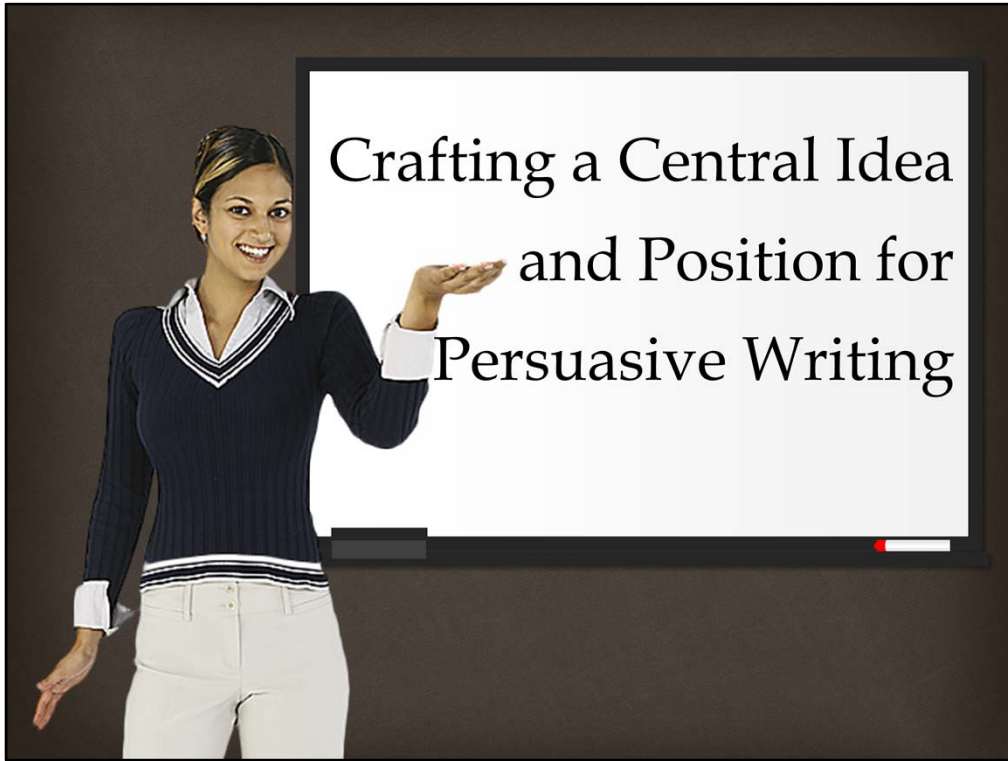


Module 2: The Art of Persuasive Writing

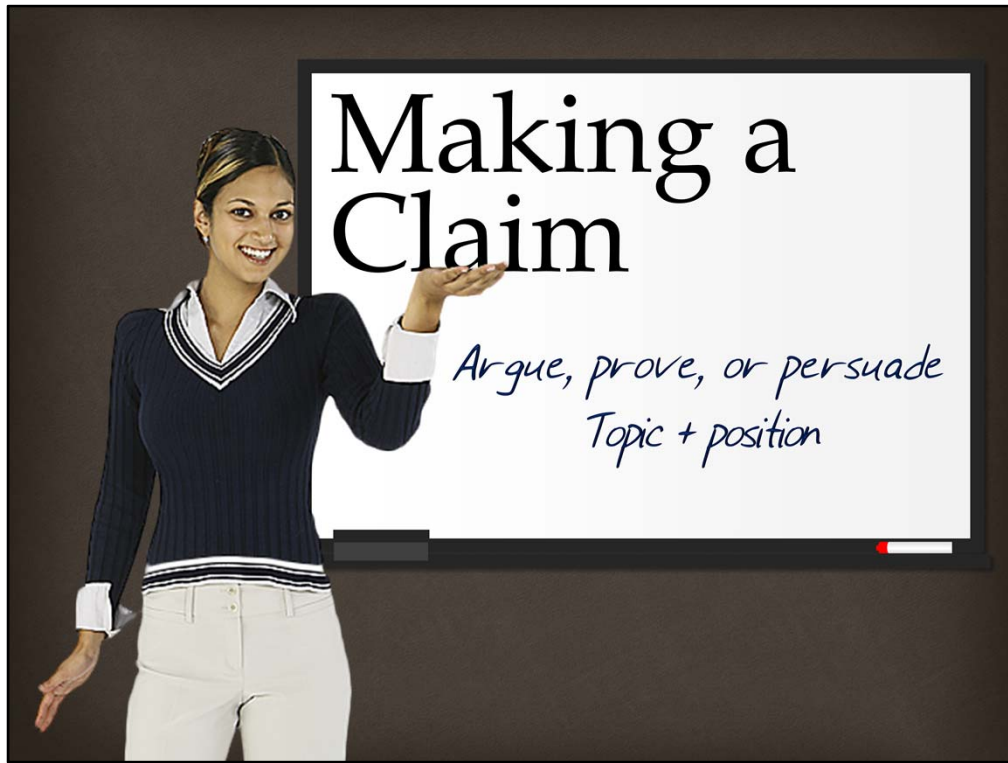
Topic 1 Content: Crafting a Central Idea and Position for Persuasive Writing



