

The Synthesis Solution Protocol OUTLINE

Stage 1: Issue Identification and Investigation

At the root of all critical inquiry is the deceptively complex problem of identifying and formulating an issue or question that is either academically or socio-politically both important and open. Students then need an ample and supported opportunity to research, study, learn about, and produce ideas on and around it.

Stage 2: Rigorous Argumentation and Debate

Investigation and inquiry are directed toward the designation of a position on the issue or question, and then the creation of evidence-based arguments and counter-arguments, thoroughly reasoned through. This then elicits argumentation and debate, in which the opening positions and their supporting arguments are pressed against each other, tested in the *agon* of intellectual conflict and clash, and ultimately pushed to attain a greater clarity, validity, and authority.

Stage 3: Review and Evaluation

Using a set of graphic organizers and tools, the participants in the argumentative activity review and evaluate each other's argumentation and their own, pointing to perceived strengths of evidence, reasoning, and refutation, and paring away weaker and less valid arguments. This process can include the potentially powerful contribution of an observer-audience (or, more definitively, a judge or judge panel), which can contribute its own review and evaluation of both sides' argumentation.

Stage 4: Search for Argumentative Common Ground

The post-debate review and evaluation lays the groundwork for a search for argumentative common ground. This does not equate with easy compromise or resigned conciliation. Instead, this search is guided by a rigorous process in which all participants look for overlapping or common positional objectives, standards and types of evidence, warrants, backing for warrants, assumptions, rebuttals, and concessions. This stage needs to be framed by a more technical approach to and understanding of argument than is commonly brought to bear. It also must adhere with the utmost fidelity to the standard of veracity of objective evidence and logical reasoning, trusting most in an open search for truth, above partisanship or side-adherence. Careful recording of the discoveries – where they occur – or the lack thereof is essential to enable the concluding stage to begin.

Stage 5: Collaboration toward a Synthesized Answer, Solution, or Position

In this final stage, participants work from the discoveries and the gaps that come from the systematic search they undertook in the previous stage to attempt to collaborate on an answer, solution, or position that aims to learn from and advance upon the earlier positions and arguments, synthesizing what is most supportable, defensible, encompassing, and veracious.