

## Activity Type

Writing Exercises:  
identifying, paraphrasing,  
writing sentences,  
paragraph writing

## Focus

Counter-arguments

Refutations

Concessions

## Aim

To learn and practice  
writing a counter-  
argument and refutation  
paragraph that includes a  
concession for persuasive  
essays.

## Preparation

Make one copy of the  
three-page worksheet for  
each student.

## Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

## Time

75 minutes

## Introduction

In this counter-argument and refutation worksheet, students learn how to write a counter-argument and refutation paragraph to include in a persuasive essay.

## Procedure

Give each student a copy of the three-page worksheet.

First, students read a short passage explaining the purpose of a counter-argument and refutation.

Students then read a paragraph that includes a counter-argument and a refutation and identify and paraphrase both the writer's view and the opposing view.

Exercise A - Answer key

Writer's view: Prisons contribute to crime because rather than help improve prisoners, they teach them to be better criminals.

Opposing view: If criminals are in prison, they are not out in the community breaking the law.

Next, students read a short passage explaining three ways to refute a counter-argument - refute evidence, refute the main assumption, and identify and explain the logical fallacy.

After that, students read four counter-arguments and refutations and identify the ways the counter-arguments are refuted.

Exercise B - Answer key

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. faulty evidence | 2. faulty assumption |
| 3. logical fallacy | 4. faulty evidence   |

Students then read a short passage that explains the purpose of beginning a refutation by making a concession to the opposing view.

Students then move on to read a complete counter-argument paragraph and identify its four key parts.

Exercise C - Answer key

Topic sentence - 1  
Counter-argument - 2, 3, 4  
Concession - 5  
Refutation - 6, 7, 8, 9  
Concluding sentence - 10

(continued on the next page)

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## Procedure continued

Next, students write a counter-argument and refutation for two arguments that both include a concession. The arguments are written in such a way that students can choose to take either a *for* or *against* stance on the issue. Explain to students that they can simply cross out the stance they do not wish to take.

Students continue by reading a short passage that explains how to incorporate a counter-argument and refutation paragraph into a longer persuasive essay.

Finally, students write two paragraphs addressing the question, 'Is online shopping better than shopping in a bricks and mortar store?'

Explain to students that if they are *for* online shopping, they should begin by writing a paragraph that does not include a counter-argument and refutation, but just simply lists points to support the main argument. In this case, the points will be the three pros listed in the exercise. In the second paragraph, they should include a counter-argument and refutation which includes a concession. The counter-argument will be based on just one of the cons listed in the exercise.

For students who are against online shopping, they follow the same procedure, but the points for the first paragraph will be taken from the cons list and the counter-argument from the pros list.

In a persuasive essay, you try to convince the reader that your argument is valid. To do this effectively, it is useful to include an opposing viewpoint to the one you are arguing. This opposing viewpoint is known as a counter-argument. Even though you are arguing one side of an issue, it is not only acceptable but highly recommended to include an argument from the view that opposes your own. After presenting the opposing view, include a refutation to show why the other point of view is flawed or wrong. Attacking the opposing view is an effective way to make your arguments more convincing.

**A. In the paragraph below, identify both the writer's view and the opposing view and paraphrase them below.**

It is often argued that the most effective way to reduce crime is to build more prisons thereby taking people with undesirable behaviours off the streets. While there is some logic to this view, some experts argue that it can actually increase crime because rather than rehabilitate, prisons can help create more hardened criminals.

Writer's view: .....

.....

Opposing view: .....

.....

**Refutation:** The way in which you refute an argument depends on determining the particular aspect of the counter-argument you want to attack. For example, you may challenge the opposing view's evidence because it may not be credible, or it is outdated. Thus, you would need to present evidence from a more credible source or evidence that is more current. In another example, the counter-argument may be based on faulty assumptions, so you need to show why these beliefs are flawed. Finally, the counter-argument may contain a number of logical fallacies. Therefore, you will need to present and explain each fallacy.

**B. Read the four counter-arguments and refutations and identify the aspect being refuted. i.e. faulty evidence (FE), a faulty assumption (FA), or a logical fallacy (LF).**

..... 1. While those that deny climate change often cite academic research to support their claim, most if not all of these studies are not able to be replicated or they contain errors.

..... 2. Many people have recently entered the housing market despite all-time high prices in the belief that real estate prices can only ever go up. However, many of these buyers have not had the experience of living through a housing market crash.

..... 3. While those that oppose nuclear energy bring up the examples of Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima to argue that the risks far outweigh any benefits, this is a somewhat hasty generalisation. They fail to mention that there are close to 500 nuclear power plants in operation today all operating safely, and since the first nuclear power plant was established in 1954, these are the only incidents that are commonly cited.

..... 4. While there has been a well-publicised inquiry into the state of our education system, the investigation was mainly led by key figures in the education department. Therefore, if we want to trust any findings about the quality of education in our state, we need a fully open and independent investigation.

When refuting a counter-argument, it is useful to begin by making a brief concession. A concession simply means to acknowledge that on the surface, the counter-argument seems to have merit. After making the concession, explain why the counter-argument is flawed. You can do this by refuting the evidence, an assumption, or logic. Through making a concession, you show that you have studied both sides of the issue and that your conclusions should be taken seriously.

**C. Read the paragraph and write down the number or numbers of the sentences that show the following:**

- The topic sentence .....
- The counter-argument .....
- The concession .....
- The refutation .....
- The concluding sentence .....

(1) Those who oppose the idea of imposing higher taxes on the wealthy often refer to the concept of trickle-down economics. (2) The key idea of trickle-down economic theory is that when the wealthy gain benefits, these trickle down to everyone else in the economy. (3) These benefits are usually in the form of tax cuts for high-income earners and businesses. (4) The belief is that the money gained from tax cuts will be pumped back into the economy through investments that will ultimately create more jobs and income for everyone. (5) On the surface this argument seems quite logical. (6) However, this theory is being rejected by many, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (7) Their research suggests that when the top 20% become wealthier, this does not have a significantly positive impact on the economy. (8) In contrast, they found that more economic growth is generated by increasing the incomes of low to middle-income earners. (9) For instance, increasing the wealth of just one-fifth of low-income earners by 1% results in about a 0.4% increase in economic growth, whereas an increase in wealth for the top 20% only results in about a 0.1% increase in growth. (10) Thus, it can be concluded that cutting taxes for the rich does not have wider benefits for all.

**D. Read the arguments below and choose a stance. Then, write a short refutation of the opposing stance that includes a concession.**

1. Social media *has / has not* improved human communication.

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.....

.....

2. Advertising aimed at children *is / is not* harmful.

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