

COUNTERARGUMENTS

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Counterarguments recognize any circumstances/conditions which might affect/hinder your thesis and/or your support.

Counterarguments serve many purposes:

- 1) To show an understanding of the opposing argument
- 2) To recognize and show understanding of potential problems with your argument.
- 3) To play the "Devil's Advocate" (that is, to take the opposing position for the sake of understanding any potential circumstances/conditions which might arise as a result of or as a cause of your thesis).

In this sense, counterarguments are simply components of arguments which recognize the opposing viewpoint (its thesis and its argument), and attempt to refute, deny, or debunk it.

Counterarguments contain four components:

- 1) The Counterclaim
- 2) The Counterpoints
- 3) The Analysis
- 4) The Rebuttal

These components equate to main four steps, which must be accomplished to have a valid and well-constructed counterargument:

- 1) The opposing viewpoint is recognized (counterclaim).
- 2) Points of support from the opposing argument are discussed (counterpoints).
- 3) A weakness or limitation is recognized, if any exists (analysis).
- 4) Then, action is taken to restore credibility in your claim/argument (rebuttal).

COUNTERCLAIM

The counterclaim is simply the claim of the opposing viewpoint or the opposing argument.

Note: The opposing viewpoint is always presented fairly and honestly (so that you do not expose ill-will towards your opponent (or opponents) in the eyes of the audience/reader).

COUNTERPOINTS

Counterpoints are points of support for the counterclaim. Essentially, you will discuss the opposing argument. Usually, you will recognize the most substantial evidence of the opposing argument (one or more points from the opposing argument).

ANALYSIS

In conducting an analysis of the counterclaim and its counterpoints, you should ask yourself if any of these circumstances/conditions apply:

- 1) Is the support weak? In other words, do they have enough proof? Is the proof substantial? Are there any limitations of their support (e.g. time, technology, expertise)?

(EX: Sometimes, arguments are supported by bad information - including old information, badly-researched information, etc. Recognizing that an argument has bad information can be helpful. You should simply point out that something is not sufficient or unacceptable since the support is limited, not conclusive, or even not substantial due to its research).

2) Is the logic faulty? In other words, is one of the common fallacies present? (There are many different types of fallacies which could have been used by the opposing viewpoint to construct their argument; likewise, the information presented could be flawed since there is little connection between the thesis and the support).

3) Are there ulterior motives for the argument which are not discussed? (Presenting these motives may help against showing their argument as unethical or not very moral) Would a favorable outcome for the opposing viewpoint lead to something other than the desired outcome?

4) Does the opposing viewpoint move contrary to commonly held beliefs or assumptions? (Groups are generally conservative and superstitious. If something about the opposing viewpoint disrupts the commonly held belief systems or superstitions, the argument is likely to be viewed unfavorably).

5) Is this an emotional issue rather than a logical one? If the logic is sound and valid, then you might employ some emotional support to strengthen your own argument. Use an image presenting the outcomes of favoring the opposing viewpoint -> Point to long-term effects/outcomes, problems in implementation, etc. Any certain or foreseeable effects may be enough to create doubt in the argument.

6) Are there other problems/concerns/opportunities which do not appear here...?

REBUTTAL

After you have recognized and analyzed the counterclaim and the counterpoint, you may use a rebuttal to point out problems with the counterclaim or its argument.

Rebuttals may focus on the counterclaim itself (rather than the entire opposing argument), particular points of its support/argument, or they may simply focus the argument as a whole.

Once you have identified any problems/hazards represented by the opposition, you should attempt to move forward with them.

You may decide to:

- +Point to fallacies
- +Point to problems in their natural support (their evidence)
- +Point to problems with their artificial support (their rhetorical appeals)
- +Point to how artificial support is wrongly used or exploited for the ends of the counterclaim
- +Offer your own questions to unseat the counterclaim, the counterpoints, or the writer/speaker/composer (sometimes called, "cross examination").
- +Offer your own critical interpretation of the counterclaim and/or its support
- +Point to errors, incongruities, or biases.
- +Etc.

Again, you can point to problems in the opposing viewpoint directly; however, if no problem can be identified and the argument is fairly sound/valid, then you should attempt to use your own artificial support to strengthen your own claim while moving away from the opposition.

EX:

1: All Christians, Jews, and Muslims should be vegetarians.

2: Why?

1: It says in the Old Testament: Thou Shall Not Kill. And, it does not specify what is not to be killed. Therefore, I think this applies to animals as well, so Christians, Jews, and Muslims should not kill and consume meat.

2: [Rebuttal] I understand that you believe this interpretation is correct; however, there are well-documented accounts of early Christians/Jews offering animal sacrifices and eating meat. Additionally, while Mosaic Laws suggest not killing, we accept that this text (because of its context) refers to crimes between human beings, since there is plenty of mention of meat consumption and sacrifice in the *Old Testament*. And, again, most of the "commandments" are expressly between humans and other humans, and humans and their conception of God.

Notice the use of logos after the opposition's support.

CIRCULAR ARGUMENTATION

Many "closed-minded people" practice an interesting maneuver to move away from the opposition and return to their thesis by practicing something called "Circular Argumentation."

Circular Argumentation involves the circumventing (or moving around) factual or valid evidence/appeal by directly returning to the thesis and the recapitulation of support.

EX:

1. All drugs should be legalized.

2. No, drugs should be illegal.

1. The legalization of drugs would reduce the number of people in prison.

2. Yes, but it would increase the number of people in rehabilitation and addiction programs.

1. Drugs, especially prescription drugs, are good. Many people do not develop an addiction to prescription drugs.

2. Not true. Many prescription drugs are more commonly abused, since they represent the bulk of drugs available to the general public.

1. Well, regardless of this fact, drugs should be legalized, since legalization would reduce the number of people in our prisons.

Notice the recapitulation of the thesis statement and some evidence.

Circular Argumentation is somewhat unethical and fallacious in academic writing, since it does not allow for a synthesis and understanding of both argumentative positions. In a sense, this practice rejects the argument of another completely. So, we consider it unwise as a practice in academic writing.