

The Counter-argument

Thesis. Without a **good thesis**, you cannot have a good argumentative paper. Typical characteristics of a good thesis: specific (not overly general), accurate (not vague), and arguable. "Arguable" means that the thesis is a statement that a reasonable person might disagree with – or at least, might disagree with prior to reading your brilliant defense of it! A good thesis is not merely descriptive, is not merely factual. It may be highly debatable, even surprising – a "risky" thesis. (A good defense of a risky thesis makes an impressive paper.) After doing a full draft of your paper and reflecting what you've said overall, you'll usually need to revise or "polish up" your thesis.

Opposing views

You can cite specific writers or thinkers who have expressed a view opposite to your own. Make sure that you express the opposing authors' views with the concept of **"they say"** in some form:

- *On the other hand, Fund argues that...*
- *However, Ngugi has written, ...*
- *Dangarembga takes the position that...*

How should the rebuttal be introduced?

If the counter-argument requires careful signaling, so does the rebuttal. The essay has just done a 180° turn away from its thesis, and now it is about to do another 180° turn to complete the circle. The reader needs warnings and guidance or they will fall off or get whiplash—you'll lose them, in other words, because the essay will seem incoherent or contradictory.

The common strategies for introducing the rebuttal are the mirror image of those for introducing the counter-argument, and they all boil down to the same basic concept: "Yes, but...." They can be as simple as that, or as complex as this example sentence:

*While Auerbach's claim **seems initially plausible**, and is backed by the copious evidence provided by his astonishing erudition, it is **marred** by an **inconsistency** that derives from an **unsupportable** and ultimately **incoherent** definition.*

In all cases, the job of this transitional language is to show the reader that the opposing view is now being answered. The essay has returned to arguing its own thesis, strengthened by having taken the opposition into account. Here are some typical strategies. These are generic examples; they work best when tailored to suit the specifics of the individual topic.

- *What this argument [overlooks/fails to consider/does not take into account] is ...*
- *This view [seems/looks/sounds/etc.] [convincing/plausible/persuasive/etc.] at first, but ...*

- *While this position is popular, it is [not supported by the facts/not logical/impractical/etc.]*
- *Although the core of this claim is valid, it suffers from a flaw in its [reasoning/application/etc.]*

Organizing your rebuttal section

Following the TTEB method outlined in the Body Paragraph section, forecast all the information that will follow in the rebuttal section and then move point by point through the other positions addressing each one as you go. The outline below, adapted from Seyler's *Understanding Argument*, is an example of a rebuttal section from a thesis essay.

When you rebut or refute an opposing position, use the following three-part organization:

The opponent's argument: Usually, you should not assume that your reader has read or remembered the argument you are refuting. Thus at the beginning of your paragraph, you need to state, accurately and fairly, the main points of the argument you will refute.

Your position: Next, make clear the nature of your disagreement with the argument or position you are refuting. Your position might assert, for example, that a writer has not proved his assertion because he has provided evidence that is outdated, or that the argument is filled with fallacies.

Your refutation: The specifics of your counterargument will depend upon the nature of your disagreement. If you challenge the writer's evidence, then you must present the more recent evidence. If you challenge assumptions, then you must explain why they do not hold up. If your position is that the piece is filled with fallacies, then you must present and explain each fallacy.