Crafting a Central Idea and Position for Persuasive Writing

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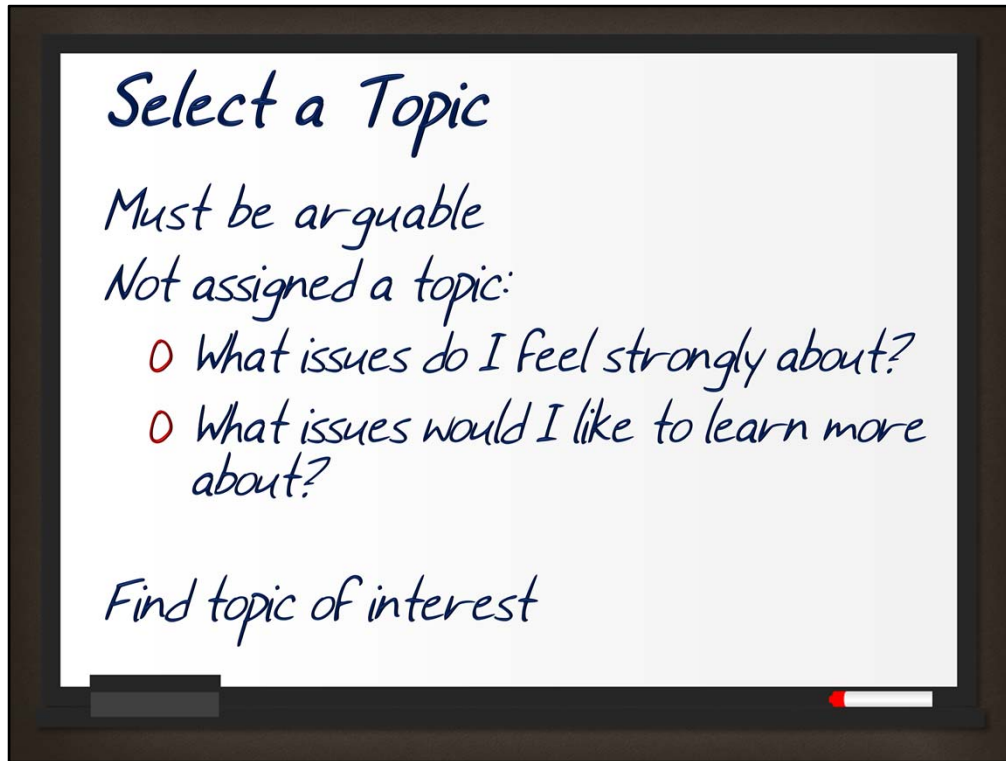
Topic 2 Content: Crafting a Central Idea and Position for Persuasive Writing



Just like a house or government needs a strong foundation upon which to stand, a good argument needs one as well. The foundation of a persuasive argument is the thesis, or claim. The claim is what you want to argue, prove, or persuade your readers to believe. To build a solid claim, you must first select a topic and then decide upon your position.

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Typically, persuasive writing assignments ask you to address a topic that is somewhat controversial or complex. After all, in order to make an argument, the topic has to be something that can be argued. Topics can be on issues as complicated as gun control, abortion, legalized drug use, and violence in the media, or as pedestrian as school uniforms, cell phone policies, and school dance locations.

If you have not been assigned a topic, you need to first think about your own interests, opinions, and feelings. Ask yourself:

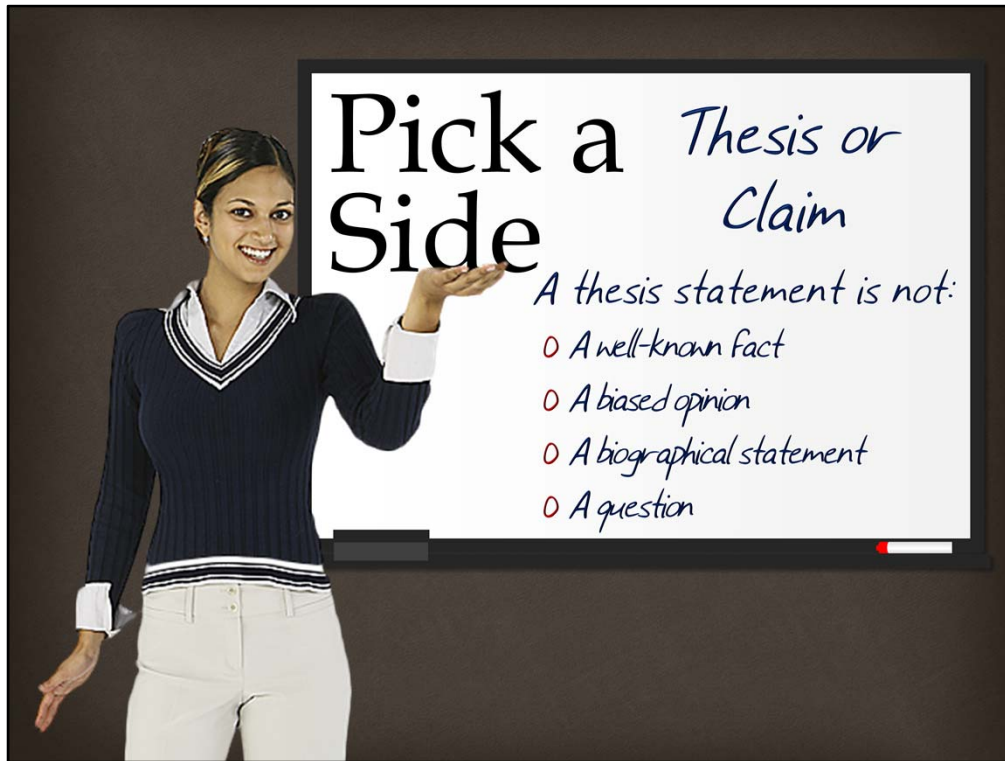
- What issues do I feel strongly about?
- What issues would I like to learn more about?

If you are still having trouble thinking about a possible arguable issue, watch the news, read the newspaper, or check out online news websites. See what issues are currently being talked about in the news. Selecting a topic that is currently trending ensures that you will be able to find relevant information later when you start researching.

If your teacher has selected the topic for you, then half of the work has been done for you. All you need to do is decide the stance you want to take. For most topics, this can be as simple as agreeing or disagreeing with the issue. It is preferable to pick a side about which you feel strongly. Making a sound argument will be easier if you feel connected to the topic. Whenever possible, try to pick issues that mean something to you; it will make creating your argument easier in the long run. If you know nothing about the topic, take time to read general information about it before choosing a stance.

