



Drown
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***Drown*, by Junot Díaz (1996)**
Evidence Collection: Refutation

To write college-directed interpretive essays in literature courses we need to address counter-interpretations – a.k.a., counter-arguments. An important standard applied to college-level academic work is that interpretations and other types of literary readings are only worth making if they are addressing an unsettled question, an open and probing matter, a debatable issue. It follows that your interpretive position and the arguments you make to advance it, are not so obvious or logically deductive that they unarguable.

College-level academic writing, therefore, addresses counter-arguments, and it attempts to responds to those counter-arguments (it is never enough merely to acknowledge that other viewpoints exist, the *response* to them is all). When choosing counter-arguments – as applied to literature, counter-interpretations or counter-readings – it is important to select the most compelling reasons that might be advanced against your arguments. Avoid choosing easily addressed, “straw man” counter-arguments. Raising those in your writing has the opposite effect that you intend: weak counter-arguments lead the reader to conclude either that you are hiding from the stronger, better supported reasons to disagree with your conclusions, **or** that you are unaware of stronger counter-arguments because you haven’t fully thought through your position and thought critically about it.

Responding to the best reasons you might be wrong – imagining what Deanna Kuhn at Columbia University calls what a “missing interlocutor” might say in disagreement with you – strengthens and refines your own arguments and makes them more compelling and convincing, thoughtful and lasting. Responses to counter-arguments fall into two categories. You can rebut or refute the counter-argument. You do this either by critiquing and undercutting its evidence or reasoning – often this means the reading that the counter-argument gives to a passage, in literary argument – or by presenting other, more compelling and significant evidence and articulating a reading of this passage that serves to refute the counter-argument.

Or, alternatively, you can make a strategic concession. A strategic concession acknowledges the validity of the counter-argument – up to a point. Strategic concessions can often be very persuasive because they signal the reasonableness and inquiry-purpose of the writer or speaker. The key to making a strategic concession work,



however, is to be able to analyze and explain that the portion of the counter-argument that is being conceded does not negate your overall position, that it is compatible with your reading of the work.

Counter-Arguments and Responses

For each of the three argument clusters and claims that you developed in your prior pre-writing work on *Drown* you are now to develop one strong counter-argument, backed by a piece of evidence from the text. In response to the counter-arguments, you should refute each of them – either critically, going back to the evidence in your cluster explaining how it is more significant or re-interpreting the counter-argument’s passages, or with additional evidence from the text. Or you should strategically concede, identifying what you agree with in the counter-argument (and possibly too what you disagree with), analyzing how the concession does not undercut your overall position.

Claim #1
Counter-Argument
Evidence Supporting the Counter-Argument
Response to the Counter-Argument



Claim #2

Counter-Argument

Evidence Supporting the Counter-Argument

Response to the Counter-Argument



Claim #3

Counter-Argument

Evidence Supporting the Counter-Argument

Response to the Counter-Argument