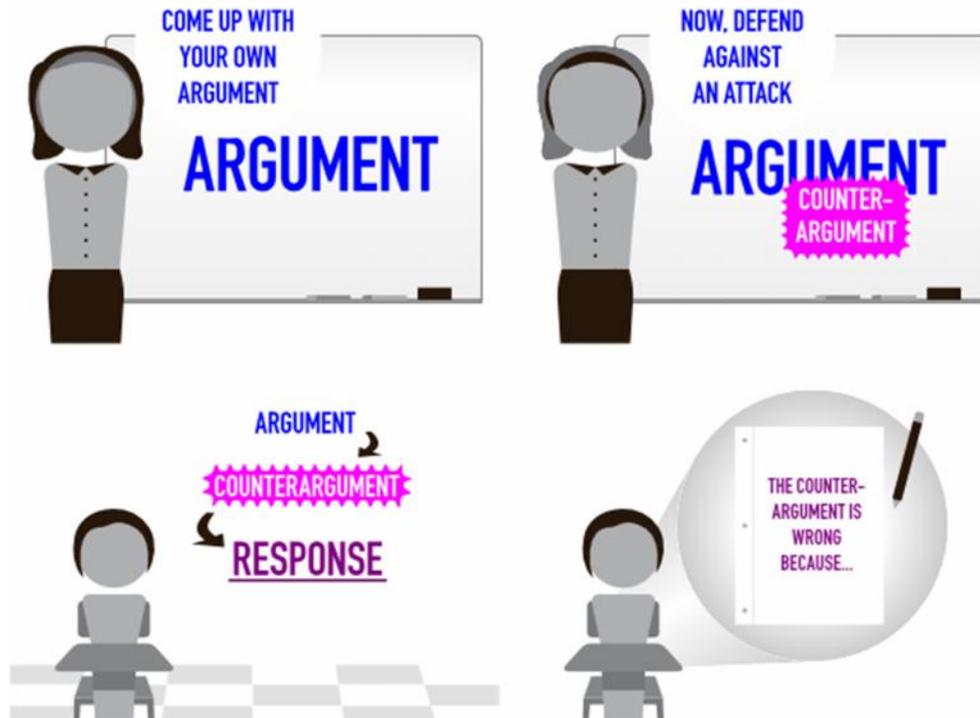


## Defeating the Critic Paragraph



This exercise is fairly advanced, but students who have progressed this far in the sequence should find it manageable. Students are asked to choose a controversial thesis statement about a text or concept they are studying. Instead of providing reasons why that statement is true, however, students are asked to come up with two reasons that someone might disagree with their thesis statement. Then, they write a paragraph that refutes both potential counterarguments.

These paragraphs can take many forms as long as they focus on identifying a claim and a counterargument to that claim, followed by a defense of the original claim against the counterargument. The claims might be ones provided by a teacher either to activate prior knowledge at the start of a unit or to review what has been learned at the end of a unit. Claims might also be generated by students: for example, students could be asked to take a stand on which of the Intolerable Acts was most responsible for the American Revolution. Since they will have personal experience in discussing all of the Acts, they should be able to easily shoot down potential objections to their chosen example.

Defeating the Critic is a written task but can be used in conjunction with oral ones: for example, students might write their paragraphs in preparation for a debate so that they can better predict what their opponents might say, or they might debate first and incorporate arguments their opponents made into the paragraphs they write afterward.

The activity can be scaffolded heavily or not at all. In step 3, some teachers might provide graphic organizers or have students articulate counterarguments in a specific format: for example, “the claim that ... is not true because (1)... and (2)...” Again in step 4, some teachers might require students to follow a clear-cut formula: “some may say that ... ; however, my claim is still valid because ...” Others might provide editorials or other texts and samples to emulate, and still others might simply leave students to their own devices.

Step	Teacher Move	Student Move
1	Select a controversial topic for the class to discuss.	
2	Make sure each student can make a claim about the topic. Students can choose the claims or the teacher can assign them	Write down your claim in a clear, complete sentence.
3	Explain that instead of just providing warrants to support their claims, students need to think about what warrants others might use to challenge those claims. If necessary, introduce the term “counterargument” and distribute graphic organizers that have space for the counterarguments and their responses.	Think of an argument an opponent might make against your claim. Write it down in the appropriate place on your graphic organizer, if you have one.
4	Monitor students as they...	Think of how you would respond to the argument you wrote in step 4. Write down your response in the appropriate place on your graphic organizer, if you have one.
5	Repeat steps 3–4.	Repeat steps 3–4.
6	Provide students with any more scaffolding you deem necessary.	Construct a paragraph in which you address and effectively refute both counterarguments to your claim.