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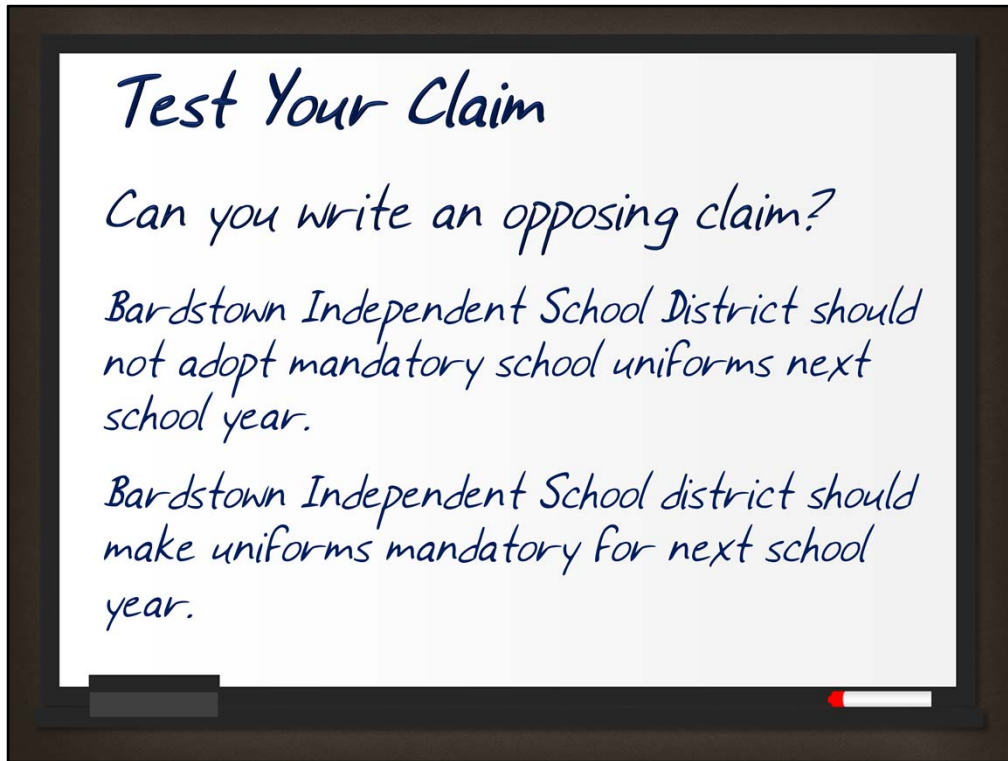
The position you take on the issue becomes the thesis, or claim, of your essay. This claim will limit the scope of your argument and indicate the organization of your entire essay, so make sure your claim is arguable because this is where the persuasive essay differs most from an expository or literary essay. You are not writing to inform but to persuade; therefore, you want to avoid arguing indisputable facts.

A thesis statement is not:

- A well-known fact that does not need support ("Humans are mammals.")
- A biased opinion that cannot be proven ("I think teachers should be paid more than professional athletes.")
- A biographical statement ("Mark Twain was born Samuel L. Clemmons in 1835.")
- A question ("Is global warming real?")

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Once you have decided upon a position and written your claim, test it out. If you can write down a second claim that directly refutes or opposes yours, then you know your thesis is arguable.

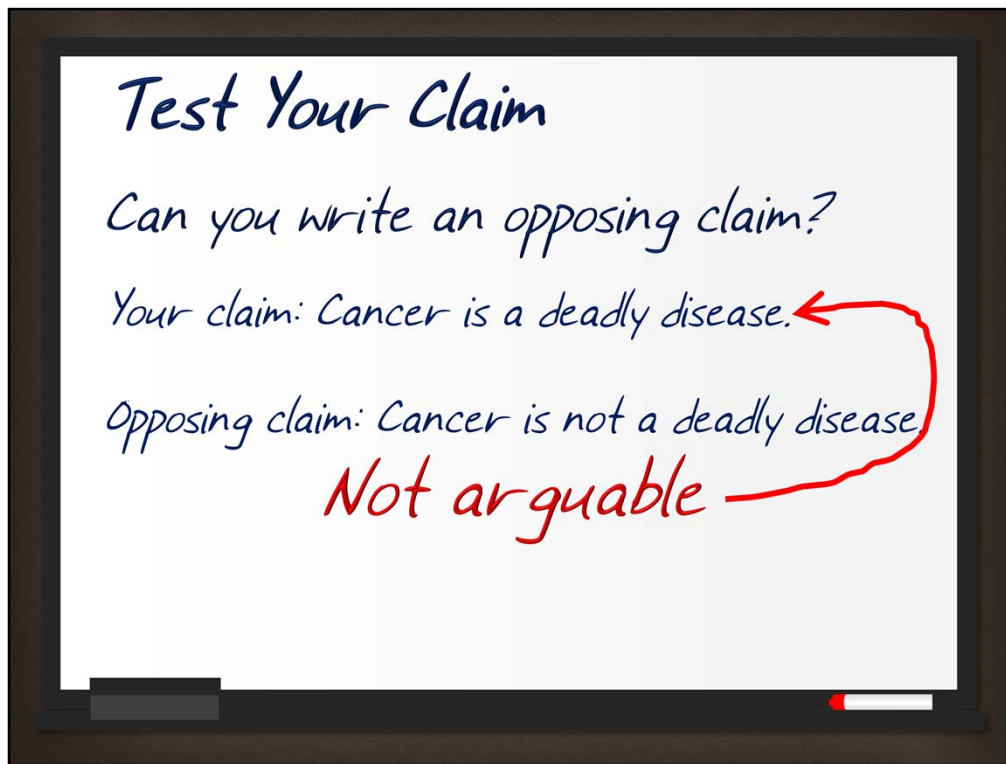
For instance, your claim could be written as: Bardstown Independent School District should not adopt mandatory school uniforms next school year.

An opposing claim would be: Bardstown Independent School district should make uniforms mandatory for next school year.

In this example, you can write a claim that directly opposes your original. Therefore, this claim is arguable.

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Now look at this next example.

