Writing a Well-Argued Paper
Part Two: Parts of an Argument

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this presentation (Part Two), you should be able to:

- Develop an academic argument, which makes claims supported by evidence and addresses counterclaims and counterevidence.
- Rebut a counterclaim.
- Concede that some parts of the counterclaim are worth considering.
Overview of Presentation (Part Two)

1. Key terms in argumentation
2. The parts of an argument
3. Counterclaim, rebuttal and concession
4. The organization of your argument
Key Terms in Argumentation

- **Claim** – a debatable assertion that something is true. *E.g.*, *Adults generally prefer to avoid losses rather than achieve gains when making decisions.*

- **Fact** – a statement that is true by virtue of its correspondence to widely accepted evidence. *Paris is the capital of France.*

- **Data** – factual information about units of analysis (e.g., individuals, countries, species, etc.) often presented in tables, graphs and charts.

Parts of an Argument

1. **A claim** – a debatable assertion that something is true

2. **A sub-claim** – a debatable reason, justification, explanation or cause that flows from or supports the main claim

3. **Evidence** – facts and data from a source or from your own reasoning that support the sub-claim

4. **Bridge** – a link that connects the evidence to the sub-claim or claim (sometimes unstated)
Parts of an Argument (continued)

5. **Counterclaim** – an assertion that disagrees with or contradicts a claim or sub-claim or proposes a different causal path or explanation

6. **Counterevidence** – facts or data that support a counterclaim

7. **Rebuttal** (refutation) – a reason for objecting to or rejecting the counterclaim

8. **Concession** – a reason why the counterclaim may be worthy of consideration
Example of Parts of an Argument

Main Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Sub-Claim One (Reason for Main Claim): Driving a car is a typical citizen's greatest contribution to air pollution.

Evidence: Three studies in peer-reviewed academic journals found that 55% of an American’s annual emissions come from driving.

Bridge to Claim: Because cars are the largest source of privately produced air pollution, switching to hybrid cars decreases overall emissions.

Adapted from Owl Purdue. (2016). Organizing your argument. OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab. Retrieved from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/03/
Example of Parts of an Argument (continued)

Main Claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Sub-Claim Two (reason for main claim): Hybrid cars emit 4,200 Btu per mile compared with 6,500 Btu per mile for conventional cars.

Evidence Two: Data from three peer-reviewed articles comparing Btus of hybrid cars with those of conventional vehicles.

Bridge to Claim: Lower energy input results in lower lifetime emissions in hybrid cars compared to conventional cars. A decision to switch to a hybrid car could make a long-term impact on pollution levels.

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Example of Parts of an Argument (continued)

Main claim: Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution.

Counterclaim: Instead of focusing on hybrid cars, which still encourage a culture of driving even though these vehicles reduce pollution, government policy should focus on building and encouraging use of mass transit systems.

Concession and Rebuttal: Although mass transit is an environmentally sound idea that should be encouraged, it is not feasible in many rural and suburban areas or for people who must commute to work; thus, hybrid cars are a better solution for much of the nation's population.

Adapted from Owl Purdue. (2016). Organizing your argument. OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab. Retrieved from https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/03/
Avoid Skipping Bridges (Links) in Your Logic

✗ Greenhouse production in Canada is increasing so rapidly that Canada now produces more greenhouse tomatoes than do Mexico and the U.S.A. However, greenhouses on the Canadian prairie require a large amount of supplemental heat for crop production.

✓ Greenhouse production in Canada is increasing so rapidly that Canada now produces more greenhouse tomatoes than do Mexico and the U.S.A. However, production on the Canadian prairie has remained flat because greenhouses in cold regions are costly to heat, making it difficult for producers to increase profits.

Courtesy of a former student
Counterclaims

- You cannot ignore counterclaims (counterarguments) and counterevidence.
- You can address them in several ways:
  - Rebut the counterclaim -- point out problems with its logic, evidence, source, method used to collect or analyze the data, or by citing the claims and evidence of academics who disagree with it.
  - Concede that parts of the counterclaim are valid.
  - Qualify the counterclaim by indicating that it may be valid but only under certain conditions.
- How you respond to counterclaims and evidence can make the difference between a strong and weak paper.
Argument and Counterargument

Main argument (simplified thesis statement): Violent video games do not appear to lead to violent behavior in individuals who play these games.

Counterargument (counterclaim): Violent video games do appear to lead to violent behavior in individuals who play these games.
Counterargument

Some researchers have found that people who play violent video games are generally more aggressive than those who play non-violent video games (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Anderson & Ford, 1986; Bartholow & Anderson, 2002; Bartholow, Anderson, Carnagey, & Benjamin, 2005; Calvert & Tan, 1994; Kirsh, 1998). ... Similarly, short-term experiments have shown that children, particularly boys, who play violent video games tend to be more aggressive towards peers (e.g., Irvin & Gross, 1995). ... The results of all these studies suggest that there may be a connection between violent video games and violent behaviour.

Courtesy of a former student
Concession with Rebuttal

Although these studies have provided insights into the behaviors of individuals who play violent video games, they do not offer conclusive evidence of a link between video gaming and violent behaviors because researchers have not considered all contextual variables. Such factors include the level of competitiveness, difficulty, and pace of action of the game and how these impact the players’ responses. ... Adachi and Willoughby (2011) suggest that aggression observed in gamers could be linked to the difficulty of the game used for the test. They point out that violent video games are more difficult and much more competitive than nonviolent video games, which in itself could lead to frustration and possible violent behavior. ... Until all these contextual variables have been considered, a link between playing violent video games and violent behaviour cannot be established.

Courtesy of a former student
Organizing the Development of Your Argument

Summary

- An argument consists of a central claim or thesis and sub-claims.
- A claim or sub-claim must be debatable.
- Claims should be supported with evidence from peer-reviewed literature, your interpretation of the literature and your own research findings.
- A good argument raises and rebuts counterarguments and counterevidence.
- In making an argument, a writer often concedes that some parts of the counterargument are worth considering.