

Concessions & Counterarguments

In your papers, it is often important to make a concession to the other side to make your argument stronger—that is, rather than acting like another side of your argument does not exist, you address it and “debunk” it. In fact, in an argument paper, presenting the other side and then “tearing it apart” can often be a very effective strategy. Conceding to some of your opposition’s concerns can demonstrate respect for their opinion. Making concessions also demonstrates your ability as a writer by showing that you have researched and considered your argument from multiple perspectives in order to come to an informed decision.

Naturally, what you don’t want to do is present a counterargument and not address it. It might be tempting to do this in your conclusion; you may feel that you’ve made your point pretty strongly and that it is okay to just say something about the “other side” and just leave it there. But resist—the conclusion is what the reader is left with.

There is no surefire way to make concession, but it is likely a good idea to keep it short, limiting yourself to one per paragraph at the most (otherwise the counterarguments and concessions start to become your argument). Also, watch out for fallacies—sometimes it might be tempting to make a bad analogy or to oversimplify in order to “dismiss” the other side. Basically, if you can’t make the concession strongly, it may be better not to address it all.

Tips for Making Counterargument and Concessions Effectively

- Consider your audience when you make your counterargument or concession.
- Remain tactful and respectful yet firm on your position.
- Using rude and/or deprecating language can alienate your reader and cause them to reject your position without carefully considering your claim.

Let’s consider some examples from other Writers

Taken from:

“The Changing Face of Rhetoric: Aristotelian Discourse in the World of Academia” (Ben Althouse)

“To be a successful argument the Ethos (ethics), Pathos and Logos vertexes must be in harmony. Gross and Eckert & McConnell-Ginet do this effectively. Gross states his claim, provides evidence, then uses logic to conclude, with Eckert & McConnell-Ginet following suit with the same method. *Some may say these two articles rely too heavily on Logos, but they simply use it efficiently, no words are wasted in conveying their points. Both are clear, effective arguments and are convincing.*”

Why it Works

- Althouse makes his concession (in italics), posing it in such language that you can tell it’s a concession. The “some may say” is clear.
- Althouse doesn’t let the concession hang in the air—he immediately comes back and refutes it with his argument (using a rhetorical strategy by stating “they simply...”).

Taken from:**"League Officials and Female Athletes: Manipulating Image for Profit"****(Emily Hauenstein)**

"Differentiating the women's game from the men's game through sponsors and skimpier uniforms is unsettling for many current players. "Anyone who thinks that a uniform will draw people to the game is severely off base," Brandi Chastain said. "The game of football [soccer] itself is what brings people to the stadium, not what the players are wearing. He should continue to focus on the development of the women's game rather than trying to sexualize it" (Associated Press par. 7). *Interestingly, this statement by Brandi Chastain contradicts* some of her previous actions that resulted in added media attention for Women's soccer. At the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, Chastain scored a game-winning penalty kick and proceeded to fall to her knees and peel off her jersey revealing her sports bra as shown in Figure 2. Following the event, *many speculated whether this was either* an act of "momentary insanity" (as Chastain herself claimed), a blow for gender equality (as shirt shedding by male soccer players in celebration of a victorious moment is something of a tradition in soccer), or a shrewd and calculated marketing ploy (since the sports bra in question was a Nike prototype planned for mass production) (Markovitz & Hellerman 178). Though this game was one of the strongest finishes in the history of US Women's Soccer, the focus of the media's attention quickly changed the moment Chastain stripped off her jersey. Women's professional tennis has shown that femininity and revealing uniforms have aided in building up a large fan base, contrary to Ms. Chastain's statement, therefore sexualizing the women's game could potentially result in pay increases and larger audiences for women's soccer as well.

Why it Works

- Hauenstein uses the counterargument to consider the other sides of the debate, using a quote from an insider to the community to situate her discussion of the possibilities.
- Hauenstein offers multiple perspectives on the situation
- Hauenstein attributes her counterargument/concession to someone—" Markovitz & Hellerman" & "Chastain herself." Remember that making a concession that is vague is probably going to end up being a fallacy. Make it clear who is arguing with you (and why, thought here this is implied).
- Hauenstein returns back to the original point in her paragraph (underlined). He refutes the counterargument both immediately afterwards, and goes on to make more points. She doesn't present the counterargument too late or too early.