



This exercise sheet accompanies my video: “Losing the Training Wheels”. In the video, I show how to discard the formulaic rules you were taught at school and liberate your essay writing. Watch the video and have a go at the exercises.

PART A: You sustain an argument partly by responding to counterarguments. Imagine you were defending the following propositions. Write down the strongest counterargument you can think of, then say how you would respond to it in support of each proposition.

1. For something to be classified as a “sport”, it must involve physical exertion.
2. Donald Trump is the most effective President in US history.
3. Human beings cannot truly know anything about the world
4. Successful people tend to have extrovert traits.
5. Friendship is the most important determinant of human happiness.

PART B: One training wheel you may have been exposed to: *Never use ‘I’ in your essays.* But that rule is too rigid for top-flight essays. ‘I’ can lead you to hedge excessively, but it also helps avoid nasty passive constructions. Which of the following uses of ‘I’, ‘me’ or ‘my’ would you lose, and which would you keep in your essays?

6. In my opinion
7. I argue
8. I would argue
9. I believe that
10. I collected and analysed the data
11. My data shows that
12. I reject the null hypothesis
13. For me personally, this is problematic

PART C: A third training wheel is the idea that there is a single, agreed-upon definition, but academics often confront meaty and contested concepts. Underline the contested concept(s) in each question below, and give at least two definitions, empirical manifestations, or dimensions, for each.

14. Does the European Union retain its legitimacy?
15. As rational agents, are we free?
16. How does environmentalism balance relations between humans and natural systems?
17. How do education systems resolve frictions between diversity and standardization?
18. Does conservatism depoliticize inequality?
19. Why do empires collapse?