Respond to a Counterargument

Classroom copy · 2 November 2026

In this estimated 40-minute lesson, learners respond to a counterargument by representing it accurately, acknowledging why it matters, and offering a related reason, practical change, qualification, or limit. Learners may support or oppose either position. Score fair representation and reasoning, not ideological agreement.

Represent the other view fairly

A counterargument gives a reason someone might disagree with a claim. To respond well, first state that reason in a way its speaker could recognize. Do not add an extreme motive, leave out its strongest point, or answer a weaker version. Then acknowledge why the concern matters and respond with a related reason, evidence from the scenario, a practical change, or a limit on the claim. A response may accept part of the concern, qualify the claim, or offer a bounded plan. Check whether your reply addresses the concern rather than merely repeating your original claim. A reader can support or oppose either position; score fair representation and reasoning, not agreement.

Model exchange: A book recommendation display

Original fictional instructional scenario; the people and events are invented.

Maya: The school should display student book recommendations near the library so readers can learn about books classmates enjoy.

Andre: A display would use limited wall space and take time to update. If a recommended title is not available, readers might be disappointed. A small shelf guide that someone checks could be more useful.

Maya: That is a fair concern: space is limited, and an out-of-date recommendation could frustrate a reader. Andre’s small checked shelf guide may use less wall space, so the school could compare it with one small, dated display for four weeks. The display would list only titles currently available and remove a title when no copies remain. If no one can check it regularly, the display should pause. A trial could show whether the display can be kept current; it would not show that every reader uses it or that it works better than the shelf guide.

Modeled exchange

Read the exchange. Identify Maya’s claim, Andre’s counterargument and alternative, and Maya’s response. Notice how Maya names the actual concerns, acknowledges why they matter, suggests a bounded plan, and states what a short trial could not show.

> Claim: display student recommendations near the library. Counterargument: limited wall space, time needed to update, and unavailable titles may disappoint readers. Alternative: a checked small shelf guide. Maya states those points fairly and acknowledges why they matter. She recognizes that the shelf guide may use less wall space, then proposes comparing it with a small dated display that lists available titles and pauses if no one can check it. A short trial could show whether the display can be kept current, but not whether every reader uses it or whether it is better than the shelf guide. A learner may prefer the guide or no display; score the reasoning, not the choice.

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Guided response: The class book cart

Original fictional instructional scenario; the people and events are invented.

In a fictional Grade 6 classroom, students propose moving the class book cart beside the reading rug so classmates can choose books quickly.

Lee: Putting the cart beside the rug could narrow the walking path or block access to nearby shelves. Readers who need a clear route might have trouble passing. Keeping the cart along the wall would leave more room, though choosing a book might take a little longer.

Guided response

Mark the students' claim and Lee's counterargument. Underline Lee's reason and alternative. Then write a short reply that fairly restates the concern, acknowledges why it matters, gives a related reason or practical check, and names one unresolved point. Adapt this frame: "One concern is ___ because ___. This concern matters because ___. One response is ___. This addresses the concern by ___. It may still not solve ___." Do not assume the cart fits; make any move conditional on checking the route. You may instead support leaving it by the wall if you explain why.

Draft your reply (use the frame above; 6 lines)

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Independent response: A library recommendation board

Original fictional instructional scenario; the people and events are invented.

In a fictional school, students propose a recommendation board near the library entrance so readers can discover books classmates enjoy.

Sam: Wall space is limited, and keeping a weekly board current would take time. A student might see a recommended title but find no copy available. A small rotating shelf display updated less often could be another option.

Independent response

Write 4–6 sentences responding to Sam. Choose at least one of Sam’s main concerns to answer. State that concern and Sam’s alternative fairly, in a way Sam could recognize. You do not need to include every concern for full credit. Acknowledge why the concern matters, then answer it with a connected reason, practical plan, qualification, or limit. Use or adapt the writing frame from the guided response, then check your work with the four-part rubric below. You may support the board, suggest a smaller or less frequent display, or argue for Sam’s shelf option. Name one concern your answer does not solve. Do not add an extreme motive or score the argument by whether you agree with the original proposal.

Four-part response rubric

Fair representation — 2: Accurately states at least one main concern and Sam’s alternative. Other concerns may be omitted. 1: Identifies a main concern but omits the alternative or partly misstates the concern or alternative. 0: Does not identify a relevant concern or substantially changes Sam’s view.

