

Steps to a Rebuttal Argument

Step 1 Identify an argument to argue against as well as its main claim(s)

- What exactly are you arguing against?
- Are there secondary claims attached to the main claim?
- A fair summary of your opponent's position should be included in your finished rebuttal.

Example

- If you are taking on affirmative action admissions policies for colleges and universities, then what do those policies involve and whom do they affect?

Step 2 Examine the facts on which the claim is based

- Are the facts accurate?
- Are the facts a truly representative sample?
- Are the facts current?
- Is there another body of facts that you can present as counterevidence?
- If the author uses statistics, is evidence for the validity of those statistics presented?
- Can the statistics be interpreted differently?
- If the author quotes from sources, how reliable are those sources?
- Are the sources treated fairly, or are quotations taken out of context?
- If the author cites outside authority, how much trust can you place in that authority?

Step 3 Examine the assumptions on which the claim is based

- What is the primary assumption of the claim you are rejecting?
- What other assumptions support that claim?
- How are those assumptions flawed?
- If you are arguing against a specific piece of writing, then how does the author fall short?
- Does the author resort to name calling? use faulty reasoning? ignore key facts?
- What fallacies is the author guilty of committing?

Step 4 Analyze your potential readers

- To what extent do your potential readers support the claim that you are rejecting?
- If they strongly support that claim, then how might you appeal to the change their minds?
- What common assumptions and beliefs do you share with them?

Step 5 Decide whether to write a refutation, a counterargument—or both

- Make your aim clear in your thesis statement.
- For example, a thesis statement like this one promises a refutation and counterargument: "Friedman's argument is flawed in several ways. Not that, he ignores the fact that laws in the United States are frequently developed in order to protect individuals against themselves."

Step 6 Write a draft

Identify the issue and the argument you are rejecting

- If the issue is not familiar to most of your readers, you might need to provide some background.
- Even if it is familiar, it might be helpful to give a quick summary of the competing positions.
- Remember that offering a fair and accurate summary is a good way to build credibility with your audience.

Take on the argument that you are rejecting

- You might want to question the evidence that is used to support the argument.
- You can challenge the facts, present counterevidence and counterexamples, cast doubt on the representativeness of the sample, cast doubt on the currency and relevance of the examples, challenge the credibility of any authorities cited, question the way in which statistical evidence is presented and interpreted, and argue that quotations are taken out of context.

Conclude on a firm note

- In your conclusion you should have a strong argument that underscores your objections.
- You might wish to close with a counterargument or counterproposal.

Step 7 Revise, edit, proofread

- For detailed instructions, see Chapter 12.

From: Good Reasons, 3rd ed
Selzer & Faigley