**Argumentative Writing: Analytic Comparisons**

**Analytic Comparisons of Students’ Refutation**

**Undocumented Residents Samples – KEY**

**Analytic Comparison: Refutation – Responsiveness**

**A) Argumentative claim: Undocumented residents improve the U.S. economy.**

**This student writing sample is the more proficient. The counter-argument (“they cost taxpayers money”) isn’t very precise (how do undocumented residents impose a burden on taxpayers? this should be spelled out in a concise phrase), but the implication is clear. More importantly, the subsequent refutation directly addresses the economic implications of providing a pathway to citizenship for “illegals,” by (a) arguing that the costs of deportation are high, and (b) referring back to the economic benefit of undocumented residents who are productive workers. The one phrase in the section of refutation here that isn’t responsive is “they want to have a better life here in America,” but the phrase is clearly subordinate to the previous portions that do directly address the counter-argument. The overall backing for the refutation offered here is probably no more than moderately effective; but Analytic Comparisons depends for its effectiveness on isolating each argument component criteria and assessing the writing sample to it, narrowly and specifically.**

**B) Argumentative claim: The U.S. is a country of immigrants, so it should always protect and try to expand its diversity.**

**This writing sample is the more deficient. The counter-argument is a pretty good one: diversity is an American value, but only if it’s legal diversity. This writing sample’s refutation ranges from highly to moderately non-responsive. It first answers the counter-argument by saying that undocumented residents help the economy. That is highly non-responsive to the counter-argument; in fact, it has nothing to do with it. It next repeats the argumentative claim that more immigrants equate with more diversity. But in repeating the claim in this argument, the student doesn’t address the counter-argument that attempts to distinguish between legal and illegal “sources” of diversity. The student here could have rebutted that distinction, but did not. It is important in teaching academic argumentation that we require that students make their own arguments; we should not make their arguments for them, in effect, by imputing thinking that isn’t apparent in their writing (or speaking). The sentence “This is why their argument is false and mine is correct” is a little crude and doesn’t reflect the use of academic discourse common to experienced argumentation. But that is actually not relevant to this specific analytic comparison, which is on the “responsiveness” of refutation.**

**Analytic Comparison: Refutation – Comprehensiveness**

**A) Argumentative claim: Undocumented residents improve the economy because they are industrious and hard-working.**

**This writing sample is the more deficient. The counter-argument is that the economic benefits of hard-working immigrants, even undocumented ones, are undermined if these immigrants are merely taking jobs from American citizens and therefore increasing unemployment in the U.S. An implication of the counter-argument – and it would be a stronger argument if this had been spelled out – is that the U.S. economy is relatively worse off if those jobs are taken by undocumented workers, since they don’t pay income and payroll taxes (both of which require a social security number). Refutation in this instance is partial. The student refers back to evidence in the argument that immigrants are especially likely to be entrepreneurial and creative, so their contribution to the economy is important. This is broadly responsive to the counter-argument, which is after all economic. But it isn’t refutation that directly addresses the specific point that is being made to undercut their economic advantages: namely that they are replacing American workers, and increasing the American unemployment rate. So we have an instance of partial refutation and two ships – if not *passing* in the night, than only glancingly denting each other and moving on. Refutation, to be comprehensive, should thoroughly and fully engage the counter-argument.**

**B) Argumentative claim: Deporting undocumented residents would tear apart millions of American families.**

**This writing sample is the more proficient. The counter-argument here is straight-forward: undocumented residents are in this country illegally, so the fear of their families being torn apart is a consequence they have brought upon themselves. Refutation here is fairly complete. The student argues that treating undocumented residents’ families is discriminatory, since no one should be punished by attacking or harming their families. A further backing offered is that undocumented residents are *trying* to fix their legal status. The counter-argument that tearing apart families is justified has been fully addressed by this refutation, even if the strength of this refutation could be enhanced somewhat through the use of additional or alternative reasoning and evidence.**

**Argumentative Writing: Analytic Comparisons**

**Analytic Comparisons of Students’ Refutation**

**Analytic Comparison: Refutation – Depth of Thinking**

**A) Argumentative claim: Deporting undocumented residents would tear apart millions of American families.**

**This writing sample is the more proficient. The counter-argument here is once again that U.S. governmental policy is justified in separating families, despite the harm that causes, because undocumented residents broke the law when entering the U.S. Refutation of this counter-argument entails only two short sentences. It’s short but sweet. The student focuses on the children in these families and argues that it wasn’t their decision to immigrate illegally, which means that it cannot be ethically just to implement a policy that harms (traumatizes, leaves parentless) these children living in the U.S. This is an example of carefully thinking through the full dimensions of the counter-argument, finding its most significant weakness, and honing the refutation on that. Like acute and insightful thinking generally, its simplicity reflects its depth of thought.**

**B) Argumentative claim: The U.S. is a country of immigrants.**

**This writing sample is the more deficient. It is also pithy, but (and in a way that can dispel simplistic correlations, such as that between brevity and depth) it is glib and superficial rather than well thought through and well-backed. The counter-argument is the same as in the writing sample above. Its refutation is marred by pre-fabricated phrases and clichés. “That argument does not work in reality” can have some application – in instances where an argument is especially theoretical and isn’t borne out by empirical facts – but that isn’t the situation here.**

**Further, the U.S. may be a melting pot, but it is likelier that the student is using this pat label without thinking through how it applies in this instance. The counter-argument is that the U.S. is country of immigrants, but legal immigrants not illegal immigrants. So the application of the melting pot image hasn’t been sufficiently considered. Finally, in calling those who would defend the counter-argument “hypocrites,” the student unknowingly implies that they or their ancestors must all have come into this country illegally themselves, something that is very unlikely to be true. The phrase “when people say stuff like that” is colloquial, and non-academic, but that is not directly relevant to the criterion of “depth of thinking.” The reasons that the sample is deficient on the refutation criterion at issue are clear enough from the analysis above.**

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**Analytic Comparison: Refutation – Strength of Counter-Argument**

**A) Argumentative claim: Undocumented residents improve the U.S. economy.**

**This writing sample is the more deficient. The counter-argument in this sample is that undocumented residents “don’t use the opportunities that America has to offer them.” Undocumented residents are under-achievers. That may be true, but how does it effectively counter the argument that they are good for the U.S. economy. Perhaps they would be better for the economy if they were strivers, more ambitious, more high-energy. But under-achievers with a job, that buy and spend, are still economic contributors. So this counter-argument fails a threshold test: even if it were granted, it would disprove neither the writer’s argument nor his overall position. It is the model of a “straw man” argument, easily knocked down and refuted but (for that reason) posing no test of the strength and credibility of the writer’s original argument.**

**B) Argumentative claim: Undocumented residents improve the U.S. economy.**

**This writing sample is the more proficient. The counter-argument here is one we’ve seen before in this set: undocumented residents do not positively affect the U.S. economy since the jobs they have would have been taken by American citizens – with the implication that undocumented residents raise American unemployment rates and drain money from governmental tax revenues (since undocumented residents pay fewer taxes than citizens do). This counter-argument has weight and force, it is concisely formulated, it is one that is common in the literature on undocumented residents and their impact on the economy, and it presents a rigorous test of the strength of the writer’s original argument.**