

Counterarguments & Rebuttals

The Middle School Writer's Guide

How strong writers handle the other side — and turn it into points. | Grades 5–8

1. Why Counterarguments Matter

Here's something most middle schoolers don't hear until it's too late: in elementary and early middle school, you can earn a good grade just by stating your opinion and backing it up. **But that stops working in high school.**

In high school — and in AP, IB, and eventually college admissions essays — teachers expect more than a strong opinion. They expect you to show that you understand the other side and can respond to it. A writer who only argues one side looks like they haven't really thought it through. A writer who takes on the opposing view, fairly, and then answers it? That writer sounds smart, fair, and convincing.

The big idea

Anyone can give an opinion. What separates a **middle-school** essay from a **high-school-ready** essay is the counterargument. Building this skill now is the difference between coasting and getting caught off guard later.

2. What Is an Argumentative Essay? (Quick Refresher)

An argumentative essay takes a clear position on a debatable topic and uses evidence to convince the reader that the position is correct. It isn't just sharing how you feel — it's proving a point.

The shift to remember: not *"I think..."* but *"I argue this, because the evidence shows..."* A real argument makes a claim and proves it. And a complete argument also deals with the strongest objection to that claim — which is exactly where the counterargument comes in.

3. The 3-Step Move

Counterarguments confuse a lot of students because they get tangled up with rebuttals. The fix is to see all three pieces as one connected move:

MY CLAIM → COUNTERARGUMENT → REBUTTAL

1. My Claim	2. Counterargument	3. Rebuttal
The position you are arguing for.	What someone who disagrees would say — stated fairly.	Your response that shows why your claim still holds up.

1. My Claim	2. Counterargument	3. Rebuttal
<i>“Schools should ban phones during the day.”</i>	<i>“Some say phones are needed for emergencies.”</i>	<i>“True — but the front office can reach any student instantly.”</i>

The counterargument and the rebuttal almost always travel together. You never raise the other side just to leave it sitting there — you raise it so you can answer it.

4. Counterargument vs. Rebuttal

Counterargument

A counterargument is the strongest reason someone might disagree with your claim. You state it on purpose, in your own essay, and you state it fairly. Yes — you put the other team’s best point into your own writing. That sounds risky, but it actually makes you look more trustworthy, because it shows you considered both sides.

Rebuttal

A rebuttal (sometimes called a “refutation”) is your response to the counterargument. It explains why your claim still stands, even after taking the other side seriously. A rebuttal usually does one of three things:

- Shows the objection is based on a misunderstanding or wrong information, **OR**
- Agrees the objection is partly true, but shows your point still matters more, **OR**
- Points out that the problem in the objection already has a solution.

Easy way to remember: the **counterargument** is what *they* would say. The **rebuttal** is how *you* answer back.

5. Where It Goes in the Essay

For most middle school essays, the cleanest approach is to give the counterargument and rebuttal their own paragraph — placed right before the conclusion. By then your reader has seen all your reasons, so it’s the perfect moment to say “now let me deal with the other side.”

Typical 5-Paragraph Order	What Happens
Introduction	Hook + thesis (your claim).
Body 1 & 2	Your reasons and evidence.
Body 3 — Counter + Rebuttal	State the other side fairly, then respond. This is the paragraph most students skip.

Typical 5-Paragraph Order	What Happens
Conclusion	Restate the claim, now stronger because you handled the objection.

6. How to Find a Counterargument

The hardest part is often just thinking of one. If you stare at a blank page, ask yourself these questions — they pull the other side out of hiding:

- “What would someone who completely disagrees with me say?”
- “What is the best point on the other side — not the silliest one?”
- “If my friend argued the opposite, what would actually be hard to answer?”
- “Is there a cost, risk, or downside to my idea that I’m ignoring?”

Pro tip: pick the objection that scares you a little. If a counterargument is easy to knock down, it won’t impress anyone. The strong move is to take on the point you almost wish no one would bring up — and then answer it well.

