclusion
Others, however, may conclude _____.
 - **disadvantages** to what you propose
This proposed solution does have some disadvantages _____.
 - **alternative explanations** that makes more sense.
Alternatively, this issue could be viewed _____.

After introducing your counter-argument, you state the case against yourself as briefly but as clearly and forcefully as you can, pointing to evidence where possible (Harvey).

➤ **How Do I Rebut a Counter Argument?**

In the second stage, you turn back to re-affirm your argument. You may consider the following rebuttal tactics and models for structuring them:

- 1) **Quote acknowledged experts** that support your position
- While many may see this argument as flawed, _____ John Smith, an expert in his field, also finds _____.
- 2) **Redefine the criteria** of “known” concepts
- Although I grant that _____, couldn't it also be possible that _____.
- 3) **Find agreement** and show how your **new idea supports a shared idea**
- I agree with X that _____. Furthermore, this idea actually supports my point because _____.
- 4) Pointing out **faulty assumptions in your critic's arguments** where:
- the **facts** are wrong

Proponents of X are right to argue that _____. But they exaggerate when they claim that _____.

- the **analysis** is incorrect
While it is true that _____, it does not necessarily follow that _____.
- the **values** it is based on are not acceptable
It is dangerous to believe _____ because _____.

Following the introduction of your rebuttal, you must then go on to suggest why the opposing argument is relatively less important or less likely than what you propose, and thus, doesn't overturn it.

(Templates adapted from Graff & Birkenstein 79-85)

➤ **Example**

This table shows an argument, counter-argument, and one possible rebuttal to this counter-argument:

Argument	Counter-argument	Rebuttal
The primary focus in medical end-of-life decisions should be on patient consent, rather than doctor intention, because it is not a breach against a patient's rights if s/he consents to the termination of their life.	Terminally ill patients are likely to be depressed, and, therefore, unable to consent to their hastened death in a balanced or acceptable way.	Depression can be managed. The relevance of depression must be made on a case-by-case basis. Depression does not warrant a general rule prohibiting patients from consenting to a hastened death.

➤ **Practice**

Using the information provided in the chart above, try to introduce and rebut the counter-argument in paragraph form below:

***See page 4 for one way to one way to introduce and rebut this counter-argument.**

Works Consulted & Further Reading

CALT Learning Support. "Dealing with Counter Arguments." *Monash University*. 21 Feb. 2007. Web. 10 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/law/legal-process/2.3.3.xml>>.

Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein. *"They Say/I Say": the Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. Print.

Harvey, Gordon. "Counter Argument." *Home | Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences*. 1999. Web. 10 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/resources.html>>.

Oldham, Davis. "ENG 101 - What Is a Counter-Argument." *Shoreline Community College*. Web. 10 Nov. 2010. <[http://www.shoreline.edu/doldham/101/HTML/What is a C-A.htm](http://www.shoreline.edu/doldham/101/HTML/What%20is%20a%20C-A.htm)>.

***The following paragraph is one way in which you might introduce and rebut the counter-argument from page 3:**

Yet, some readers may challenge that basing medical end-of-life decisions on patient consent may lead to abuse, since many terminally ill patients are depressed, and, therefore, unable to make sound decisions on matters of such significance (*Here the author is imagining a skeptical reader to introduce a counter-argument and stating this reader's case*). **While it is true that** such patients may have a greater tendency to depression, **we cannot justifiably assume** all patients are depressed, or that depression, even when present, prevents a patient from consenting in a balanced and acceptable way (*Next, the author is rebutting the counter-argument by pointing out faulty analysis in the counter-argument*). Depression is generally manageable nowadays, and a medical diagnosis can determine when a person is incapable of making such a decision. The issue of depression, therefore, should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and not be a reason for prohibiting choice in general (*Finally, the author is suggesting why this counter-argument is less likely than what s/he proposes, and thus, doesn't overturn it*).

(Adapted from CALT Learning Support)