Writing Exercise: Incorporating Counterarguments

Today I want you to focus on writing and incorporating counterarguments in your essay.

This is just a draft and is not set in stone, but is designed to get you thinking about how to structure your counterarguments and your responses.

Before Writing a Counterargument

- Before writing a **counterargument**, you must fully understand the objection(s) your paper may face. You cannot respond fairly and convincingly if you do not understand the objection or are not presenting it accurately.
    - Do research on (relevant) opposing points of view
    - Examine what objections your own sources are responding to
    - Anticipate other logical objections/alternatives
- Plan how you will respond to these objections/alternatives
    - Prepare evidence for your response to opposing points of view
    - Consider what evidence (and how much of it) will be convincing to your audience
    - Consider what **acknowledgements/concessions** you might need to make
    - When responding to reasonable **alternatives**, consider why your idea/proposal/solution is the <u>best</u> possibility
    - *Note: If you cannot find a way to respond to an objection/counterargument, you might need to rethink your argument!*
- Incorporate the counterarguments and your responses into your text where they will be most effective, rather than just tacking them on at the end.
    - You can respond to counterarguments to your overall claim or to specific points you make.
    - Organize your essay so that you are anticipating/responding to possible objections from your reader as or before they might form them, rather than making them search for the answer (with their objection coloring the rest of their reading!).
    - Consider whether a counterargument requires its own **section** (one or more paragraphs on a single topic) in your essay, or whether it should be folded into another section.
    - If the counterargument to a particular point can be fully expressed within a few sentences, it can be incorporated into that particular point's paragraph. Otherwise, it should probably be placed in its own paragraph.
- In presenting and refuting each objection/concern/alternative, consider your **tone** and use language that respectfully acknowledges and addresses each objection, rather than dismissive, insulting, or antagonistic language. In other words, don't make your reader feel stupid/defensive for considering such an objection!

Writing a Counterargument

- Come up with a strong and persuasive counterargument (not a straw man) to either your overall claim or to a specific point you are going to make.
    - Consider whether this counterargument should be incorporated into a current paragraph or section, or if it will constitute its own section.
- Introduce the objection with a phrase that clearly indicates to your reader that you are presenting a counterargument (e.g., "Some, like John Smith, have argued . . ."; "Although some might argue. . ."; "Despite concerns that. . .").
- Explain the objection thoroughly and as objectively as possible (look at it from the objector's perspective) in several sentences.
    - If you have evidence from research supporting such a counterargument, include it.
- Now respond to this objection.
- Respond providing a clear signal to your reader that you are now responding to the objection (e.g., "Despite these claims . . ." or "These objections, however, are based on faulty . . .").
- Is the objection/concern/alternative valid (i.e., a fair objection you cannot outright refute)? If it is, make appropriate concessions (or do you need to refine/revise your thesis?).
    - Explain why this objection/concern/alternative is reasonable and any concessions you must acknowledge
    - Provide a clear explanation of why your solution is still the best option despite this valid objection, providing relevant and sufficient supporting evidence and/or logic.
- If the objection is not valid (i.e., an objection you can outright refute), respond to and rebut it.
    - Provide a clear explanation of why this objection is not valid and what is wrong with it, providing relevant and sufficient supporting evidence and/or logic.
        - Why isn't it valid? Is it based on faulty assumptions? Faulty evidence? Faulty analysis? Faulty logic? Problematic values? Irrelevant?
    - Consider offering a statement conceding why the objection might be reasonable to assume or why someone might pose such an objection (in other words, don't make your reader feel stupid for considering such an objection!).
    - Use this response to further justify why your argument remains correct.
- Transition to another objection or a new paragraph/section.