

Counter-Argument and Refutation

In a persuasive essay, you try to convince the reader that your argument is valid. To do this effectively, it is useful to include an opposing viewpoint to the one you are arguing. This opposing viewpoint is known as a counter-argument. Even though you are arguing one side of an issue, it is not only acceptable but highly recommended to include an argument from the view that opposes your own. After presenting the opposing view, include a refutation to show why the other point of view is flawed or wrong. Attacking the opposing view is an effective way to make your arguments more convincing.

A. In the paragraph below, identify both the writer's view and the opposing view and paraphrase them below.

It is often argued that the most effective way to reduce crime is to build more prisons thereby taking people with undesirable behaviours off the streets. While there is some logic to this view, some experts argue that it can actually increase crime because rather than rehabilitate, prisons can help create more hardened criminals.

Writer's view:

.....

Opposing view:

.....

Refutation: The way in which you refute an argument depends on determining the particular aspect of the counter-argument you want to attack. For example, you may challenge the opposing view's evidence because it may not be credible, or it is outdated. Thus, you would need to present evidence from a more credible source or evidence that is more current. In another example, the counter-argument may be based on faulty assumptions, so you need to show why these beliefs are flawed. Finally, the counter-argument may contain a number of logical fallacies. Therefore, you will need to present and explain each fallacy.

B. Read the four counter-arguments and refutations and identify the aspect being refuted. i.e. faulty evidence (FE), a faulty assumption (FA), or a logical fallacy (LF).

..... 1. While those that deny climate change often cite academic research to support their claim, most if not all of these studies are not able to be replicated or they contain errors.

..... 2. Many people have recently entered the housing market despite all-time high prices in the belief that real estate prices can only ever go up. However, many of these buyers have not had the experience of living through a housing market crash.

..... 3. While those that oppose nuclear energy bring up the examples of Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima to argue that the risks far outweigh any benefits, this is a somewhat hasty generalisation. They fail to mention that there are close to 500 nuclear power plants in operation today all operating safely, and since the first nuclear power plant was established in 1954, these are the only incidents that are commonly cited.

..... 4. While there has been a well-publicised inquiry into the state of our education system, the investigation was mainly led by key figures in the education department. Therefore, if we want to trust any findings about the quality of education in our state, we need a fully open and independent investigation.

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When refuting a counter-argument, it is useful to begin by making a brief concession. A concession simply means to acknowledge that on the surface, the counter-argument seems to have merit. After making the concession, explain why the counter-argument is flawed. You can do this by refuting the evidence, an assumption, or logic. Through making a concession, you show that you have studied both sides of the issue and that your conclusions should be taken seriously.

C. Read the paragraph and write down the number or numbers of the sentences that show the following:

The topic sentence

The counter-argument

The concession

The refutation

The concluding sentence

(1) Those who oppose the idea of imposing higher taxes on the wealthy often refer to the concept of trickle-down economics. (2) The key idea of trickle-down economic theory is that when the wealthy gain benefits, these trickle down to everyone else in the economy. (3) These benefits are usually in the form of tax cuts for high-income earners and businesses. (4) The belief is that the money gained from tax cuts will be pumped back into the economy through investments that will ultimately create more jobs and income for everyone. (5) On the surface this argument seems quite logical. (6) However, this theory is being rejected by many, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (7) Their research suggests that when the top 20% become wealthier, this does not have a significantly positive impact on the economy. (8) In contrast, they found that more economic growth is generated by increasing the incomes of low to middle-income earners. (9) For instance, increasing the wealth of just one-fifth of low-income earners by 1% results in about a 0.4% increase in economic growth, whereas an increase in wealth for the top 20% only results in about a 0.1% increase in growth. (10) Thus, it can be concluded that cutting taxes for the rich does not have wider benefits for all.

D. Read the arguments below and choose a stance. Then, write a short refutation of the opposing stance that includes a concession.

1. Social media *has / has not* improved human communication.

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2. Advertising aimed at children *is / is not* harmful.

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When writing a persuasive essay, not every body paragraph requires a counter-argument and refutation. In a typical five-paragraph essay, it is usually acceptable to only include one counter-argument and refutation paragraph. The other body paragraphs can simply be a list of points in favour of the main argument.

E. Write two paragraphs on the following topic:

'Is online shopping better than shopping in a bricks and mortar store?'

If you are *for* online shopping, begin by writing a paragraph that does NOT include a counter-argument and refutation, but simply discuss the three points in the pros column. In the second paragraph, include a counter-argument and refutation which includes a concession. The counter-argument will be based on one of the cons shown.

If you are *against* online shopping, follow the same procedure, but the points for the first paragraph will be taken from the cons column and the counter-argument from the pros column.

Pros of online shopping	Cons of online shopping
1. convenience 2. greater selection 3. easy access to information	1. can be more expensive 2. increases risk of fraud 3. leads to longer wait times

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