

Disputations

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How to write a disputation

Disputations prove a thesis. The thesis answers a question. Disputations respectfully summarize your opponent's viewpoint. Disputations state a thesis, provide good arguments, state reasonable objections, and refute them. Disputations are not papers, since they don't have an introduction or conclusion. Disputations are the outline or "skeleton" of a paper, with clear, numbered, sections.

Here is an example disputation for us to discuss:

1. **Are McDonald's chicken nuggets made of chicken meat?**
2. **Objection 1.** It seems that } McDonald's "chicken" nuggets are not made of meat. For they do not have the right texture, like a chicken breast or chicken wing.
3. **Objection 2.** Furthermore, there is a picture of "pink goo" on the internet showing what McNuggets look like before they are molded and cooked.
4. **Appeal to authority.** On the other hand, CNBC reporter Landon Dowdy says that "it's just chicken."
5. **Argument.** I answer that McNuggets are made of ground chicken meat. Mythbusters host Grant Imahara did a report inside the Tyson factory and took video footage showing that the nuggets are made from whole chickens, cut up, ground, flavored, and pressed into molds.[^3] Although industrially produced ground chicken may be unappetizing before it is breaded and fried, it is indeed chicken meat. The final product is so heavily salted and preserved, that it may not be healthy, but it is still meat.
6. **Reply to objection 1.** The texture of McNuggets is to chicken breast as the texture of ground beef chuck is to steak. The meat is processed and ground and then fried, but it is still meat.
7. **Reply to objection 2.** The picture passed around on social media sites is not of chicken meat, but a picture of boneless lean beef trimmings used to make bolognas, sausages, and so on.[^4]

This example shows several key points. Let's consider them.

A passing Disputation is in five-point format:

1. **Question.** This is your title. It is a question with two alternatives, basically a yes/no question.

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2. **Objections.** These succinctly state objections to your thesis. These summarize your opponent's answer to the question. You will eventually refute the objection below. For now, just state it as sympathetically as you can. You may have one to three objections. Avoid having more than three.
 3. **Authority.** This section quotes an authority who agrees with your thesis. Actually cite them, word for word. Use Plato, Socrates, Scripture, science, or anyone whom you consider to be an authority.
 4. **Argument.** This section actually argues for your thesis. Begin by stating your thesis. The thesis is a truth claim. It is the governing principle of the whole essay. Each paper should have only one thesis, and every word, every sentence, and every paragraph should relate to the thesis. Then, provide support for your thesis. Why should we think your thesis is true? The evidence for a thesis may be: factual, logical, statistical, anecdotal, intuitive, and so on. But the arguments must be strong and support the thesis. The argument is the heart of the paper. This is where you attempt to provide sound, solid reasoning why anyone should think your thesis is true. You should aim for at least two or three different arguments in defense of your conclusion. Define your terms. Each argument uses one or a few key terms. Make sure your sentences are clear and exact. And finally, make sure that your argument form is valid. Make sure your premises are true (or very likely). You can use evidence from your own research, the text, or your own thinking.
 5. **Reply to objections.** Your last paragraph(s) deals with your counterclaim. How can you refute your opponent's counter argument? You must either refute their evidence or acknowledge but re-interpret it to show that it does not damage your conclusion.

A PASSING DISPUTATION achieves seven goals:

1. **Answer the question.** The questions are provided. Your disputation presents and proves an answer to the question.
2. **Argue your thesis.** Do not say "I believe" or "I feel that". State your thesis and support it with arguments and evidence.
3. **State reasonable objections.** Do not just argue your view, summarize your opponent's view. Do not demonize or mock your opponent. Even though they are mistaken, assume they are making a reasonable, understandable, intelligent mistake. You are going to argue against yourself before you argue for yourself. The point is to make sure you know what your opponents think and why. Do not demonize or mock your opponent. They may disagree with you, they may be wrong, but do not assume that they are stupid. Rather, use the principle of charity: assume they have some good reason to disagree with your thesis (even if it's not good enough!) Cite texts from our semester, or use other logical or anecdotal evidence to give some support to the counterclaim. You can use arguments from the texts, from your research, or from your own thinking.
4. **Appeal to authority.** The "On the other hand" section is the transition from the Objections to your argument. This is where you use an authority that you think gets it right as a starting point in building your case. If you can't find an authority who agrees with you, that doesn't necessarily mean you are wrong, but it is a bad sign. You can use an authority from the text, from history, your own research, or you can do without it (but I don't recommend doing without it — that places you as the authority. And are you really an authority on this stuff yet?).
5. **Refute objections.** Do not just state your opponent's view, but explain why it is wrong. You can re-interpret their objection, refute it, clarify it, but don't ignore it.

6. **Meet the length requirement.** Disputation 1 is a 350 word minimum. This minimum excludes block quotes, headings, title, name, page numbers etc. Maximum is 1000 words. Disputations 2+ are a 500 word minimum, 1500 word maximum.
7. **Cite the text.** Each disputation should interact with the relevant semester text. Cite correctly using MLA, APA, Turabian, or Chicago formatting – just be consistent. (I prefer Chicago or MLA but do what you like.) Cite our text books, the Bible, journal articles, etc., but never cite Wikipedia or dictionaries, since these reflect general knowledge and are sometimes inaccurate or irrelevant.
8. **Write clearly and simply.** Be frank and to the point. Don't use B.S. or filler. Just say your point, make your arguments, and move on.

A failing disputation commits one or more of the following errors:

1. Doesn't answer the assigned question; answers a different question or no question at all.
2. Doesn't provide arguments but only asserts, opines, shares its feelings.
3. Doesn't state reasonable objections; demonizes or mocks opponent; asserts wild straw man objections that no one actually believes.
4. Doesn't refute objections; leaves them hanging, or provides weak assertions to the contrary.
5. Doesn't meet minimum length requirement; uses excessive block quotes to make up for low word count.
6. Doesn't cite any texts; doesn't cite semester texts or any other research.
7. Is composed mostly of convoluted, forced, obscure, "thesaurus heavy", pretentious, garbled, academic B. S.

I recommend that you write the paper in your preferred text editor (like Word or Google Docs), save a copy, then copy/paste it into the browser by the due date.

Formatting tips:

- 1 inch margins
- Double spaced
- Serif font such as Times New Roman or Baskerville
- Insert page numbers