

Constructing the Counter-Argument

Why use a counter-argument if it goes against what I want to say?

- Acknowledging and refuting the opposing position actually *strengthens* a paper because it greatly diminishes the reader's ability to question your argument. It also establishes your credibility as a writer because you have addressed other opinions rather than simply ignoring them.

How can I approach a counter argument?

- If you totally disagree, refute the *entire* argument
- If you partially disagree, *qualify* argument. Establish which parts you disagree with and why.
 - Example:
 - **Counterargument:** The federal government has made successful efforts to desegregate schools.
 - **Qualification:** The federal government has made significant efforts to desegregate schools, but they have been ineffective.

How do I incorporate a counter-argument into my essay?

- **On a structural level:** There are many ways to incorporate a counter argument in a paper. The way you present a counter-argument should depend on the level of disagreement you present.
 - Introduction
 - In the first body paragraph (This is especially useful if you qualify the counter-argument. The following body paragraphs can explain why you partially agree and partially disagree.)
 - Throughout the paper. Break up counterargument and attack each part in a body paragraph
- **On a sentence level:** Certain phrases, which clearly signal a shift between counter arguments and your own argument, can be used to move back and forth between your argument and the counter-argument. USE 2.20
 - Transitioning to counterargument:
 -
 - Transitioning to your own argument:
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Is there anything I should watch out for when using a counter-argument?

- ✓ **Balance.** Don't let the counter-argument overtake your main argument. Remember, counter-arguments are only one way to support your point(s). If you give them too much weight, the reader's focus may drift to the very thing you are trying to disprove.
- ✓ **Strength of refuting evidence.** If your evidence disproving the counter-argument is weak, the reader will find the counter-argument, not your argument, the most convincing.

Model Counter-Argument Paper with Annotations

The following essay is an example of a paper in which the counter-argument is presented and refuted throughout the entire paper.

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 Professor Paschal
 English 102
 17 March XXXX

Performance Enhancement through Biotechnology
 Has No Place in Sports

The debate over athletes' use of performance-enhancing substances is getting more complicated as biotechnologies such as gene therapy become a reality. The availability of these new methods of boosting performance will force us to decide what we value most in sports—displays of physical excellence developed through hard work or victory at all costs. For centuries, spectators and athletes have cherished the tradition of fairness in sports. While sports competition is, of course, largely about winning, it is also about the means by which a player or team wins. Athletes who use any type of biotechnology give themselves an unfair advantage and disrupt the sense of fair play, and they should be banned from competition.

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Comment: Before introducing the argument and counter-argument, the author establishes that there are two positions on the topic of the essay.

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Comment: The author explicitly introduces the two opposing positions.

Writing Center User 11/1/12 5:41 PM

Comment: The author narrows the focus of the argument and counter-argument by specifying a specific aspect of the debate.

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Comment: The author states his own position in the thesis, thereby clearly establishing which of the two positions he is arguing for.

Researchers are experimenting with techniques that could manipulate an athlete's genetic code to build stronger muscles or increase endurance. Searching for cures for diseases like Parkinson's and muscular dystrophy, scientists at the University of Pennsylvania have created "Schwarzenegger mice," rodents that grew larger-than-normal muscles after receiving injections with a gene that stimulates growth protein. The researchers also found that a combination of gene manipulation and exercise led to a 35% increase in the strength of rats' leg muscles. (Lamb 13).

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Comment: The author provides background information in this paragraph.

Such therapies are breakthroughs for humans suffering from muscular diseases; for healthy athletes, they could mean new world record in sports involving speed and endurance--but at what cost to the integrity of athletic competition? The International Olympic Committee's World Anti-Doping Agency has become so alarmed about the possible effects of new gene technology on athletic competition that it has blamed the use of gene therapies and urged researchers to devise a test for detecting genetic modification (Lamb 13).

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Comment: The author introduces repercussions of counter-argument in a negative light.

Some bioethicists argue that this next wave of performance enhancement is an acceptable and unavoidable feature of competition. As Dr. Andy Miah, who supports the regulated use of gene therapies in sports, claims, "The idea of the naturally perfect athlete is romantic nonsense. . . . An athlete achieves what he or she achieves through all sorts of means—technology, sponsorship, support, and so on" (qtd. in Rudebeck). Miah, in fact, sees athletes' imminent turn to genetic modification as "merely a continuation of the way sport works; it allows us to create more extraordinary performances" as the goal of competition reflects our culture's tendency to demand and reward new heights of athletic achievement. The problem is that achievement nowadays increasingly results from biological and high-tech intervention rather than strictly hard work.

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Comment: The author discusses a specific part of the opposing position.

Better equipment, such as aerodynamic bicycles and fiberglass poles for pole vaulting, have made it possible for athletes to record achievements unthinkable a generation ago. But athletes themselves must put forth the physical effort of training and practice—they must still build their skills—even in the murky area of legal and illegal drug use (Jenkins D11). There is a difference between the use of state-of-the-art equipment and drugs and the modification of the body itself. Athletes who use medical technology to alter

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Comment: The author counters the opposing position with his own argument.

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Comment: The author marks a sharp contrast between opposing positions in preparation for transition to own argument.

their bodies can bypass the hard work of training by taking on the powers of a machine. If they set new records this way, we lose the opportunity to witness sports as a spectacle of human effort and are left marveling at scientific advances, which have little relation to the athletic tradition of fair play.

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Comment: The author refutes the counter-argument in a relatively general sense.

Such a tradition has long defined athletic competition. Sports rely on equal conditions to ensure fair play, from regulations that demand similar equipment to referees who evenhandedly apply the rules to all participants. If the rules that guarantee an even playing field are violated, competitors and spectators alike are deprived of a sound basis of comparison on which to judge athletic effort and accomplishment. When major league baseball rules call for solid-wood bats, the player who uses a corked bat enhances his hitting statistics at the expense of players who use regulation equipment. When Ben Johnson tested positive for steroids after setting a world record in the 100-meter dash in the 1988 Olympics, his “achievement” devalued the intense training that his competitors had undergone to prepare for the event—and the International Olympic Committee responded by stripping Johnson of his medal and his world record. Likewise, athletes who use gene therapy to alter their bodies and enhance their performance will create an uneven playing field.

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Comment: The author refutes counter-argument with specific examples.

If we let athletes alter their bodies through biotechnology, we might as well dispense with the human element altogether. Instead of watching the 100-meter dash to see who the fastest runner in the world is, we might as well watch the sprinters mount motorcycles and race across the finish line. The absurdity of such an example, however, points to the damage that we will do to sports if we allow these therapies. Thomas Murray, chair of the ethics advisory panel for the World Anti-Doping Agency, says he hopes, not too optimistically, for an “alternative future...where we still find meaning in great

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Comment: The author uses the negative consequences of the counter-argument to support his own argument.

performances as an alchemy of two factors, natural talents . . . and virtues” (qtd. in Jenkins

D11).

Unless we are willing to organize separate sporting events and leagues—an Olympics, say, for athletes who have opted for a boost from the test tube and another for athletes who have chosen to keep their bodies natural—we should ask from our athletes that they dazzle us less with extraordinary performance and more with the fruits of their hard work.

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Comment: By refuting the counter-argument, the author reaches a concluding point.

Source: Diana Hacker (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007).

