

Writing Effective Arguments: Focus on Claim

What Is a Claim?

If you've ever expressed your opinion with words like "People should not be allowed to..." or "The state should pass a law that...", then you have made a claim. A **claim** is a writer's position on a problem or an issue. What makes these claims effective?

Sample Claims	Analysis
Going to college has become so expensive, with college graduates carrying huge debt burdens by the time they graduate, that some parents and high school seniors are asking themselves: <i>Is it worth it?</i> The answer is an unequivocal and emphatic "Yes!" Despite rising costs, a college degree is still the best way to secure future success and fulfillment.	Claims should be precise , or specific. After reading this claim, you know exactly what the writer is arguing.
The rate of unemployment for young adults has never been higher. Many lack the income even to move out of their parents' homes when they graduate from college. Yet, many incoming freshmen still insist on choosing college majors on the basis of their preferences—things like film studies, English literature, and communication. In this economy, it is crucial that students choose majors that will ensure them a job and independence.	Claims must make only a single assertion , or main point. This claim asserts that students should choose sensible majors.
My parents started me with piano lessons when I was just five, and I hated it! The teacher was crotchety and the ten minutes of practice each day seemed like ten hours. Nonetheless, I am grateful to my parents for those piano lessons. Parents should encourage their children to learn to play a musical instrument because doing so enhances IQ, teaches discipline, and relieves stress.	This claim is precise and has one main idea. To be effective, the claim should be repeated in the concluding paragraph.

<p>Most people agree that some homework is useful—it gives students a chance to practice concepts and skills learned during class, which in turn leads to better retention of learning. However, according to a recent study, the amount of time spent on homework is up 51% since 1981. And all that added work has brought little to no improvement in test scores and academic achievement. Instead, it has created a generation of stressed-out kids with no time to pursue the activities they love, and equally stressed-out parents who must spend the little free time they have monitoring their children’s homework habits. It is time to return to a common-sense approach to homework. To foster individual creativity and protect family time, homework should be limited to no more than one hour per night.</p>	<p>Writers should establish the significance of a claim. Let readers know why it is important and why they should care.</p>
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Address Opposing Claims

Every argument has at least two sides, and not everyone will agree with your side. To strengthen your argument, think about what your opponent might say. Then respond to each **opposing claim**, or objection, with a counterclaim. A **counterclaim**—also called a *rebuttal*—is your response to that objection. With an effective counterclaim, you can expose weaknesses of opposing claims and show why your position is stronger.

Claim: The school district should hire a crossing guard to help students cross busy MLK Boulevard safely.

Opposing Claim: The school district does not have money in the budget to hire a crossing guard.

Counterclaim: Because student safety should be the district’s top priority, money from a less essential program should be used to pay for the crossing guard.

PRACTICE: Identifying Claim, Opposing Claim, and Counterclaim

So you think you know all about claims and counterclaims? Let's find out. Read the argument. Then answer the questions to identify the claim, the opposing claim, and the counterclaim.

During World War II, people embraced conserving, rather than consuming. "Use it up, make it do, or do without," they said. But in the years that followed, most Americans abandoned those old-fashioned notions, replacing them with an almost frantic consumerism. The new mantra seemed to be: *If something is old or needs repair, throw it out and buy a new one!* However, with our trash dumps growing and our savings accounts shrinking or nonexistent, it is time for young Americans to learn to conserve again.

Young people face a tougher job market than did previous generations, and should respond by spending less and saving more. The earlier people begin saving, the more interest they can earn over a lifetime. And a healthy savings account can help protect young people in the event of accidents and setbacks. For instance, having savings would allow a person to replace a lost smart phone or weather a sudden illness. After college, a comfortable savings account would provide graduates with the luxury of looking for the *right* job, not just any job.

Some young people scoff at the idea of saving money, exclaiming that "you only live once," and that youth is the time to have fun. Yet, there is no reason that youth is the time to have fun. Yet, there is no reason that young people cannot save money and enjoy themselves, too! There are many free events and activities every weekend, and great clothes can be purchased second-hand at scores of thrift stores. In fact, resale shops often have more interesting and unique items than can be found at the local mall, and for a quarter of the price! Saving money is more satisfying than wasting it on stuff that is simply not needed.

Conserving rather than consuming is also better for the planet and the economy. The average American throws away four to five pounds of garbage a day. We also throw away nearly half of our food every year—waste that is worth roughly \$165 billion annually. Imagine if young people could learn to buy only what they need, to use it up, to reuse things, and to share. The benefits to us all would be astronomical.

Everyone has heard the old saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned." For today's young people, that old saying may be truer than ever. To protect themselves in this fragile economy, to safeguard the planet, and to save the country billions of dollars annually, young people must learn to reject consumerism and embrace saving. Young Americans must lead the way with conservation—our futures depend upon it!

1. Highlight the writer's claim. Then restate that claim in your own words.
2. What objection to the claim does the writer anticipate? Underline the section that presents the opposing claim.
3. Explain the counterclaim that the writer uses to rebut the opposition. In your opinion, is this counterclaim effective?

NOW WRITE: Craft a Claim, Opposing Claim, and Counterclaim

Use what you've just learned to write a short argument on a topic that matters to you. In an introduction, state your **claim** clearly and precisely, so that your audience knows exactly what you are proposing. Acknowledge at least one **opposing claim**, which you rebut with a **counterclaim**.

Once you have finished writing, share your draft with a peer. Have your classmate answer the three questions above as they apply to your draft.