

The Synthesis Solution Protocol

THE SEARCH FOR ARGUMENTATIVE COMMON GROUND

Directions: The set of questions below should be used to guide a discussion among all participants in a classroom debate or structured argumentation activity. If there are observers or judges present they should lead the discussion. All participants should take notes on the discussion prompted by each question and should be prepared to turn in their notes, but should also use them to share out. **IMPORTANT:** students should try to avoid continuing the debate during this discussion. Instead, analyze and consider the implications of the argumentation that has already taken place.

Warrants and Support

1. Go through each argument from each side's original case and identify the warrants: the reasoning and emphasized reasoning that shows how it is that the evidence proves the claim. In which arguments from opposing sides are the warrants the same or very similar. What leads these two arguments to oppose each other rather than converge?
2. Identify arguments that have contradictory warrants. Why do these warrants oppose each other? What are the implications of the opposition on the debate? What happens to the debate if this opposition is set aside and other arguments are the focus?
3. Identify the ways in which the standards of evidence used – either implicitly or explicitly – by each side are in agreement. What implications might these shared standards have on identifying a synthesized solution?
4. Are there instances of disagreement over objective facts in the debate? Identify those instances. How might the probably truth be discerned, given the standards of evidence that both sides agree on? What happens to the debate if this opposition is set aside and other arguments are the focus?

Clash and Compatibility

5. As the debate evolves, particularly into the final evaluation of arguments, crystallize the nexus points of opposition. What is each side’s strongest argument, by the end of the debate, and why?
6. Which arguments, on both sides, are either conceded explicitly or granted to be true implicitly (“Silence = Assent”)? Are there broader implications on the debate to these concessions, and if so what are they?
7. How can the strongest arguments that remain standing by end of the debate – the nexus points of opposition – be configured in such a way that they can be made mostly compatible with each other? How would they have to be modified to do this?

Resolving on the Merits

8. Are there arguments on either side whose evidence and reasoning overwhelm the effort the other side makes to refute them? Identify these arguments, and draw out the implications for any synthesized solution if these arguments have to be acceded to by all sides.
9. Are there arguments on either side that are thoroughly refuted by overwhelming counter-arguments, to the point that no reasonable observer of the debate could believe that argument any longer to be true? Identify these arguments, and draw out the implications for any synthesized solution if these arguments have to be rejected by all sides.

Synthesizing a New Solution

10. Each participant should individually formulate their own position, in light of the above discussion. This position is called a “synthesis solution,” since it attempts to bring together the close review and evaluation of arguments, and the search for argumentative common ground where that can be found, and recognition of continuing difference where that cannot be reconciled. The synthesis solution should creatively seek the reconfigured compatibility of arguments, but should also incorporate the truths that emerge through clashing ideas. Each participant should present their synthesis solution and explain how it accounts for the discussion above – especially the nexus points of opposition. The group should then rank order its synthesis solutions for sharing out.