

Rubric Category	Organization
Grade/Score	Grade 7-12 / Scores 1, 2, and 3
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grade 7-8 / Scores 2 and 3 Grade 9-12 / Score 2
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1a, W1c
Argument Type	All arguments

Agree AND Disagree: Introducing Counterclaims and Alternate Positions

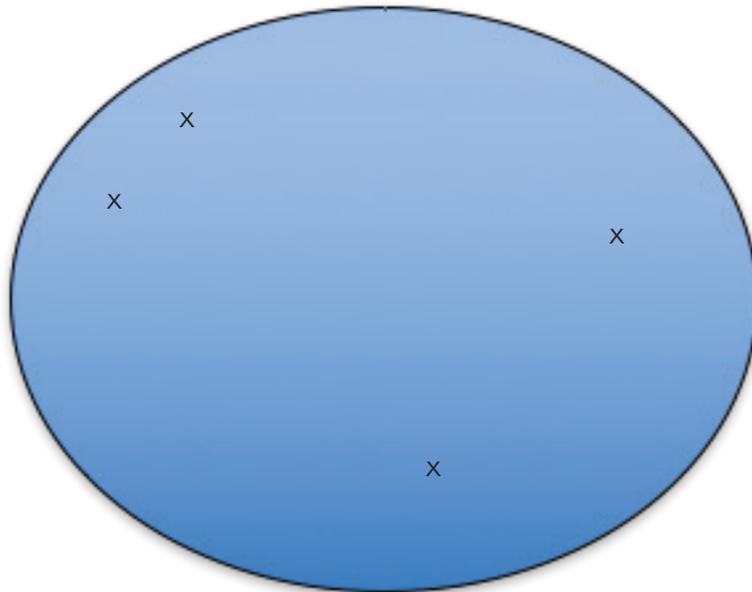
Students will explore how their claim relates to alternate positions to help develop their counterclaims.

Understanding the Expectations

Counterclaims: What Are They? (A quick review)

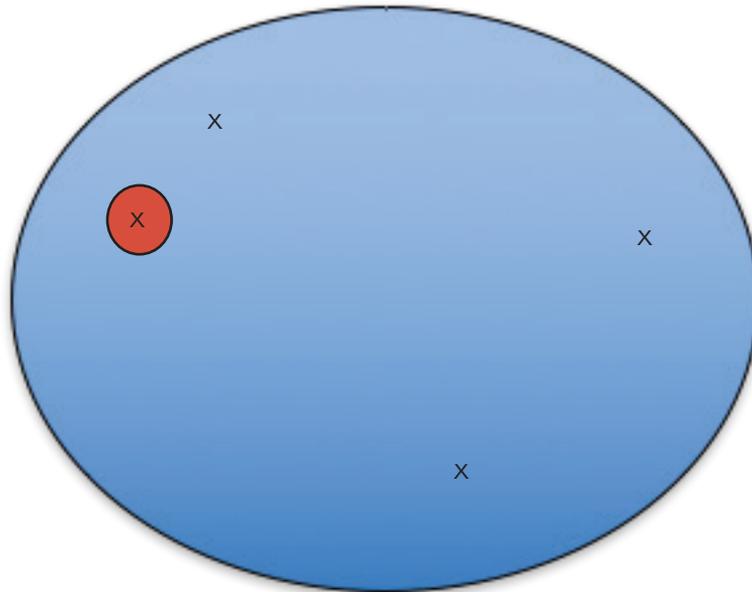
When you make an argument, you make a claim or take a position. The choice-making in that is often ignored. And when it is ignored what is lost is something critical: That claim or position is a *selection* from a universe of options. That universe may be small (two options) or large (many) but in the world of argument there are always alternatives. An argument is strong to the extent that a writer or speaker can describe this universe of choices and then say why the position or claim she takes is compelling or warranted.

A picture of this might help:



Imagine that the circle is the “universe” of this particular argument and that the x’s are the different positions a person could choose to take. Some of these choices are close together—meaning, they have similarities—others are further apart or more different.

A strong argument is an argument that helps a reader or listener map or understand this universe and then explains why one particular position or claim is most compelling—in other words, in an argument you say “Here are the claims you could make, the positions you could take. Here’s the one I think is best. Here’s why I think that.” When you “address” alternate positions—a.k.a. “counterclaims”—you do that to send the following message: “I know there are other positions a person could take. I know what those positions are. I’ve considered them and selected this one instead. Here’s why that is smart.” Let’s go back to our picture:



Notice that there are two circles now: the universe circle and the one around the position you took. When you acknowledge or address counterclaims you say to your audience: "Here's the universe of choices for this question or issue. Here's the one I choose and here is why I chose it."