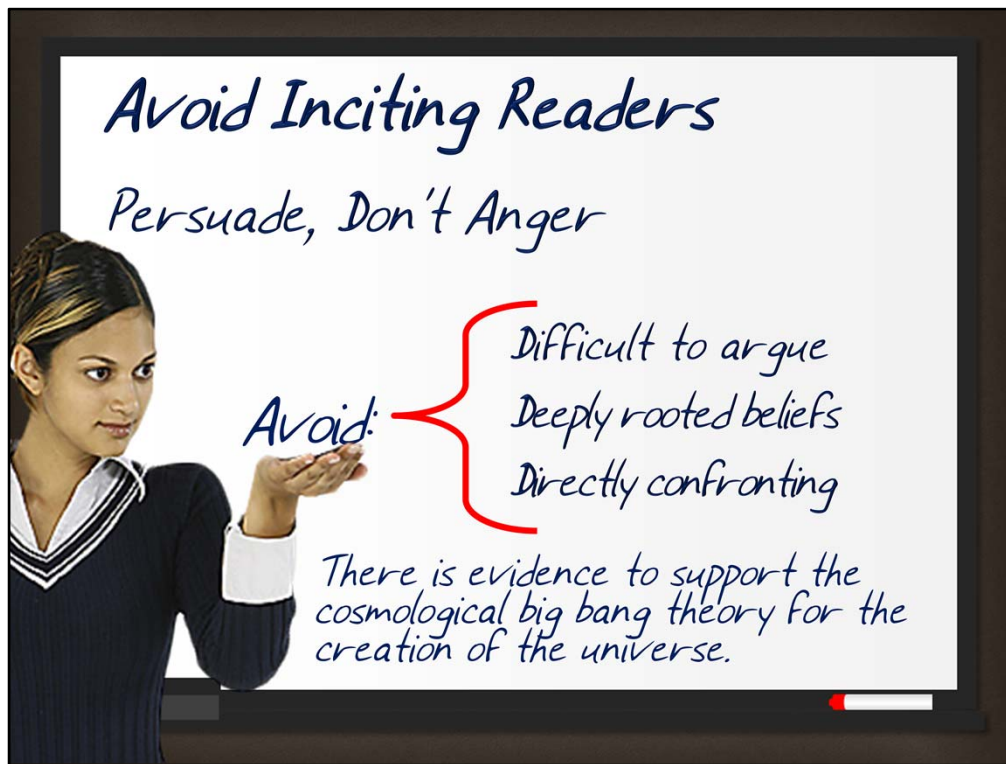
Your claim in this example is: Cancer is a deadly disease.

The opposing claim in this example is: Cancer is not a deadly disease.

Is this a good claim to make for a persuasive essay? In this example, your original claim is not arguable. Who would argue that cancer is good? This is an example of trying to argue an indisputable fact. A better claim would deal with a specific treatment or form of prevention for cancer rather than arguing that cancer is "bad."

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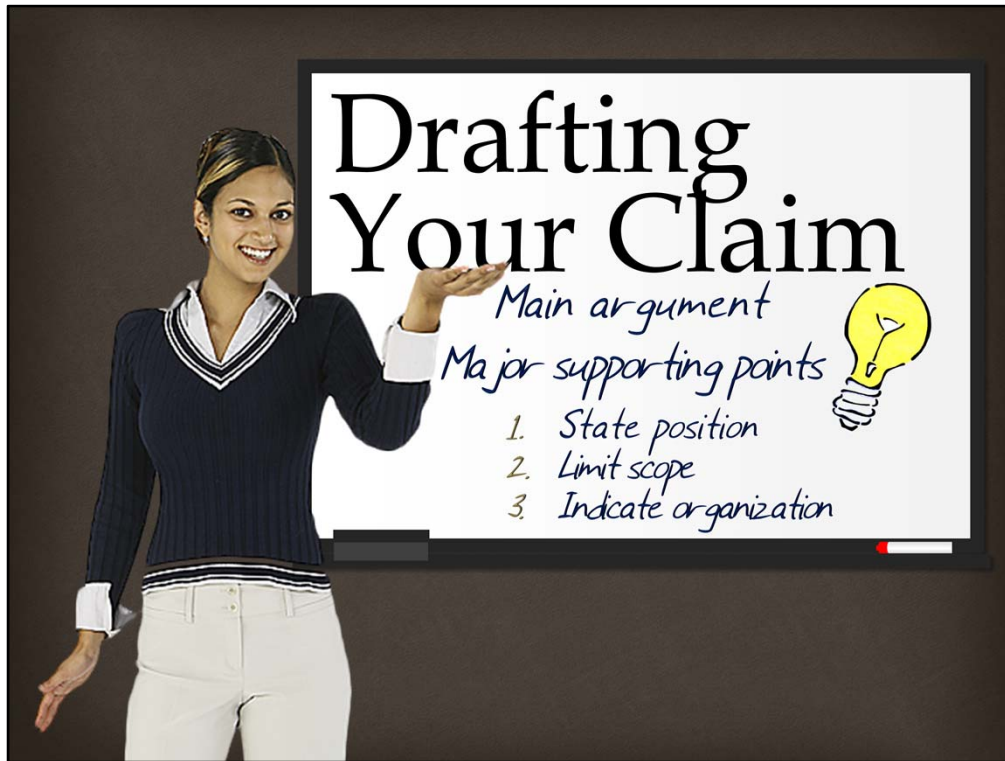
You should always try to avoid angering or offending your readers when writing a persuasive essay. Remember, your goal is to persuade readers to believe you, adopt your viewpoint, or take a specific action. Angering and offending a reader is not going to accomplish that goal. It is a good idea to avoid issues that are difficult to argue, like religion or other deeply rooted beliefs. Try approaching the issue you want to argue from a perspective that does not directly confront religion. You would not want to make the claim that a specific religion is false or wrong, as that will only offend and incite a reader who follows that religion.

For example, your claim might be written as: There is evidence to support the cosmological big bang theory for the creation of the universe.

This claim, while refuting a belief widely accepted by many religions, does not directly attack or attempt to falsify any religion. This claim merely states that there is evidence to support a theory.

