

## Counter the Comments: Engaging with Alternate Perspectives

**OVERVIEW:** This lesson will help you identify and utilize different methods for engaging with alternative points of view and arguments. This is an essential skill for improving your primary presentations and responding to commentary in an Ethics Bowl match!

### Methods of Engaging with Alternate Perspectives

Imagine that you are scrolling through social media when you come across an article about a local high school that made the news because hundreds of students walked out of class to protest. Let's pretend you know very little about what sparked the protest. However, you can tell that the central moral issue at stake is whether or not students should be allowed to organize protests like this at school.

As you start reading through the 849 comments, you realize that people have a lot to say about this issue. In fact, you yourself have a lot to say as well.

⇒ **First:** Read the headline from the post and then take a look at some of the comments on this below.



### Comments Section

**Tim K:** No way. We need to keep students safe. How long until it turns into a mob? It only takes 1 kid...

**Sally R:** I'm for this. I spoke with my student and it sounds like the leaders of this walk-out really care about this issue. Why can't students show up like citizens in a democracy? It's a fundamental right, and they feel obligated to speak out.

- **Tom T:** It's a right for citizens. These students are minors. The law should be different when we talk about the difference between kids and adults.
- **Sally R:** What about the students who are already 18?

**Nia T:** My daughter was there and her teacher threatened to give everyone a failing quiz grade because they missed an in class quiz. To me, that's unfair. They should at least get a chance to make it up.

- **Stephen P:** Civil disobedience has consequences though right? Should we really pretend like it doesn't for students?

**Maya L:** I've seen a couple of parents on this post, and I agree with them. This is about what we want for our students. I think it's fine for my students to protest, so the school needs to hear us and support our students.

**Ryan D:** Schools have a legal obligation to protect students AND help them learn. Students missed 2 hours of class? Really? That sounds like teachers aren't educating our students.

⇒ **Second:** Let's say you wanted to add to this ongoing conversation. Take a look at the back of this paper for some engagement strategies you could use to carefully and critically engage with alternative perspectives:

⇒ Let's look at some of these argumentative moves and see how they might be used:

| Engagement Method                                | Definition                                                                  | When to use...                                                                                                                                                                             | Example in student protest case                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><u>State clarification</u></b>                | Restate / summarize another perspective fairly.                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When responding to specific claims</li> <li>• When transitioning to your own claim</li> </ul>                                                     | <i>I noticed a lot of people already mentioned the issue of student safety. Their point is that schools have a responsibility to supervise and keep students safe. I can see that because...</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b><u>Make a concession</u></b>                  | Acknowledge a valid point from another perspective.                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When accepting another person made a useful / truthful point</li> <li>• When using a valid point to build a claim in your own argument</li> </ul> | <i>The administration made a valid point about the students being minors. It's true that protesting is a civic right; however, there are a lot of differences under the law for adults and minors, so we can't discount that fact. With that in mind, let's consider...</i>                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b><u>Refute a claim</u></b>                     | Explain why an opposing claim is incomplete, mistaken, or less convincing.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When illustrating a weakness in a different position</li> <li>• When transitioning to your own claim</li> </ul>                                   | <i>One teacher claimed walking out of class should be penalized in the grade book. This seems disconnected. Why give students a low grade for this behavior? Especially if it was motivated by civic duty? Instead, teachers should...</i>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b><u>Qualify a claim</u></b>                    | Put limits on a claim so it is more accurate or realistic.                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When challenging the limits of someone else's claim</li> <li>• When defining new limits on the issue at hand</li> </ul>                           | <i>Let's keep things in perspective. A lot of people are stating this is a "parents' rights" issue and parents should be in control of consequences if their student attended. However, aren't there some limits to the rights of parents in this situation? Realistically, there seems to be more evidence that...</i>                                                                                                           |
| <b><u>Synthesize claims</u></b>                  | Combine ideas from multiple perspectives into a stronger solution or claim. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When connecting multiple claims</li> <li>• When showing relationships (cause/effect, etc)</li> </ul>                                              | <i>Multiple people have brought up obligations. The students felt they had an obligation to protest, and the administration feels like they have an obligation to protect students and learning. What if these positions actually support each other? Isn't there a way that both parties can come together and...</i>                                                                                                            |
| <b><u>Identify a "Value-Motivated" Claim</u></b> | Identify when another person makes a claim based on a larger value.         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When digging deeper into another person's claims</li> <li>• When identifying values that may be connected or "in tension"</li> </ul>              | <i>It's clear that a lot of parents are upset about this post. One person mentioned that, "We need to keep students safe. How long until it turns into a mob?" Comments like these seem to be motivated by a deep sense of care and concern. However, in this case, "safety" has to be balanced with justice. Protests like these happen in our cities all the time. The tension between these two values can show us that...</i> |

## Group Practice: Engaging with The Comments Section

**OVERVIEW:** In the 2025-2026 Regional Ethics Bowl, a case titled “[Fido as Feed](#)” raised key moral issues about animal rights, our relationships with our pets, and our commitments to the environment. Essentially, a zoo in Denmark was asking people to donate deceased pets to feed predators such as lions and tigers. This story was picked up by many news organizations, shared widely on social media, and sparked strong reactions in the comments section from people across the globe.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the following post from Good Morning Britain, and read some of the selected comments. Then, select 1 commenter and engage with their position using at least 1 of the strategies from this lesson. Write down your position to share with your team.



### SELECTED COMMENTS:

**Annette L:** Farmers donate cows, sheep, pigs and chickens to feed humans. Who decides which animal's life is more valuable than another?

**Steve H:** If you did, then you never really loved them in life. Pets are family. Would you do that to a parent or your child ?

**Yvonne G:** Tax breaks??? If someone is getting paid to do this I can imagine poor animals being allowed to breed indiscriminately just so owners can get tax breaks or payment. There should be no financial gain at all. I'm not sure I agree with it anyway but I definitely don't if there are financial benefits to the pet owners.

**Leo T:** How many commenting are meat-eaters? That bacon, you had for breakfast, was once a live pig, up to the point it was taken to the [slaughterhouse]. How many have been on a fishing boat or watched a lobster boiled alive?

**Kasey U:** If the animal is already dead, then why not? You could save another animal's life (possibly) by feeding it instead of letting it starve and the pet sit in a box on a window sill.

MY POSITION (engaging at least 1 commenter):