

Argumentative Writing Guide

W.9-10.1 — WHAT HIGH SCHOOL EXPECTS "Write arguments to support claims... using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence."

A · PRECISE CLAIMS

Introduce a precise claim and clearly distinguish it from opposing claims.

B · BOTH SIDES, FAIRLY

Develop claims *and* counterclaims with evidence — noting the strengths and limitations of both.

B · KNOW YOUR READER

Anticipate the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

C · COHESION

Use links that clarify claim → reasons → evidence → counterclaim relationships.

D + E · STYLE & CLOSE

Formal style, objective tone, and a conclusion that follows from the argument.

1 Precise & Qualified Claims — Your Thesis Statement

W.9-10.1.a

Your central claim **is your thesis statement** — the standards say "claim," teachers say "thesis," and they mean the same sentence. In middle school, a thesis just had to be **arguable**. In grades 9–10, it must be **precise** — specific about who, what, and under what conditions — and it earns credibility by **acknowledging complexity up front**.

✗ VAGUE CLAIM

"Social media is bad for teenagers."

Too broad to defend. Bad *how*? For *which* teens? A reader can dismiss it in one sentence.

✓ PRECISE, QUALIFIED CLAIM

"Although social media helps teens stay connected, schools should teach media literacy in ninth grade because most students never learn to evaluate what they scroll past."

Names the opposing view, narrows the scope, and states a defensible position with a reason.

THE QUALIFIED THESIS FORMULA

Although / While + [strongest opposing point] , [your precise claim] because [your core reason] .

Starting with "Although..." is not weakness — it signals to the reader that you have already considered the other side.

2 Know Your Audience

W.9-10.1.b

New at this level: your argument must **anticipate the reader's knowledge and concerns**. Before drafting, answer these three questions — they decide what you explain, what you skip, and which counterclaim you must address.

① What does my reader already know?

Don't waste a paragraph defining what's obvious to them — and don't assume expertise they lack.

② What will my reader doubt or worry about?

Their biggest concern is your most important counterclaim. Address it directly, not the easiest one.

③ What evidence would convince them?

Parents, teachers, and peers are persuaded by different things. Choose evidence for *your* reader.

3 Evidence + Reasoning — Pass the "So What?" Test

W.9-10.1.b · c

The standard asks for **relevant and sufficient** evidence connected by **valid reasoning**. Stacking facts without explaining them — an **evidence dump** — is the #1 reason strong research still earns a weak score.

★★★★

Research findings & statistics — from credible, named sources

★★★

Expert testimony — quotes from qualified authorities

★★

Real-world examples — documented events and cases

★

Personal anecdotes — use sparingly; never as your only support

THE "SO WHAT?" TEST

After every piece of evidence, add at least one sentence of reasoning that answers: **so what does this prove about my claim?** If you delete the reasoning and the paragraph still "works," you never actually argued anything.

EVIDENCE → REASONING → CLAIM

EVIDENCE: "According to [named source], most teens never fact-check the posts they share."

REASONING: "This matters because sharing unverified claims is exactly the habit a media-literacy class is designed to break."

4 Essay Map — Plan Every Paragraph

5-PARAGRAPH FRAME · EXPAND BODY ¶s AS NEEDED

¶1 · INTRODUCTION

Hook — a real question or fact, not a cliché
Context — 2–3 sentences your reader needs
Thesis — your qualified claim (use the formula above)

¶2 · BODY — REASON 1

Topic sentence — reason #1, tied to thesis
Evidence — credible, named source
Reasoning — pass the "So What?" test

¶3 · BODY — REASON 2

Topic sentence — reason #2, new angle
Evidence + reasoning — repeat the E → R move
Link — transition that connects back to thesis

¶4 · COUNTERCLAIM

The 4-Step Move (see Page 2):
Counterclaim, fairly stated → concede its **strength** → expose its **limitation** → **rebuttal**

¶5 · CONCLUSION

Restate thesis — new words, sharpened by ¶4
Synthesize — how the reasons add up
Wider implication — never "In conclusion, I think..."

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The 4-Step Move

MIDDLE SCHOOL: MENTION IT · HIGH SCHOOL: DEVELOP IT

In middle school, it was enough to **acknowledge** a counterargument. Grades 9–10 require you to **develop the counterclaim fairly** — give it real evidence, concede its genuine strength, expose its limitation, and only then rebut. **Stuck finding one?** Ask: *what would the smartest person who disagrees with me say first?* — then write **that**, not the easiest objection.

CLAIM → COUNTERCLAIM → STRENGTH & LIMITATION → REBUTTAL

1 · MY CLAIM = THESIS	2 · COUNTERCLAIM	3 · STRENGTH & LIMITATION	4 · REBUTTAL
Your precise, qualified position — the thesis statement your whole essay defends.	The strongest opposing view, stated so fairly its supporters would recognize it. No strawman.	Concede what is genuinely true in it — then show exactly where its logic or evidence stops working.	Your response, with evidence, showing why your claim still holds after taking the other side seriously.

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Sentence Frames — High School Register

W.9-10.1.c · d

CONCEDE THE STRENGTH	EXPOSE THE LIMITATION	DELIVER THE REBUTTAL
"Critics contend that ____, and this concern is not unfounded."	"However, this argument overlooks ____."	"Even granting this point, the evidence still shows ____."
"Admittedly, there is merit to the argument that ____."	"While true in some cases, this reasoning does not account for ____."	"Ultimately, the benefits of ____ outweigh these concerns because ____."
"Proponents of ____ rightly point out that ____."	"This evidence, though compelling, is limited because ____."	"A more effective solution, therefore, is ____."

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Weak → Strong: Handling the Counterclaim

TOPIC: AI TOOLS IN SCHOOLWORK

✗ WEAK — STRAWMAN + EVIDENCE DUMP "Some people say AI is bad for students, but they are just afraid of new technology. AI helps students a lot. Everyone uses AI now. Also, banning things never works. That is why schools should allow AI." Distorts the opposing view into something easy to knock down, stacks unsupported assertions, and never explains <i>why</i> any of it proves the claim.	✓ STRONG — FAIRLY DEVELOPED, THEN REBUTTED COUNTERCLAIM Critics of classroom AI contend that writing tools let students skip the very thinking that essays are designed to build — CONCESSION and this concern is not unfounded: when a chatbot drafts the essay, the student practices nothing. LIMITATION However, this argument assumes that banning a tool removes it from students' lives, when in reality these tools remain a click away outside of school. REBUTTAL Ultimately, students are better protected by structured lessons in responsible use — disclosing AI assistance, verifying its output, and knowing when not to use it — than by a rule that only applies inside the classroom walls.
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Notice: the strong version spends **two full sentences taking the other side seriously** before responding — and it makes the rebuttal **more** convincing, not less.

FORMAL TONE	a lot of → numerous · kids → students · really important → essential · can't / don't → cannot / do not (no contractions) · "I think..." → delete it — state the
QUICK SWAPS	point directly

✓ SELF-CHECK BEFORE YOU SUBMIT	
☐ Is my claim precise and qualified — not a vague opinion anyone could dismiss?	☐ Did I state the counterclaim so fairly its supporters would recognize it ?
☐ Did I point out a genuine strength AND a limitation of the opposing view?	☐ Does every piece of evidence pass the "So What?" test with a reasoning sentence?
☐ Do my transitions show how claims, reasons, and evidence connect ?	☐ Is my tone formal and objective , and does my conclusion follow from my argument?