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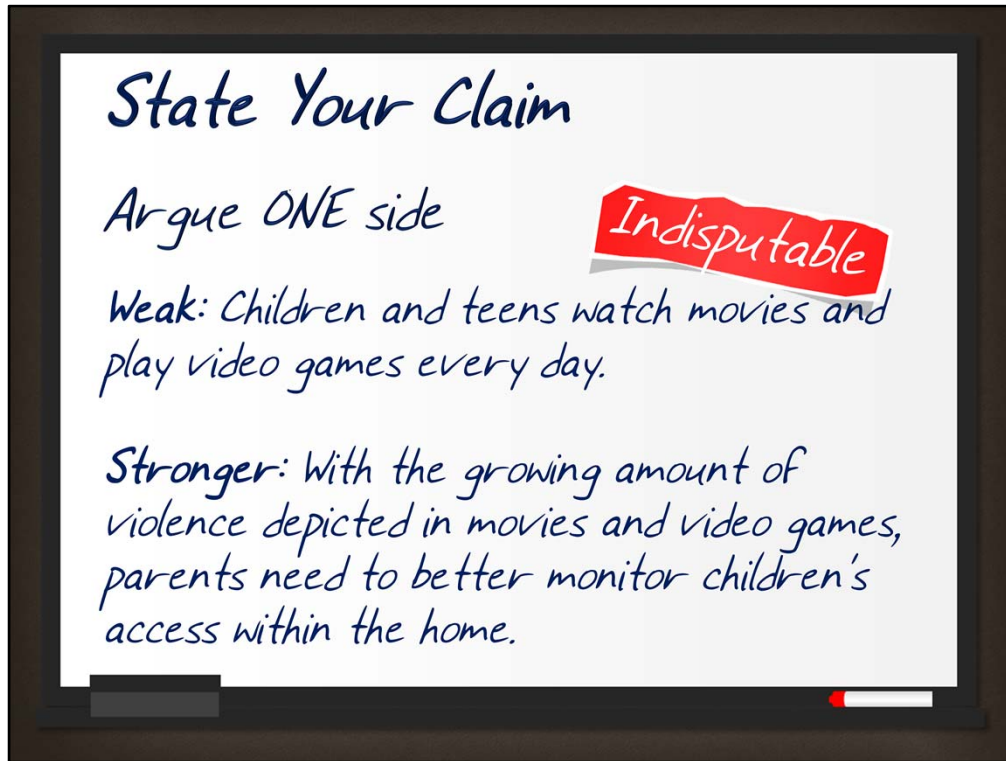


Now that you have selected a topic and know your position on the topic, it is time to write the thesis. Remember, your thesis is the main idea or position that you will argue throughout your persuasive essay. The thesis needs to clearly state the main argument and outline the major supporting points of the argument. Including the main points to be argued lets the reader know how broad or limited your argument will be.

The thesis for your persuasive essay needs to do three things: state your claim or position, limit the scope of the argument, and indicate the organization of the essay.

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You need to clearly identify your topic and your position on that topic. Remember, for persuasive writing, you must take a stand and argue only one side.

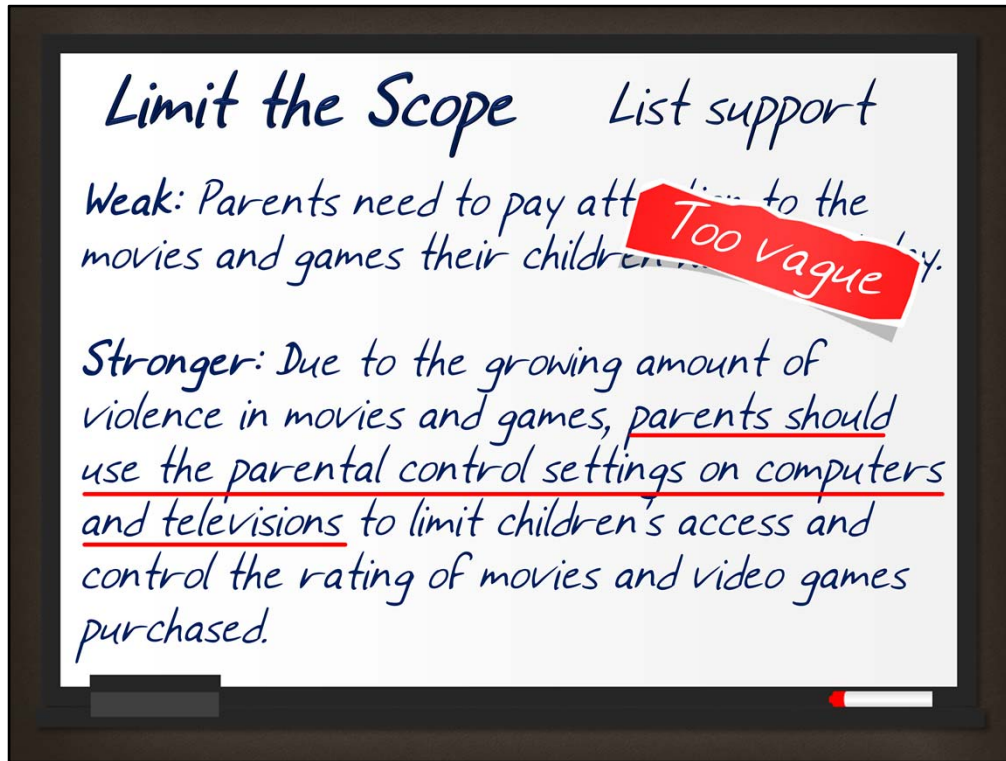
An example of a weak thesis is: Children and teens watch movies and play video games every day.

A stronger thesis would be: With the growing amount of violence depicted in movies and video games, parents need to better monitor children's access within the home.

In the first example, the thesis cannot be argued; it is an indisputable fact. The second example is much better because it can be argued.

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Once you have stated your single, main argument for your essay, you need to list the major supporting points. This establishes the scope, or extent, of your argument.

An example of a weak thesis would be: Parents need to pay attention to the movies and games their children watch and play.

A stronger thesis would be: Due to the growing amount of violence in movies and games, parents should use the parental control settings on computers and televisions to limit children's access and control the rating of movies and video games purchased.

In the first example, the thesis is too vague. It does not adequately limit the scope of the essay. The second thesis example is better because it specifically names the steps the writer wants parents to take to limit children's access to violent movies and games.

