

Exploring Misguided Arguments

Often, people who think differently about topics than you do will base their opinions on inaccuracies. While they may passionately believe that they have shaped their positions carefully, there are flaws in their thinking. The best persuaders can accurately describe the sources for disagreements and respectfully point out misguided arguments. Use this handout to structure your responses to individuals who hold inaccurate ideas about the topic that you are studying.

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What core belief does this person hold that you think is flawed?

(Be as specific as possible when describing their point of view. Include statements that they have made or facts that they have used to defend their point of view.)

Why would a reasonable person think this way?

(What is it about the flawed point of view that you are considering that would resonate with reasonable people? Do these ideas reflect common fears in your town? In our nation? Have there been any major events recently that would make this flawed point of view seem accurate?)

Are there any public figures who agree with this flawed point of view? If so, what kinds of messages are they sending to listeners?

(Public figures like politicians, movie stars, musicians, television show hosts, authors, and athletes can be very influential—and very wrong! Use the Internet to track down any comments being made by public figures that might be influencing the way that people think about the topic that you are studying.)

Specifically, what is wrong with the core belief that you are questioning? What evidence can you provide to prove that this core belief is flawed?

(Questioning the emotions and personalities of the people that you disagree with is unproductive and disrespectful. Instead, stick to the facts. What is it that you think your opponents have failed to think through carefully? What clear and convincing evidence can you provide to call their flawed thinking into question?)

What strengths can you find in this core belief to compliment or celebrate? Was it well intentioned? Inventive but impossible? Did it make you think differently? Challenge you?

(Remember that your opponent feels as strongly about their core beliefs as you feel about yours. Effectively challenging flawed thinking often means finding the admirable qualities in another position. Doing so makes it clear that you don't doubt the intentions or the competence of another thinker.)