Argument Tutorial #4: Opposing Positions video, edited transcript

[0:01] Now we discuss the opposing position in an argument. Whenever you construct an argument, you must expect that somebody will disagree with you. In fact, if you are constructing a good argument, you are probably basing it on a controversial claim. If your claim is controversial, that means that somebody will take issue with it, somebody will oppose your claim, somebody will argue against you. This leads to debate. But before we get into full-on debate, let's just understand what an opposing position might be.

[0:32] What is an opposing position? The opposing position is a claim and warrant that opposes your own. Notice that I've used the same words that we've talked about before: claim and warrant. This means that the opposing position begins with two sentences, each of which is familiar to us.

[0:54] Let's take a look at an argument example. Let's say that this is my argument with my claim and my warrant: "Parents should allow their children to watch as much television as they want." Why? Because parents should help their children be happy. My claim outlines an action, and my warrant shows which value that action will achieve.

[1:16] Okay, what would be the opposing claim to this? How would I construct it? As you might anticipate if you've watched the first few tutorials in this argument series, I start with the same responsible party. Even though this position opposes the original position, it uses a lot of the same language. I'm still talking about parents, and of course, I continue with the word "should." So, I still begin my claim with "Parents should."

[1:47] If you focus on the same sort of beginning for your claim and warrant, then you'll be fine with your opposing position. How do I complete the claim sentence then? Well, you also might anticipate that this is where I see some difference. My original claim said that "Parents should allow their children to watch as much television as they want." My action was "allow their children to watch as much television as they want." My claim for the opposing position would be an action that would directly contradict it, like this: "Parents should limit their children's television viewing."

[2:29] So, if you wish to write the claim for the opposing position, use the same responsible agent, use the word "should," and then outline an action that is contrary to the original action. Instead of allowing them to watch as much as they want, I will limit their television viewing.

[2:45] The warrant can happen in the same way. I begin with "Parents should," then I find a different value. If I'm talking about limiting children's television viewing, then I'm probably aiming toward a different value. Yes, you're right—I may actually aim for the same value, saying that unlimited television watching will not make the children happy. However, for this example, let's say I wish to find a different warrant. What value will parents achieve if they limit their children's television viewing? Well, that value may be education.

[3:23] Watching television with unlimited access generally leads to people who are not quite as intelligent, not quite as critical, and not quite as mentally active as their peers. So, my warrant would be something having to do with the value of education, whereas the warrant in the first position was happiness. So, characterizing that would be this: "Parents should ensure their children's education."

[3:51] As you look at the original position and the opposing position, you can see that there's a lot of similarity. Both contain a claim and a warrant. Both contain claims and warrants that start with "Parents should." The difference lies in the content. My original position said: "Allow them to do as much as they want—make them happy." My new position says: "Limit their viewing—help them be educated." This is a fairly classic conflict, simple to see how one opposes the other.

[4:25] So how do I do this? How do I construct the opposing position? I use the same responsible agent, I write a contrary action into my opposing claim, and I find another value for my opposing warrant. If I can do this, then I can construct an opposing position that is intact, clear, and functions logically. I can deal with it in a full-on argument and debate session. If you do this, everything from here on out will be much clearer and easier.