Acknowledgment and connection — 2: Explains why the selected concern matters and makes a clear link between the reply and that concern. 1: Does one of those two things clearly, but not both. 0: Does neither clearly.

Reasoned response and limit — 2: Gives a related reason, plan, agreement, or qualification and names a remaining limit. 1: Gives a related response or a limit, but not both. 0: Gives neither.

Clear reasoning — 2: The reasoning is easy to follow. 1: The main idea is partly clear. 0: The reasoning is not yet clear. Your score does not depend on which option you support. Total: 0–8 points.

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Independent response planner

Use Sam’s exchange to plan a fair response. You may support either option. Name the concern accurately, acknowledge why it matters, connect your response to it, and note what remains unresolved.

Sam’s concern and alternative, stated fairly

Why does the concern matter?

My connected reason, plan, qualification, or agreement

How does my response address Sam’s concern?

What might my response still not solve?

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Draft a 4–6 sentence reply

Teacher directions

Grade 6 ELA. Adapt the reading and response demands to your students and curriculum.

Prerequisites: Learners can read or listen to a short exchange and share or record a brief response. No prior debate vocabulary is required.

Materials: Learner pages in print or editable DOCX.; Pencil or another way to mark and draft a response.; Optional highlighter for marking the claim, counterargument, and reply.

Estimated preparation: 5 minutes. Basis: Estimate to read the fictional exchanges and keys and prepare learner pages.

Estimated teaching: 40 minutes. Basis: Planning estimate: opening 3 minutes, strategy 5, model 8, guided response 10, independent response 12, closure 2.

Before teaching — about 5 minutes (estimate): read the fictional exchanges and answer keys. All people, school settings, and events are invented instructional examples, not reports of actual students or school trials. Prepare the learner PDF or editable DOCX.

Opening — 3 minutes (estimate): show the claim that the school should display student book recommendations. Ask what a reader who disagrees might be concerned about. State that learners will practice answering the concern fairly; they may favor either position.

Strategy — 5 minutes (estimate): teach the sequence: identify the other view, state its reason without exaggeration, acknowledge why it matters, respond with a related reason or practical change, and name a limit. A response can accept, qualify, or disagree. Score the reasoning rather than the position.

Model — 8 minutes (estimate): read the book-display exchange aloud. Think through Andre’s limited-space, upkeep, and availability concerns and his shelf-guide alternative. Show how Maya responds with a small dated trial, a check for availability, a pause condition, and a limit on the trial’s conclusion. Ask whether each part answers a concern.

Guided response — 10 minutes (estimate): learners annotate the cart scenario and draft a reply. Invite either a conditional move after checking the route or a reasoned choice to keep the cart by the wall. Ask learners to point to the exact concern their reply addresses and one issue it leaves open.

Independent response — 12 minutes (estimate): learners write 4–6 sentences to Sam. Learners may select one main concern; they must also represent Sam’s stated alternative. Do not require all three concerns or supply a preferred conclusion. Use the rubric to score whether the other view is represented fairly, the reply connects to it, and the reasoning names a limit. Do not score agreement with the proposal.

Scoring — use the four-part learner rubric and the matching teacher criteria. Score each criterion from 0 to 2 based on the response’s representation and reasoning (maximum 8); this short task is not a broad measure of overall argument skill. Accept either position when the reasoning meets the criteria. Do not award or withhold points for agreement. For fair representation, an accurate main concern plus Sam’s alternative earns 2 points even if other concerns are omitted. Use the learner rubric’s 1-point descriptor for an omitted alternative or partial misstatement, and its 0-point descriptor for no relevant concern or a substantially changed view.

Acknowledgment and connection scoring — check two elements separately: an explanation of why the selected concern matters, and a clear connection between the reply and that concern. Award 2 when both are clear, 1 when only one is clear, and 0 when neither is clear. A connected reply without an explanation of why the concern matters earns 1 on this criterion. Apply the other criteria separately.

Closure — 2 minutes (estimate): ask learners to name one way a reply can address a concern without conceding the whole claim. Reaffirm that a fair response can support either side.

Shortened 30-minute option (estimate): opening 2 minutes; strategy 4; model 6; guided response 7; independent task 9; closure 2. Preserve the independent response and neutral scoring; shorten discussion and the model share-out.

