

Rubric Category	Organization
Grade/Score	Grades 7-12 / Score 1
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 7-12 / Score 2
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a
Argument Type	All arguments

# Generating a Counterclaim

*Students generate multiple counterclaims in response to their claims both to evaluate the original claim and to make strong decisions about including potential counterclaims.*

## Understanding the Expectations

A key part of writing a strong argument is acknowledging that there are other opinions out there that conflict with your own. By understanding and including those other opinions, you can make your own claim even stronger. When you include a point of view that doesn't agree with the claims of your essay, it's called including a *counterclaim*.

### *What's a Claim?*

In order to understand counterclaims, we first need to have a clear understanding of what a *claim* is. Remember, to be a claim, a statement has to argue something that a reasonable person could disagree with. For example, if a character named Jack punches a character named Steve, it wouldn't be a claim to say, "Jack hit Steve" because that is a fact from the story that nobody can disagree with. It also wouldn't really be a claim to say, "Jack hit Steve because he is mad," because even though that is a little more of an interpretation, and therefore more

interesting, it still isn't something we could disagree with. A real claim might be something like "Jack hit Steve, even though Steven didn't deserve it, because Jack learned from his family that violence is the only way to solve problems." A reasonable person might disagree with that and offer a conflicting interpretation of Jack's reasons for hitting Steve, like "Jack hit Steve because Steve egged him on and really deserved it."

### *What's a Counterclaim?*

When you include a counterclaim in your writing, it means including a point of view that doesn't agree with your own and then explaining why it's not as strong a point of view as yours is. Counterclaims are useful for two reasons: first, by including a contradictory point of view and explaining why it's wrong, you help strengthen your own argument. Second, by writing a counterclaim, you can help verify that your own idea is really a true claim (instead of just an obvious statement). To put it another way, if we define a claim as something a reasonable person could disagree with, then we should be able to write down that disagreement.

## Playing the "Counterclaim" Game

1. If you are working on a full draft, choose three claims you made in your paper for this game. If you are early in the writing process and don't have a draft, review your notes or your essay and list up to three potential claims you want to use.
2. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and make three columns. Label one "Claim," one "Counterclaim," and one "Explanation."
3. Write or paste your three claims in the left column.

*Your notes should look something like this:*

<b>Claim</b>	<b>Counterclaim</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<i>Jack hit Steve, even though Steven didn't deserve it, because Jack learned from his family that violence is the only way to solve problems.</i>		

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<i>Jack hit Steve because he is mad.</i>		
<i>Jack had every right to be angry at Steve because of Steve's actions.</i>		

4. For each of your claims, write a strong counterclaim and put it in the next column. Your counterclaim should be something a reasonable person might say, and it should contradict your claim, meaning that both things can't be true at the same time. If you can't write a counterclaim, that's probably a clue that your claim is really just an opinion or a statement of a basic fact. If you realize your statement isn't a true claim, make a note to that effect.

*Now your notes should look something like this:*

<b>Claim</b>	<b>Counterclaim</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Jack hit Steve, even though Steven didn't deserve it, because Jack learned from his family that violence is the only way to solve problems.	<i>Jack hit Steve because Steve egged him on and really deserved it.</i>	
Jack hit Steve because he is mad.	<i>There's no way to write a counterclaim for this because nobody could really disagree with it.</i>	
Jack had every right to be angry at Steve because of Steve's actions.	<i>Steve's actions were not fair, but Jack gets angrier than is really fair in that situation.</i>	

- Now, fill in the final column. For each claim and counterclaim, write an explanation for how they conflict and why your claim is true, even though the counterclaim could be true.

Now your notes should look something like this:

<b>Claim</b>	<b>Counterclaim</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Jack hit Steve, even though Steven didn't deserve it, because Jack learned from his family that violence is the only way to solve problems.	Jack hit Steve because Steve egged him on and really deserved it.	<i>Whether Steve really deserved it is arguable, but my evidence proves that he really did not deserve it and that Jack should have expressed his anger in a different way.</i>
Jack hit Steve because he is mad.	There's no way to write a counterclaim for this because nobody could really disagree with it.	<i>Because there's no way to write a counterclaim, I need to revise this statement to make it more of a claim.</i>
Jack had every right to be angry at Steve because of Steve's actions.	Steve's actions were not fair, but Jack gets angrier than is really fair in that situation.	<i>My evidence can prove that Jack's anger is completely justified, even if hitting Steve was going too far.</i>

- Review the work you've done to look for two things: first, can you improve any of your original claims by making it more of a claim and less of a statement of fact. Second, you can use one of your counterclaims and your explanation to help you write a stronger body paragraph for your essay. By including a counterclaim and then explaining why it isn't as strong an idea as your claim, you can make your own argument more persuasive.

## Writing It Up

If you are early in the writing process, you can improve a claim and then work on writing a body paragraph with it. Consider including one of your counterclaims in order to make the paragraph more persuasive. If you are working with a full draft, you can use your work to ensure that all of your paragraphs make claims that are actually arguable and interesting, and you can look for opportunities to include a counterclaim in order to make a paragraph more persuasive.