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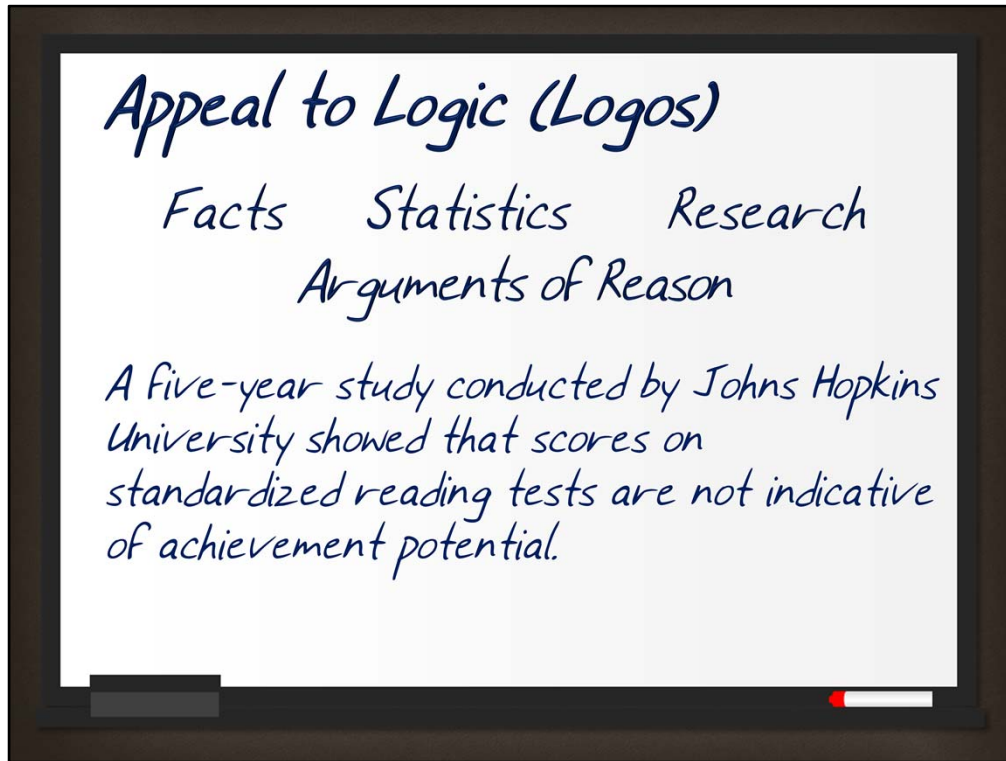
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Now that you have a working claim, you need to think about how you will support that claim and what evidence you will use to prove your point. To make sure your argument is reasonable and valid, you will want to use appropriate persuasive writing techniques.

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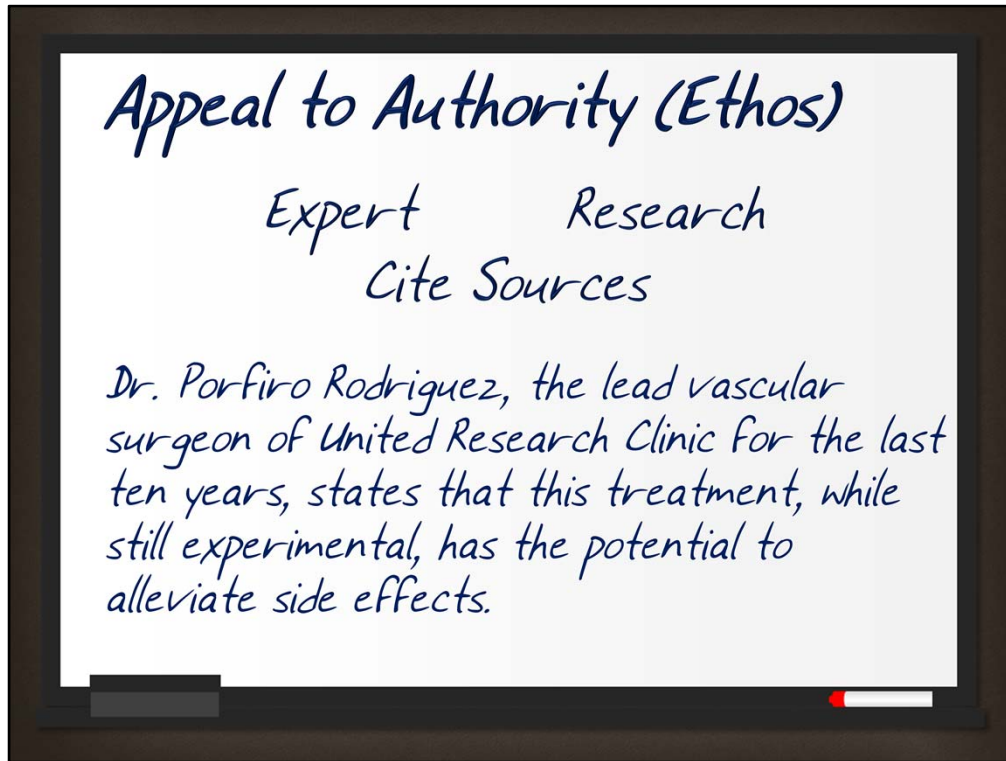


When crafting an appeal to logic, or logos, you want to make use of facts, statistics, research, and arguments that use reason. This type of empirical data will help you support and prove your point.

An example of appealing to logic is: A five-year study conducted by Johns Hopkins University showed that scores on standardized reading tests are not indicative of achievement potential.

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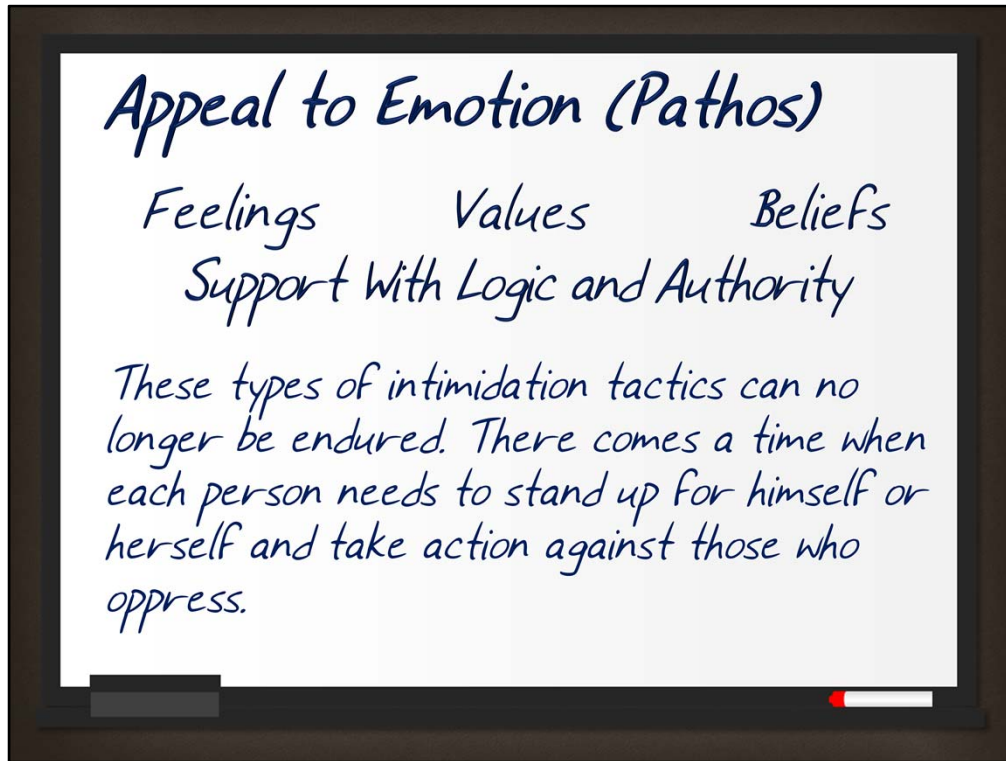


