

# Arguing in Opposition (Rebuttal Argument)

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For almost all of us, we are not the first person to address an issue. Therefore, when we argue, we do so in a context of multiple viewpoints on the issue. We consider those points of view as arguments we agree with, disagree with, or even partially agree and disagree with. We don't argue within a vacuum. As a result, it benefits us to learn about the points of view of other writers and speakers and how they have already shaped the discussion of an issue as much as possible in order to better situate and design our own arguments.

**The Assignment:** You will need to research a chosen topic or issue to find out what the various points of view are and select one to which you want to respond. You may stay with the topic you addressed in your first project or you can choose a new topic.

**You will find one argument with which you disagree.** You don't necessarily have to disagree with every single point in the argument, but you do need to disagree with a substantial portion of the argument you identify. Think about why you disagree with this argument, and then go back into your research to find evidence that will support your reasons for disagreeing.

Narrowing your focus to one argument and one author with whom you disagree will be helpful to keep your project manageable and doable. You must select one published or publicly available work to refute and it must have an identifiable author whose background is described by you. The argument you refute must be available in the public domain and must be provided to me through a functional link at the top of your assignment. I must be able to access the argument you are refuting to assess that you have refuted it effectively.

Please be aware an argument in opposition or rebuttal essay is **not a generalized position essay**. For this assignment, you are expected to narrowly focus your refutation on one published or publicly available work. You must keep your task doable and focused on one argument with the goal of refuting it. You are not responsible to refute an author's entire body of writing, public addresses, or work. You should focus on a single work with which you disagree and refute that argument effectively.

## How to Get Started:

- First, you will need to decide on whether you are staying with your first project topic or finding a new topic about which to write.
- Then, you will need to find one specific article that you disagree with addressing the topic. The editorial section of the newspaper is one place to look for ideas and arguments with which you disagree.
- If you wish to write about a topic already covered in one of the sample essays from previous students, you must discuss your ideas and approach with me before beginning.

- Once you have located a published argument with which you disagree, then you need to figure out why you disagree with some or all of the author's points. Your disagreement with these points will form the basis of your essay. The expectation is that you will refute the argument you disagree with point by point.
- Go back to the Hesburgh Library search site and begin looking for evidence that will support your reasons for disagreeing. Because you may be looking at and using multiple sources, keep a research log to record what you have found, note whether it will help you refute the argument or not, and list what in it, if anything, you can use to support your refutation.
- As you get ready to begin drafting, think about your rhetorical situation—your audience, purpose or goal, and the context—and how you will shape your argument to best articulate your reasons for disagreeing with the author or speaker's points.
- You must include a properly formatted citation to the argument you are arguing in opposition to at the top of your essay so that I can find it immediately.

### **Use Your Rhetorical Situation to Help You Develop Your Argument in Opposition:**

- What is your purpose? How do you want to impact your target audience? What do you want your argument to accomplish?
- Who is your target audience? Are they able to accomplish the purpose of your argument to take action or change their minds?
- What does your target audience already know about the issue?
- Does your target audience already have a firm opinion or position on the issue? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
- What are the dominant characteristics of the target audience who will be reading your argument in opposition (e.g., level of education, age, socioeconomic status, profession, geographical location, culture, interests, experiences, ethnic or religious background)? Do the members of the audience to whom you are writing share similar values, beliefs, and expectations? Identify these to help you design strategies to convince this audience.
- Are there any current events, which have some bearing on your chosen topic, that you need to consider in your opposing argument?
- What is your relationship to your target audience? How will you position yourself in relationship to them?
- What strategies (such as word choice, examples, types of evidence and secondary sources, and explanations) will you need to use to best appeal to your target audience?

**Note about the audience:** You may assume that the author of the argument you are refuting is a member of your target audience. However, it's unlikely that he or she is the *only* member of your target audience. We often use disagreement with another's argument as a forum to address what we actually believe about an issue, topic, or controversy; therefore, your target audience is likely to include others who may have a stake in the issue or who have a strong interest in it. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" is an example of this strategy. The eight clergy members to whom his letter was addressed are not the only audience

he aimed to refute. He also aimed to refute white moderates and those individuals who claimed that civil rights social movement participants in Birmingham were impatient outsiders.

**How This Essay Will Be Evaluated:**

- Your ability to select and refute one argument with which you disagree.
- The reliability and credibility of secondary sources you include from the Hesburgh Library. Note: you must document and engage with **at least five sources**. You will lose points for any missing sources.
- The correctness of your documentation of your sources and your ability to include a functional link to the publicly accessible argument you are refuting at the top of your essay.
- The clarity of the essay's focus on refuting one writer's or speaker's argument.
- The thoroughness of the argument's development and refutation of the opposition point by point.
- The logic of the argument's organization and readability of your writing.
- Your ability to follow the assignment instructions by providing adequate context and key background information to explain why this controversy exists.
- The level of engagement your rebuttal essay elicits or draws forth due to avoidance of stale, overused, or stock topics.