



# The Refutation Paragraph

*Refute the opposition and win with your readers.*

*by Anthony Starros, M.F.A.*

## What is a refutation paragraph?

A refutation paragraph recognizes the opposing point of an essay's thesis while offering a persuasive counter argument.

It shows your readers that you're being fair, that you've carefully thought about both sides of the debate at hand.

## What does a refutation paragraph do?

A refutation paragraph *acknowledges* the other side of the argument *without* conceding. It then shows *disagreement* with the opposition to help readers see the logic in the essay's thesis.

The refutation paragraph should never offer support for the opposite side of an argument.

Ultimately, the refutation paragraph argues *for* the claim made in the essay's thesis while showing the flawed logic of the opposition.

Once you have presented your evidence and explained carefully how that evidence proves the point you are trying to make, you then need to take some time to refute objections...

Include within your paper the objections that have been or might be raised against your argument.

Try to imagine the questions that will arise in the mind of the reader... Show that you understand those questions, that you have carefully considered them, and that you have the facts and the logic to refute them.

*“Refute! Reply! Fight Back!” - David R. Williams*



## How to build a refutation paragraph:

1. Present the claim to refute (*the opposition*), and acknowledge that the opposition may have valid parts.
2. Refute the opposition's claims--show the flawed logic by articulating your conclusion and how you came to it.

## 1. Present:

Summarize the opposition's point, plainly and fairly, but don't insult the intelligence of your reader. Simple concepts won't need much explanation, while complicated ones will need more background.

Phrases that present:

*Those who disagree believe that...*

*Opponents argue that...*

*Proponents may claim that...*

*Many may point out...*

*One argument commonly brought up is...*

*Granted...*

*Others may argue...*

*Some Contend that...*

## 2. Refute:

After you've given the right amount of summary, you can then and show the flawed reasoning in it by providing rationale for how you came to your conclusion.

To refute:

*Nevertheless, I cannot agree...*

*On the contrary, though...*

*However, the truth is...*

*Of course...*

*Really, though, when taking into account...*

*Upon further evaluation, however,...*

*On the other hand...*

*Although...*

Here is an example of a refutation paragraph on different theories of teaching writing:

George Will's editorial in Newsweek states that the reason "Johnny Can't Write" is the misguided nature of English teachers who focus more on issues of multiculturalism, political correctness, and new theories of reading such as deconstruction, than on the hard and fast rules for paragraph development, grammar, and sentence structure. *[concise, fair summary of opposition's argument]*

Although Will interviews students and uses sample course descriptions to back up his opinion, he misses the main point: all the "fashionable" theories and approaches he decries have actually been proven to teach writing more effectively than the traditional methods he favors. *[refutation that concludes how and why Will's claim is wrong]*



Here is another example for the following thesis:

“Not all women are emotional thinkers, and not all men are analytical thinkers.”

*Antithesis: All women are emotional thinkers.*

Sure, I can admit that in some cases women can be more emotional thinkers who look at “big picture” concepts, and, yes, some men can be item-by-item analyzers, but that isn’t always the case. On the contrary, I see that kind of thinking as oversimplifying the human existence. It prescribes general classifications to complex creatures like human beings in such simplistic terms. We are more complicated than that. We are so wonderfully diverse as a people that it puts a pallor on our existence in this world, and I would rather choose to seek out and celebrate the variances in our existence than be limited by the sameness of it.

Helpful hint:

Don't condescend to or alienate anyone who might disagree with you. Make sure your writing invites people to your side of the debate, not pushes them away.

Avoid this sort of writing:

*It is small minded-and petty to think this way. People who think that all women are only one type and that all men are another type are just not really that smart.*

Conceding some territory to your opponents is *always* a good idea. No position is 100 per- cent right or 100 percent wrong ...

Conceding that your opponent may have a point here or there will not weaken your defenses. If nothing else, this tactic tends to disarm the other side.

Absolute positions that refuse to yield an inch create absolute oppositions that are equally stubborn. Surprise your readers. Be reasonable, be understanding, be sympathetic to their concerns, and then when their defenses are down, zap them with logic and club them to death with facts!

(David R. Williams. Sin Boldly. New York: Basic Books, 2004.)

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