7. Sentence Frames

Keep these nearby while you write. The first set introduces the other side (concession). The second set turns the corner back to your own claim (rebuttal). Mixing and matching them is completely normal.

Introduce the other side (<i>concession</i>)	Turn back to your claim (<i>rebuttal</i>)
Some people argue that...	However,...
Critics of this view claim...	Nevertheless,...
It is true that...	While this may be true, the evidence shows...
Admittedly,...	This argument overlooks the fact that...
One might object that...	Even so,... because...
At first glance, it may seem that...	A closer look reveals that...

8. Do’s and Don’ts

✓ DO	✗ DON’T
State the other side fairly and honestly . Pick the strongest objection, not the weakest.	Make the other side sound silly so it’s easy to beat — the strawman trap (see below). Raise an objection and then forget to answer it.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
<p>Always follow a counterargument with a rebuttal.</p> <p>Use a transition word to signal the turn (“However...”).</p> <p>Keep a calm, respectful tone.</p>	<p>Get emotional or insulting (“That’s just dumb...”).</p> <p>Let the counterargument quietly win by responding weakly.</p> <p>Add a counterargument you can’t actually answer.</p>

Watch out: the Strawman Trap

A “strawman” is a fake, weakened version of the other side that’s easy to knock down — like beating up a scarecrow instead of a real opponent. It feels like winning, but careful readers notice immediately and trust you less.

Weak (strawman): “Some people think kids should be allowed to do whatever they want on their phones all day.”

Strong (fair): “Some argue that phones help students stay connected with parents in an emergency.”

Rule of thumb: state the other side so well that someone who believes it would nod and say “yes, that’s what I think.” Then answer it.

9. Weak → Strong Examples

Two complete examples below. Each starts with a real claim, shows a weak attempt at handling the other side, then a strong version. Notice what changes — it’s almost never the topic, it’s the fairness and the follow-through.

Example 1 — “Schools should ban phones during the school day.”

CLAIM	Phones should be put away during the school day so students can focus.
WEAK	<p><i>Some people think kids just want phones to goof off and waste time, but that’s a bad reason. Phones are bad and should be banned.</i></p> <p>Why it’s weak: it invents a silly version of the other side (strawman), never names a real objection, and the “rebuttal” is just repeating the claim louder.</p>
STRONG	<p><i>Some argue that students need phones during the day in case of a family emergency. This is a fair concern. However, every school already has a front office that can reach any student in minutes, and teachers can be contacted directly. The safety that phones supposedly provide is already covered — without the constant distraction that pulls focus away from learning.</i></p> <p>Why it’s strong: it states the best objection fairly, concedes it has a point, then answers it with a real reason and circles back to the claim.</p>

Example 2 — “Middle schoolers should not be assigned homework over the weekend.”

CLAIM	Weekends should be free of assigned homework so students can rest and recharge.
WEAK	<p><i>Teachers who give weekend homework probably just want to torture students and don't care about them at all. So weekend homework is wrong.</i></p> <p>Why it's weak: it attacks teachers' motives instead of their actual argument, uses an unfair and emotional version of the other side, and offers no real response.</p>
STRONG	<p><i>Admittedly, some teachers assign weekend homework because they believe extra practice helps information stick. That goal makes sense. Even so, research on learning suggests that rest and downtime are when the brain actually consolidates what was learned during the week. A genuinely refreshed student on Monday will absorb new material faster than a burned-out one — so protecting the weekend serves the very goal the homework was meant to achieve.</i></p> <p>Why it's strong: it grants that the other side has a reasonable goal, then shows that the student's own position actually reaches that goal better. That's the most advanced rebuttal move.</p>

One last reminder

A counterargument isn't a sign of weakness in your essay — it's a sign of confidence. Showing the other side and answering it tells your reader: “I looked at this from every angle, and I still stand by my claim.” That's exactly what high school, AP, and IB teachers are looking for.