



Writing a Counterargument and Refutation

Noting opposing views and then showing why they are wrong helps make your argument strong and the essay more developed.

The Counterargument

A counterargument is a view that is different from your own. It shows that you are considering possible objections and exposing their weaknesses.

The Topic Sentence

Start with a topic sentence states a claim that opposes your view.

Begin with a transition that shows contrast, like “however,” “nevertheless,” “on the contrary,” and “on the other hand.”

Follow the transition with a noun that describes those with this vie, such as “critics,” “opponents,” or “some.”

Use a verb that shows that this is a claim or an opinion. These include “argue,” “claim,” “contend,” “believe,” “object,” “disagree,” or “dispute.”

Example: However, some critics contend that marijuana is a gateway drug and therefore should not be legalized.

Example: On the contrary, some people argue that marijuana is a gateway drug and therefore should not be legalized

Qualifying Words

The counterargument uses a neutral tone and qualifying words to let the reader know that you disagree with the view.

Qualifying words are words that clearly indicate the opposition or give the sense to the reader that not everyone believes this view. Words like “some,” “claim,” “contend,” “object,” or “disagree” are qualifying words.

Example of a Counterargument Paragraph

[topic sentence] Nevertheless, those who oppose marijuana legalization claim that marijuana is a gateway drug. **[explanation]** They believe that once someone tries marijuana, he or she will then move on to harder, more dangerous drugs and become an addict. **[supporting evidence]** According to Stacey Sugar, the clinical director at the Towson-based Maryland Addiction Recovery Network, “marijuana could be a gateway drug for some, but not everyone, and that a lot depends on the user and whether they are predisposed to addiction. . . Marijuana is the easiest drug to get a hold of after alcohol and cigarettes, and some of those who like a marijuana high may be more interested in trying other highs” (qtd. in Snyder). **[explanation of evidence]** Her claim is that addicts may want to try other highs beyond marijuana, and those drugs could potentially have more devastating and addictive effects. **[conclusion]** In other words, critics of marijuana legalization believe that once a person feels the altered experience of marijuana, he or she will want to experience the increased sensations of dangerous, potentially life-destroying and addictive drugs such as cocaine or methamphetamines.

The Refutation (sometimes called Rebuttal) Paragraph

The refutation paragraph uses logical evidence to explain why the opposing view is incomplete, problematic, or simply wrong.

The Opening Sentence

Start with an Opening Sentence. This sentence summarizes the opposing view. Use words like “may” or “some” to indicate that you disagree with the view.

Example: It may be true that some people use marijuana as a gateway drug to move onto harder, more dangerous drugs.

The Topic Sentence

Next, add a topic sentence (main idea). This sentence tells the reader why you think the objection is wrong. It is in the form of a claim and begins with a transition. Some good transition words are “however,” “nevertheless,” “nonetheless,” “but the truth of the matter,” “contrary to this opinion,” and “despite this idea.”

Example: The truth of the matter is that marijuana is not the first addictive substance that users initially try.

Transition and Why the Opposition is Wrong

Then add a transition and explanation

Example: Yet contrary to this opinion, marijuana is not the first addictive substance tried by first-time users.

Example of a Refutation Paragraph

[Opening Sentence] It may be true that some people use marijuana as a gateway drug to move on to harder, more dangerous drugs. **[Topic Sentence]** The truth of the matter is that marijuana is not the first addictive substance that users initially try. **[Evidence]** “A study published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of School Health* has concluded that the theory of a gateway drug is not associated with marijuana, but rather one of the most damaging and socially accepted drugs in the world, alcohol” (Scharff). **[Explanation of Evidence]** In other words, alcohol is the drug and high that influences people to try harder, more addictive substances. Alcohol is the drug that the government should be focusing on. Alcohol is the drug that needs more intervention. **[Concluding Sentence]** In reality, alcohol should be the focus of reform and recovery programs, and making marijuana legal will eliminate the gateway theory entirely.

Adding the Counterargument and Refutation to your Essay

Many writers include the counterargument and refutation just before the conclusion, after fully building their own case. However, some writers include several counterarguments and refute them throughout the essay.

Other Resources

You might be interested in the “Introduction to Argument” tutorial on eCampus. To access the tutorial:

1. Log on to eCampus and click on “Online English Corner” in the “My Organizations” area.
2. Select the purple “Tutorials” button on the left of the screen.
3. Select the “Essay Writing Tutorials” folder.
4. Click on “Introduction to Argument.”