Ok. So there's that. The question now is, what does that actually sound or look like in writing? And are there different ways it can sound or look?

Playing the Game

Agree and Disagree, The Basics

1. Decide whether your universe of options is big or small. To do this, jot down your claim and then below it write down other possible claims or positions. To come up with this list (short or long), look back in your notes or on any artifacts like paper charts or shared digital documents the class created that might contain alternate positions.



2. Once you have your list, answer the question: Is the universe of options big or small (it could also be medium or something else)? Write down your answer to that question next, for example: "The universe of options for this argument is huge!" or "The universe of options for this argument is small—there are only a few choices."
3. Play the "agree and disagree" game.

Playing the "Agree and Disagree" Game

1. Create a digital document or work in your notebook and re-list the position or claim options, leaving space (5-10 lines) to write under each option.
2. There are three basic ways to "play" Agree and Disagree and each of these ways is marked by certain phrases. Here are the three ways to play:
 - a. Part Way Agreeing
 - ◆ The "Part Way" phrase: "Although there is much about this position that I like, in the end I cannot accept the conclusion that _____."
 - ◆ **Before this phrase in your writing**, identify the position you are agreeing and disagreeing with.
 - ◆ **After you use this phrase in your writing**, fill in the blank with the reason why you don't accept it.
 - b. Mostly Disagreeing
 - ◆ The "Mostly Disagreeing" phrase: "Although, in the end, I disagree with the claim that _____, I fully recognize and support the merits of this position."
 - ◆ **Before this phrase in your writing**, identify the position you are mostly disagreeing with.
 - ◆ **After you use this phrase in your writing**, fill in the blank with exactly what it is you disagree with.
 - ◆ **Next:** 1) list the merits you admire and then 2) using a transition such as "That said" or "Nevertheless," restate the position or claim you are making in your argument.

c. Conceding and Insisting

- ◆ “concede” is to give ground, to say “you know what? I’ll give you that. That is smart and I’m not afraid to admit it.” To insist is to hold your ground, to say “I still think ___X__.” It is a kind of agreeing and disagreeing that is strong because it is flexible, like a board that will bend but won’t break.
- ◆ The “Conceding and Insisting” phrase is: “While I concede that _____, I still insist that _____.”
- ◆ **Before this phrase shows up in your writing**, state your position or claim.
- ◆ **In the first blank of the phrase**, fill in the blank with phrases or sentences that say exactly what you think is smart about the other point of view.
- ◆ **After you use this phrase in your writing**, fill in the second blank with a restatement of your position or claim.

These are all variations on the same move: you are acknowledging that there are parts or aspects of an alternate claim (or claims) that have merit. You are showing that you have done your homework. This accomplishes two major things:

1. You convey respect: you acknowledge that other positions or claims have something to them, even though, in the end, your position is different.
2. You demonstrate intelligence and, by doing so, you give your own argument a power boost. Why? Because strong arguments aren’t “loud,” instead they’re “deep.” And deep means “considered”: you’ve thought carefully about the evidence and the options, including the things about them that are strong and problematic, and, after weighing and laying it all out, you made a reasoned choice. Like a lawyer in a TV courtroom drama, you identified and anticipated the opposing counsel’s argument, addressed it upfront and in doing so send this message to your audience: “I am thoughtful and patient. I have taken the time to carefully consider this issue from many angles. You can trust me.”



Writing It Up

Select the approach that works best for the paper you are writing or revising (partway agreeing, mostly disagreeing, or conceding and insisting). Follow the instructions for that approach and write out the full sentences addressing the counterclaim.

Based on the paper you are writing, decide the best place to include the writing you just created. Does it make sense to address the counterclaims in your introduction, and get them “out of the way” from the beginning? Does it make more sense just before your conclusion, allowing you to reemphasize your main ideas? You will need to make some of these decisions yourself, depending on what you’ve written.

After you’ve copied these into your writing, review the flow of your paper to make sure the phrases don’t feel out of place to a reader—you’re encouraged to adapt some of the language and “make it your own” at this point. Once you feel like it makes sense, trade papers with a partner if possible and review each other’s work for clarity.