

How To Write the Counterargument Paragraph

Terminology:

- Concession: acknowledgement of the other side
- Refutation or Rebuttal: an answer that challenges a specific claim or charge
- Counterargument: the other side of an argument

Format of the counterargument:

1. **Topic Sentence:** Introduce the opposing side's arguments. You are acknowledging the other point of view. You will use phrases such as the following:
 - Some critics argue/assert/contend/claim/state . . .
 - Many believe that . . .
 - It has been argued/asserted/contended/claimed/stated . . .
 - Opponents argue/assert/contend/claim/state . . .
2. **Expert Source that supports the counterargument:** This sentence backs up the sentence with a quotation or paraphrase of evidence from an expert. It includes the name of the author/source, the title of the article or web site, and, if necessary, the expertise of the source to show the validity of the evidence.

For example:

In "When Patients Request Assistance with Suicide," Dr. Michael Maskin, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, argues that in many cases, dying patients' thinking is simply occupied by negative reactions to their condition (2).

3. **Explanation sentence:** This sentence begins with a transition (therefore, thus, to explain, as a result, to elaborate, in other words, etc.) and explains the evidence and/or *provides an example of what it is saying*.
4. **Concession sentence:** Concede (acknowledge) the other side's validity in a respectful way. You might begin with phrases such as the following:
 - For this reason, opponents believe/argue/claim/contend/stress etc.
 - As a result of _____, many believe/argue etc.
 - It is understandable why the opposition believes/argues etc.
 - Critics have a valid point about . . .
5. **Refutation/Rebuttal sentence:** This is where you refute or challenge the opposition's viewpoint and remind readers of your stance. You will begin by using a phrase such as the following:
 - Nevertheless/nonetheless/however + your argument
 - Though it is a valid point/argument + your argument

- Even though (one part of the argument) is true, it still does not . . .
- Though he/she/they make a good point, + your argument

Make sure that you complete the rebuttal by refuting the actual counterargument that you are using in this paragraph. Do not argue against a different counterargument, as there are usually several. Stick to the one counterargument throughout the entire paragraph. If you want to address more than one counterargument, then you will need to do so in separate paragraphs. Obviously, it helps to pick counterarguments that you can refute easily.

Example

Main Claim: Terminally ill patients have the right to end their own lives, and those who choose to help them should not be punished for doing so.

1 Critics argue that the reason why some terminally ill patients wish to commit suicide is nothing more than melancholia. Patients suffering terminal illness might tend to be negative, hopeless, and depressed. *2* In “When Patients Request Assistance with Suicide,” Dr. Michael Maskin, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, argues that in many cases, dying patients’ thinking is simply occupied by negative reactions to their critical condition (*2*). *3* In other words, most of the reasons why terminally ill patients request doctors and/or loved ones to assist them in committing suicide might be caused by certain problems such as hopelessness, because there is no effective treatment, anxiety over expensive medical bills, and regret for being a burden to their families (Maskin *2*). *4* For this reason, opponents argue that the terminally ill patient needs psychotherapy, and that his wish to end his life should never be considered. *5* Though it is true that psychotherapy might help the terminally ill patient confirm his decision, and that it is *not* a medical doctor’s job to help patients end their lives, it is, however, ultimately the patient’s decision and his life to end. No person or law should prevent or punish loved ones who assist in that choice.

adapted with revisions from *Sourcework*, by Heinle & Heinle, 2006.