When appealing to authority, or ethos, using the words and work of experts is an excellent way to support your argument. When you incorporate research into your argument, you are "borrowing" the credibility of experts. However, remember to cite your sources. When you use and cite sources correctly, you also help to build your own academic credibility.

An example of appealing to authority would be: Dr. Porfiro Rodriguez, the lead vascular surgeon of United Research Clinic for the last ten years, states that this treatment, while still experimental, has the potential to alleviate side effects.

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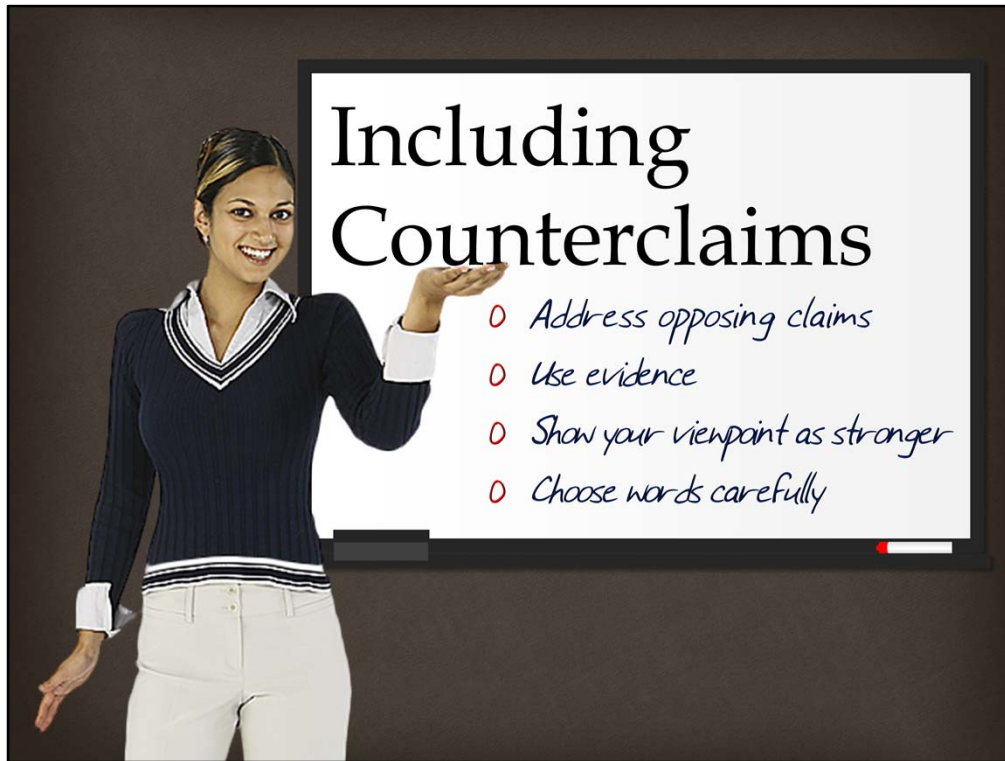


In appealing to emotion, or pathos, you may use personal feelings, values, and beliefs to support your argument. Some of the most charismatic orators have mastered the technique of using their own passionate beliefs to bolster their claims. Think about speeches you may have read or heard by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or by John F. Kennedy. They perfected the appeal to emotion. Incorporating personal stories is often a good way to illustrate a point and make the reader understand why you have taken this stand. However, you must use this technique carefully and with caution. Relying too heavily on an emotional appeal can hurt your claim if it is not also supported with logic and authority.

An example of appealing to emotion is: These types of intimidation tactics can no longer be endured. There comes a time when each person needs to stand up for himself or herself and take action against those who oppress.

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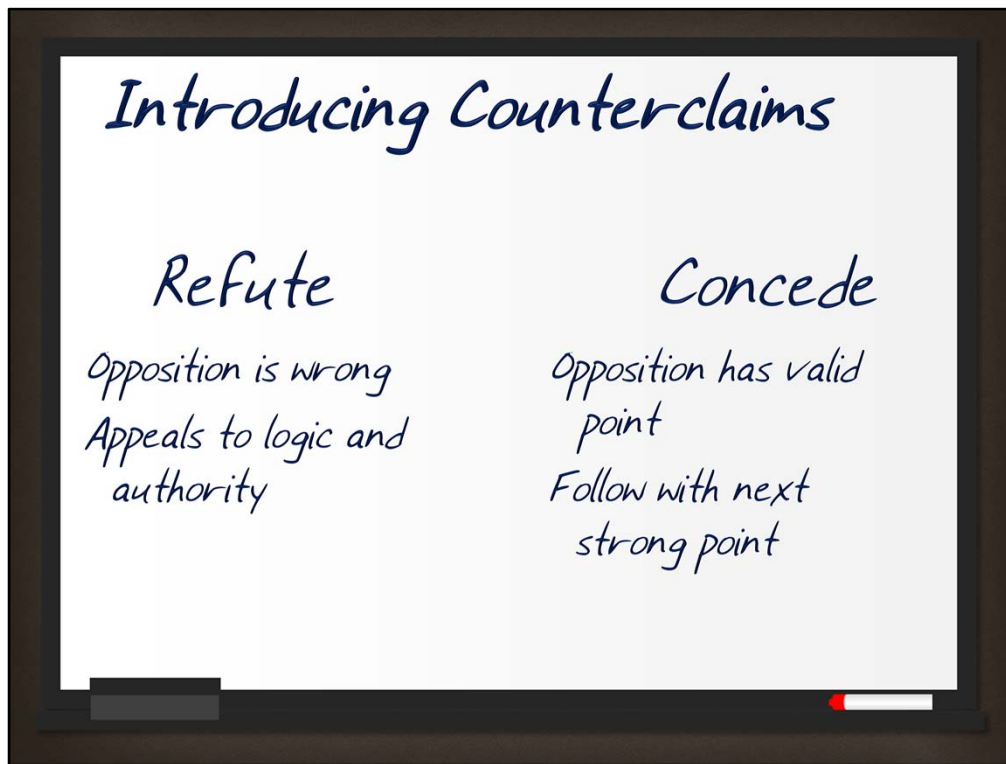