Support: read or chunk one speaker’s turn at a time. Let learners highlight the claim, concern, and alternative in different colors. Offer oral rehearsal, dictation, typing, or the sentence frame. Ask “Would the speaker recognize that as their concern?” without supplying a preferred response.

Extension: write two different replies, one that accepts part of the counterargument and one that proposes a bounded trial. For each, identify the concern addressed and an unresolved limitation. Compare how each changes the original claim.

Common confusions: a fair reply does not need to agree with the counterargument or concede the whole claim. Naming a concern and then repeating the original claim does not answer it. A practical plan should connect to the actual concern and avoid assuming unprovided facts. Do not make a concern more extreme or assign motives the speaker did not state. Accept multiple positions when representation and reasoning are sound.

The scenarios are fictional classroom examples.

Model — intended evidence: Learner identifies the recommendation display claim; fairly identifies limited wall space, update time, unavailable titles, and the shelf-guide alternative; and explains that Maya acknowledges the concerns, recognizes the shelf guide as an option, proposes a small dated and maintained comparison, and limits what a short trial could show.

Guided practice — intended evidence: Learner fairly represents the concern that the cart might narrow the route or block shelf access, recognizes clear passage matters, then offers a related conditional check or reasoned alternative. Learner names a remaining limit and does not treat either position as the only acceptable one.

Independent response — intended evidence: Learner accurately represents at least one of Sam’s stated concerns (limited wall space, weekly upkeep, or unavailable titles) and Sam’s shelf-display alternative updated less often; acknowledges why the selected concern matters; gives a connected answer or a reasoned acceptance or qualification; and identifies an unresolved concern without exaggeration. Accurate treatment of one main concern plus the alternative can earn the top representation score; other concerns need not be included. Position is not scored.

Answer keys

— key for Model

Claim: display student book recommendations near the library. Counterargument: limited wall space, time needed to update, and possible disappointment when a title is unavailable. Andre offers a checked shelf guide as an alternative. Maya acknowledges those concerns and proposes a small, dated, checked four-week trial with available titles and a pause condition.

Maya identifies the actual concerns instead of portraying Andre as opposed to student recommendations. Her plan connects to space, upkeep, and availability. The trial is limited: it could indicate whether the display can be kept current, not whether every reader uses it.

A learner may favor the shelf guide. The modeled response shows one way to acknowledge the concerns and answer them with a bounded, conditional plan.

The model is one possible response. Learners may support either position; evaluate fair representation and reasoning, not agreement.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Guided practice

Possible reply: “Lee is right that a cart could narrow the route to the rug or shelves. A clear path matters for readers using that space. The class could move the cart only if the route stays clear after checking the layout; otherwise it can stay by the wall. This may not make book choice quicker, but it protects the route.”

The reply states the actual route and access concern, acknowledges its importance, and gives a conditional check related to that concern. Leaving the cart by the wall is also acceptable when supported with reasoning.

Keeping the cart by the wall is reasonable if the learner explains that clear passage matters more than quicker access and recognizes that choosing a book may take longer.

Accept any fair response that addresses Lee’s stated concern, including supporting Lee’s alternative. Do not require that the cart be moved.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Independent response

Sam is concerned that a weekly board would use limited wall space and require updates, and that a recommended book might be unavailable; Sam suggests a small rotating shelf display updated less often. These concerns matter because a recommendation should be useful without taking more space or time than the school can provide. I would support Sam's shelf option, with a date on each update and a check of title availability when it is updated. Updating less often may reduce the number of planned updates, but titles could become unavailable between checks and someone would still need to maintain the display. If the school cannot provide that maintenance, it should pause the display rather than assume the recommendations stay current.

This example fairly names Sam's wall-space, upkeep, and availability concerns and shelf alternative, then supports that alternative with a related proposed plan and remaining limits. It keeps the chosen option consistent and does not claim that less frequent checks ensure availability. A learner may instead support the board or propose another response. Do not reward one conclusion over another. A response may select one main concern and Sam's alternative for full representation credit; including all three concerns is not required.

A response that recommends the shelf option can meet the criteria if it accurately states the board's costs, acknowledges the benefit of sharing recommendations, and explains how the shelf option could address the wall-space concern while recognizing that shelf space and maintenance would still need to be checked.

