

## Grades 11–12 Playlist: Developing Claims and Counterclaims

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.B*:

- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

### Welcome

Three years ago, David decided to become a vegetarian. While his parents were worried that it would be dangerous to his health, he now feels healthier than he ever did before. For a class assignment, he chose to write a speech on vegetarianism and why it is the best diet. After reading his speech to the class, he felt that it was a success, and when his classmates applauded he thought he might have convinced a few of them to go meat-free. But then Judith, a girl in his class whom he does not know very well, raised her hand. “You said in your speech that it is easy for vegetarians to get enough protein because they can eat tofu and seitan instead of meat,” she said. “But those are made from soy and wheat gluten. I have allergies to both soy and wheat. I once ended up in the hospital after eating a tofu stir-fry. If I wanted to become vegetarian, what would I do?” David wanted to sink through the floor. He had not considered his audience as well as he could have when he built his evidence.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- develop claims and counterclaims fairly.
- supply evidence for claims and counterclaims while pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- anticipate the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and biases.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- A **claim** is a statement that clearly expresses a writer’s opinion or perspective about an idea or topic. It is typically one sentence long and appears at the beginning of an argument. It contains a clear, specific, debatable idea that requires support and evidence.
- A **counterclaim** is a statement that disagrees with the original claim. In order to rebuke the original claim, a counterclaim must be supported by evidence that proves the original claim to be wrong.
- **Evidence** is information that validates, or supports the writer’s claim. Evidence can consist of statistics, facts, examples, quotations, research, and/or testimonials. It is important that evidence comes from reliable and credible sources. Evidence against the counterclaim is called the **rebuttal**.



## Exploring the Standard

### A Closer Look: Developing Claims

When writing an argumentative essay, it is important for the writer to develop a strong claim surrounding a debatable topic. The goal then is to prove the claim to be accurate, or, at the very least, show another way of thinking about the topic of the essay.

When developing claims, a writer should keep several things in mind. For instance, is the claim specific enough? Is there data to support this claim or is it based predominately on an opinion? Knowing the answer will help the writer to develop a strong claim. Consider the following claims:

<b>WEAK CLAIM:</b> Taking the train to work is better than driving because it is more relaxing.
<b>STRONGER CLAIM:</b> The train is a safer mode of transportation than driving.
<b>STRONGEST CLAIM:</b> Train passengers avoid threats such as busy highways and reckless motorists, which drivers must contend with, making the train a safer mode of transportation than driving.

The first claim is weak, largely because it relies upon a personal opinion. Whether a mode of transportation is relaxing or not is a personal preference. There's no way to prove that one mode is truly more relaxing than another. In addition, the claim is vague. A more specific claim would provide readers with more information, which would also help make the claim more contestable.

The second claim is also not specific enough. What is the best way to define "safe" when it comes to transportation? What is more important to a passenger's safety—the stability of the vehicle itself, or the behavior of other people who are using the same form of transportation? Is the risk of being hit by a distracted driver as high as that of being on a train when an electrical fire occurs? Which would be more potentially harmful? Which would be easier to escape from?

The third claim is the strongest because it is specific, it can easily be defended by evidence such as facts and statistics, and it includes plenty of room for disagreement.

#### Hint!

To check the strength, specificity, and contestability of the claim, the writer can ask the question "So what?" or "Who cares?" Answering these questions will help the writer to analyze and understand the limitations of the claims. If the claim does not explain why the reader should care or think the claim is significant and important, then convincing readers will be tough. However, if the writer is aware that convincing readers will be tough, the writer can make the necessary changes to strengthen his or her argument.

#### Read!

This resource gives further advice on how to develop a strong claim in an argument.

[http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/central-claim.original.pdf](http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/central-claim.original.pdf)