One of the mistakes people often make in an argumentative essay is to ignore the opposition. If you are arguing for one position, then it stands to reason that there must also be an opposing position. Do not ignore the opposition as this can weaken your own argument. Instead, address the opposing claims within your essay. This is called introducing a counterclaim. Let your reader know that there is another viewpoint on the topic, and then use your evidence and appeals to show why your viewpoint is more reasonable, or stronger.

You do not need to devote a considerable amount of time or space to the counterclaim. You can even use it as a platform to begin discussing your next major point. However, remember to deal fairly with the alternative claims. You want to choose your words carefully and avoid using "loaded" or inflammatory language.

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When introducing counterclaims into your essay, you have two options: refute or concede. Refute means you are stating that the opposition is wrong. When refuting, be sure to follow with appeals to logic and authority to prove why your claim is stronger, or more reasonable. When conceding, you are admitting that the opposition has a valid point or argument. It is best to follow a concession with your next strong point or proof. This will diminish any negative effects the concession will have on your argument as a whole.

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Introducing Counterclaims Refute

Supporters of the new bill say it will help lower the unemployment rate in the city. However, the evidence is just not there to support this claim. In fact, the unemployment rates in other cities that have recently adopted a similar law have increased.

An example of refuting a counterclaim may read as: Supporters of the new bill say it will help lower the unemployment rate in the city. However, the evidence is just not there to support this claim. In fact, the unemployment rates in other cities that have recently adopted a similar law have increased.

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Introducing Counterclaims

Concede

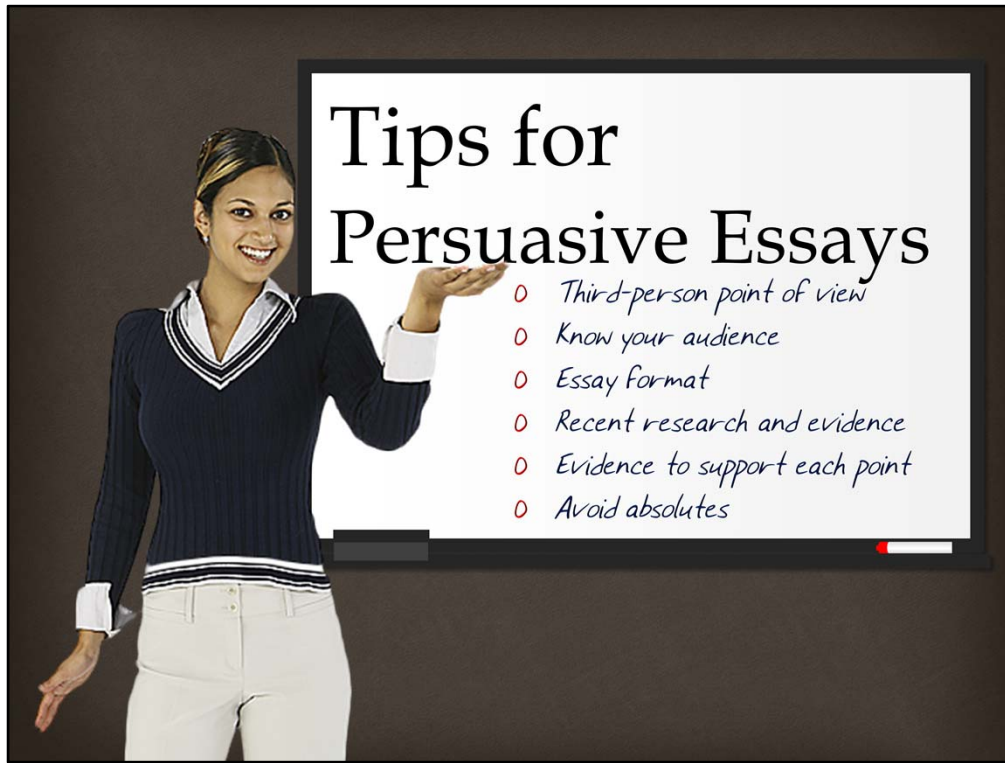
While I am personally against this new piece of legislation, the claims from proponents that it will bring in new tourism dollars is spot on.

However, this brings me to my next point. Does the city of Raywick really need an influx of new tourism dollars?

An example of conceding to a counterclaim may read as: While I am personally against this new piece of legislation, the claims from proponents that it will bring in new tourism dollars is spot on. However, this brings me to my next point. Does the city of Raywick really need an influx of new tourism dollars?

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When writing persuasive essays, consider the following tips:

- Use the third-person point of view over first or second person when possible.
- Understand and know your audience. You want to assume your audience is intelligent, but be sure to explain concepts and points thoroughly. Also, avoid sounding as if you are speaking down to your audience.
- When writing a persuasive essay, follow the basic essay format with introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Use recent research and evidence when possible.
- Make sure you have evidence to support each point. If you do not have evidence to support a point, your argument will be stronger if you eliminate it.
- Avoid absolutes. Do not say *always*, *never*, or *all people*. Try to be as specific as possible.