

Argumentative Writing: School Garden vs. Parking Lot — Teacher copy

Answers and suggested responses

Source A: Environmental & Educational Benefits

(Note: Both source notes and all figures below represent fictional classroom practice, not real research.)

A school garden provides hands-on learning opportunities for biology and environmental science classes. Additionally, replacing asphalt with soil and plants reduces the 'urban heat island' effect and absorbs some rainwater runoff, though it does not prevent flooding. A survey shows 78% of students support having more green spaces on campus.

Source B: Student & Staff Parking Concerns

The school parking lot is currently used by 45 student drivers and 15 staff members daily. Removing it would force student drivers to park on residential streets up to three blocks away, raising safety concerns and causing friction with neighbors. Public transit is an option, but it adds 30 minutes to the average student's commute.

Read the model paragraph below. Notice how the writer integrates evidence and addresses opposing views:

"Replacing the school's parking lot with a garden is a strong environmental goal, but any decision must be conditional. While a garden reduces heat and absorbs some runoff (Source A), public transit adds 30 minutes to commutes (Source B). Therefore, we should propose the garden conditionally: the school must first conduct a transportation and accessibility audit. Only if we can establish a workable plan for safe, reasonable access for the 45 student drivers and 15 staff members should we proceed with transforming the lot."

Answer the following questions based on the model paragraph above.

1. Identify the main claim of the model paragraph.

Answer: The main claim is that replacing the school's parking lot with a garden is a strong environmental goal, but any decision must be conditional on first conducting a transportation and accessibility audit.

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2. What counterargument does the writer acknowledge, and which source does it reference?

Answer: The writer acknowledges that public transit adds 30 minutes to commutes, referencing Source B.

3. How does the writer respond to the counterargument through a concession and condition?

Answer: The writer responds by making a concession (acknowledging the 30-minute transit delay) and proposing a condition: the school must first conduct a transportation and accessibility audit, proceeding only if they can establish a workable plan for safe, reasonable access for the 45 student drivers and 15 staff members.

Choose a position (which may be qualified or conditional): either support replacing the parking lot with a garden, or support keeping the parking lot. Write a short argumentative paragraph (4–5 sentences) that includes a clear claim, evidence from the sources, a counterargument, and a reasoned response (such as a concession and condition).

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4. Draft your paragraph below. Be sure to label or highlight your claim, counterargument, and reasoned response (including any concession or condition).

Answer: [Sample Answer – Position A: Pro-Garden with Conditions]

Claim: The school should replace the parking lot with a garden, provided we can resolve transit issues.

Counterargument: Opponents argue that public transit adds 30 minutes to commutes (Source B).

Reasoned Response (Concession & Condition): While we must concede that a 30-minute transit delay is a significant burden, a garden reduces heat and absorbs runoff (Source A). Therefore, we should conditionally approve the garden while conducting an accessibility audit to establish a workable plan for safe, reasonable access for the 45 student drivers and 15 staff members.

[Sample Answer – Position B: Pro-Parking Lot]

Claim: The school must keep the parking lot to ensure student safety and punctuality.

Counterargument: Proponents argue that a garden reduces heat and absorbs some rainwater runoff (Source A).

Reasoned Response: While we acknowledge the environmental benefits of reducing heat and absorbing runoff, forcing 45 student drivers to park blocks away creates safety risks, and public transit adds 30 minutes to commutes (Source B). The environmental benefits do not outweigh these immediate safety and access concerns unless a workable plan for safe, reasonable access is established.