

A “Fair and Balanced” Guide to Productive Deliberation

Background: people often discuss ethical, social, and political issues with little awareness or understanding of what people who disagree with them think about the issues. This often results in misunderstanding and “straw-personing” other people’s views – seeing them as simplistic and *obviously* mistaken – when they really might not be. This prevents people from more productively engaging with different points of view. Since we often need to work together to find responses to problems that can work for more than just our own group, the process presented in this handout can help gain us all gain a better understanding of different views, so we might make progress in responding to controversial issues. Here’s the questions and process:

1. What is the issue under consideration? What’s the question?
2. What are the main different “sides” on the issue? How would they explain what the issue **is** if their understanding of what the issue *is* is different? (e.g., is abortion “killing babies” or it about “respecting women’s choices”?).

“Side A”= what view?

“Side B”=what view?

Note: there are often more than two “sides” on issues, but this handout allows for two.

3A. What are “Side A’s” main arguments on the issues? What are their conclusions? What are their premises?	3B. What are “Side B’s” main arguments on the issues? What are their conclusions? What are their premises?
4A. What does Side A often think side B’s main arguments are on the issues? Are they correct? What does Side A misunderstand, according to Side B?	4B. What does Side B often think Side A’s main arguments are on the issues? Are they correct? What does Side B misunderstand, according to Side A?
5A. What are Side B’s objections to Side A’s arguments? Are their objections strong?	5B. What are Side A’s objections to Side B’s arguments? Are their objections strong?
6A. All things considered, are any of Side A’s arguments sound or strong? Are any of Side A’s arguments unsound or weak? Why or why not?	6B. All things considered, are any of Side B’s arguments sound or strong? Are any of Side B’s arguments unsound or weak? Why or why not?

Note: there are of course many arguments on issues and we want to engage each argument one at a time, so the process above will need to be engaged with each argument.

Given all the above and any information and understanding we have, what should we think about this issue now? What else do we need to learn? Who else do we need to discuss the issues with? When can we have a reasonable, confident view here?