Sam is concerned about the time needed to keep a weekly board current and suggests a small rotating shelf display updated less often. That concern matters because a display may become out of date if no one can maintain it. I support the shelf option with fewer planned updates. This could reduce how often updates are scheduled, though someone would still need to do them. It would not solve the problem of a recommended book becoming unavailable between checks.

This is not a required position or wording. Score the accuracy of the counterargument, connection of the response to it, quality of reasoning and limits, and clarity; do not score ideological or personal agreement.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

Scoring criteria and extensions

Criterion 1 — scoring criterion

Represents a relevant main concern and the stated alternative accurately and fairly, without exaggerating the view or assigning an unstated motive. Example: Names limited wall space and upkeep as stated, rather than saying Sam opposes all student recommendations. Alternatives: For the independent response, one accurately stated main concern plus Sam’s stated alternative is sufficient for 2 points. Do not lower that score solely because other concerns are omitted. Apply the learner rubric’s 0–2 descriptors; varied wording is acceptable.

Criterion 2 — scoring criterion

Explains why the selected concern matters and clearly connects the response to that concern. Example: Explains why access, current titles, or update time matters, then connects the reply to that issue. Alternatives: Use the learner rubric: award 2 when both the importance explanation and response link are clear, 1 when only one is clear, and 0 when neither is clear. A reasoned agreement or qualification is scored by those same two elements.

Criterion 3 — scoring criterion

Gives a connected reason, practical change, agreement, or qualification and names a relevant remaining limit. Example: Offers a dated, smaller display as a response to upkeep and notes that someone still has to update it. Alternatives: Do not require a trial or a particular conclusion. The response and limit should connect to concerns in the scenario.

Criterion 4 — scoring criterion

Communicates reasoning clearly enough to evaluate fairly, regardless of the learner’s position. Example: A clear response supporting the shelf option can earn full credit when it represents the board proposal fairly and explains why the alternative addresses the concern. Alternatives: Do not score whether the learner supports or opposes the proposal, or require a particular personal conclusion.

Fictional teaching response — sound for the named task

Named task: Library recommendation board — fair connected reply to Sam

Fictional response — sound for the named task: “Sam is concerned that a weekly board needs updating time and suggests a smaller rotating shelf updated less often. That matters because an out-of-date display may mislead visitors. I would try a small board updated every two weeks with assigned volunteers, so the task is less frequent and someone is responsible. If nobody can maintain it, Sam’s shelf option deserves a trial. This still does not guarantee that a recommended book is available.”

Visible evidence: One fairly stated concern and alternative, why it matters, a connected conditional plan and a remaining limit.

Not established: That volunteers or outcomes are guaranteed, or that every concern must be answered for credit. This is near-transfer from the taught board model.

Clarify: Accept a well-reasoned reply favoring Sam’s option; score reasoning rather than the chosen position.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the different reply scenario in the argument and reply response pack Fresh recheck after teaching. Keep the statement-role target separate and do not describe the cases as equivalent tests.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Different check after response teaching

Arguments: Check, Respond and Reconsider — matching teacher directions and answers

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Fictional teaching response — partially developed

Named task: Library recommendation board — fair connected reply to Sam

Fictional response — partially developed: “Sam worries about time. We could update less often.”

Visible evidence: A genuine concern and a potentially connected adjustment.

Not established: Sam’s shelf alternative, why the concern matters, or a remaining limitation.

Clarify: Ask for the alternative in Sam’s own proposal, why the plan reduces the concern and what is still unresolved.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the argument and reply response pack’s fair-reply model and practice. Mark concern, stated alternative, importance, connected reply and limit before the different reserved reply task.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Model and supported practice

Reserve: Different check after response teaching

Arguments: Check, Respond and Reconsider — matching teacher directions and answers

Fictional teaching response — plausible error

Named task: Library recommendation board — fair connected reply to Sam

Fictional response — plausible error: “Sam hates students sharing books, so we should ignore him and keep the board.”

Visible evidence: A position on the proposal.

Not established: A fair account of Sam’s stated concerns or any connected reason. The motive is invented.

Clarify: Ask which exact words state hatred; replace that claim with the actual space/time/availability concern and shelf alternative.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the argument and reply response pack’s fair-representation teaching/practice with its supplied exchange. Require a reasoned response to the real concern rather than an extreme motive, then use the reserved different reply.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Model and supported practice

Reserve: Different check after response teaching

Arguments: Check, Respond and Reconsider — matching teacher directions and answers