

DEALING WITH OPPOSING VIEWS

I. Why?

In any argumentative paper, one must acknowledge and deal with opposing views. This practice first of all, increases the writer's ethos because it demonstrates the writer's willingness to argue his point. He is sure of his stance and will use logic in defending his thesis. He shows he has the audience's best interests at heart as he presents an argument that provides the best option and is worthy of their trust. Second, the author's consideration for his audience creates an effective appeal to pathos because he reassures them, building a bridge of understanding and establishing common ground. Finally, dealing with the opposition strengthens the logos in a paper, demonstrating that the argument is better than the alternatives. It shows the author's foresight as he anticipates questions the opposition might have and addresses them. When one deals with the opposition, one rids one's own argument of any loopholes, making it solid and convincing.

We must deal with opposing views not only when we write, but whenever we converse with those who hold opinions different from our own. In order to communicate well and negotiate with others, we must learn to deal with opposing views in a fair, but convincing manner.

II. How?

- A. The first step in dealing with the opposition is to find common ground, explaining how the two, or several, views agree.
- B. The next thing is to explain where the points of view diverge. At what point do you disagree?
- C. Concede on points where the opposition has shown reason. Compliment the opponents on their strengths.
- D. Why do you disagree? Refute the opponents by telling why their solutions won't work. Where do their arguments fall short? How do they not fulfill the goals mentioned in part A?
- E. Now further confirm your own position (the most important part). Logically explain why your solution is better and should be chosen over the others.

There are two basic ways to organize this dialogue/debate within a paper.

- 1) By presenting each side's argument in its own place.
- 2) By conceding and refuting point by point.

The first method of dealing with the opposition splits the argument into two sections. The first details the opposition's views and the second explains why your argument is better. Examine the following example about handgun control:

"The opposition argues that self-protection is a natural right that is guaranteed by the Constitution and must continue to be guaranteed. In fact, the opposition argues, any restrictions on gun ownership invade personal privacy and freedom.

I concede that our right to bear arms must be protected. However, we can impose controls without compromising this right, for it is no more restrictive than registering a car. In fact, we must control the possession of handguns because pistols in homes kill many more relatives than intruders. Therefore, controlling handguns is reasonable and necessary.”

The second method is like a dialogue between friends who go back and forth discussing handgun control. The conversation goes something like this:

Thesis: “Possession of handguns should be controlled.”

- ▲ (Concession/Agreement)
To be sure, self-protection is a natural right...

(Refutation) ▲
But pistols in homes kill many more relatives than intruders...

- (Concession/Agreement)
▲ Of course, ownership by hunters and collectors is justified...

(Refutation) ▲
Large numbers of weapons in homes, ▲ however, give easy access to theft...

- (Concession/Agreement)
▲ But many restrictions invade privacy and freedom...

(Refutation) ▲
Nevertheless, gun registration is no more ▲ restrictive than registering a car...

(Confirmation) ▼
Indeed, all arguments about individual rights pale before the crime rate...

▼
Therefore, controlling handguns is reasonable and necessary. (Modified Baker, p. 14)

Example: Take a look at the following demonstration using The Declaration of Independence. This example shows how the four steps from above are used by Thomas Jefferson to effectively deal with the opposing view. Also notice that Jefferson concedes and refutes point by point. Ask a Reading Center Tutor for a copy of the Declaration, if you don't have one.

1. "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

In this section, Thomas Jefferson implies the **common ground**: he agrees that nations should not revolt for petty reasons. He **concedes** that in most cases, men are more disposed to suffer through trial than to revolt. **Where he disagrees** is that now is the time for revolt. **Why he disagrees** is that the wrongs the colonists have felt are more than light and transient; they are unsufferable evils. Finally, his **confirmation** is that these abuses are severe, numerous, and have continued for a prolonged time because of despotism.

2. "In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have We been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends."

The **common ground** is the assumption that petitions for redress and warnings to both government and fellow citizens are the first logical steps in the negotiation process. He **concedes** that petitions and warnings may even have to be repeated to gain attention. **Where he disagrees** is that now is the time to stop negotiating. **Why he disagrees** is that this method of petitioning and repeated warnings did not work and will not work. His **confirmation** is that the petitions were consistently answered only by repeated injury and the warnings fell on deaf ears; thus, revolt is now necessary.

III. Some things to remember as you deal with opposing views.

A. Remember that no one is ever completely wrong.

1. Concede where the opposition's argument is better than your own.

2. Compliment those who oppose you when they make a good point.
- B. Be aware of your audience's feelings.
1. Keep in mind that people are afraid of change.
 2. Reassure your audience without being condescending.
 3. Present an argument that is deserving of people's trust; show that you have done your homework.
 4. Avoid distorting the opposing views. Present differing points of view honestly, fairly, and completely. When we reduce the opposing view, we become guilty of the logical fallacy of strawman or *reductio ad absurdum*. Look at this example from Nazi propaganda of WWII:

"In reality, these lies are ancient. Our enemies always babble about violated sanctuaries, persecuted priests, murdered children and tortured women in order to prejudice the world against Germany and to arouse the impression that the world must be defended against 'the barbarians who are threatening human culture (Bytwerk 3).'"

The Nazi's here trivialize the opposing view, minimizing concerns over German atrocities. This tactic hoodwinks the naive and browbeats the fearful into agreement. However, it or angers and alienates those who oppose the Nazi's on well-reasoned grounds.

- C. Do not unnecessarily reduce issues to two-sided either/or options; there is usually more than one opposing view.

IV. Practice -look at the following passage from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and answer the questions that follow.

"You may well ask, 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?' You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension.' I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals would rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood."

1. Where does King find common ground with the opposition?

2. Where does he explain where he disagrees?
3. Where does he explain why he disagrees?
4. Where is his confirmation?
5. How does he regard the feelings of his audience/opposition?

Works Cited

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