



**SOCIAL
SYNTONIC**

The Argument Game

VERSION | 2.0

socialsyntonic.com

1. Opening

2 minutes

Names and hopes

- Participants are welcomed and the facilitator will ask everyone to say their names and answer the question:
 - ◊ *What are you hoping to get out of today's event?*

The ground rules

- Give each other a greater benefit of the doubt than usual.
- Try not only to listen: try to understand each other.
- Participants should make a real effort to be persuasive, to make sense, and to take responsibility over their claims of fact.
- Participants should be open to being fact-checked and to the possibility of learning something.
- Participants should focus on the issue being argued and make an effort to engage with the argument being given. Points critiquing the premise of the argument should be short and to the point. Participants should not repeat their critiques of the premise of an argument.

2. Optional Ice Breaker

10 minutes

The facilitator may decide that the group would benefit from exercises to help encourage individuals to speak more freely before moving on to the next step.

- Participants may be invited to think about what has helped them feel confident in speaking up in the past (possibly by envisioning the context around a past event or gathering).

Individual conversations.

- The default proposal is read aloud. Participants break out into one-on-one conversations to discuss whether they agree or disagree with the proposal entirely or in part.

Report back to group.

- Participants will be asked to share agreements, disagreements, and potential problems with the framing of the proposal.
- The note taker will track how participants align and what issues are brought up to address, including requests to define terms.

Roles

The Facilitator

- ▶ leads the group through the format (or out of the format in special cases)
- ▶ offers arguments and discussion topics when needed
- ▶ calls participants out for going off topic at their discretion

The Time Keeper

- ▶ signals when people go over time
- ▶ during path selection, recognizes alternative time allotments
- ▶ reports on who has spoken the least

The Note Taker

- ▶ documents factual claims, unanswered questions, and calls for definitions
- ▶ reports about their documentation
- ▶ highlights issues at their discretion

General Participants

- ▶ everyone else
- ▶ follow the ground rules in good faith

The Argument Game

The Advocate

- ▶ argues in favor of their proposal
- ▶ answers highlighted questions about their proposal
- ▶ answers other questions at their discretion

The Challenger

- ▶ argues in opposition to the proposal
- ▶ answers highlighted questions about their criticisms
- ▶ answers other questions at their discretion

The Fact Checker

- ▶ during the break, attempts to confirm (or refute) factual claims
- ▶ after the break, reports about what they found
- ▶ answers questions about their sources

The Rule Keeper

- ▶ keeps track of how closely the rules and format were adhered to
- ▶ reports about when and why the group went off format
- ▶ shares their views on whether deviations were beneficial or detrimental at their discretion

3. Format Presentation

3 minutes

Special Roles

- Participants with special roles are pointed out: Facilitator, Note Taker, Advocate, Challenger, etc.
- Participants may take on certain roles if unfilled: Note Taker, Time Keeper, Fact Checker, and Rule Keeper.

The format

- The Argument Game format is presented.
- Participants may ask questions about the format.

Off-Topic Token

- The mechanics of the Off-Topic Token are presented.

TRIAL MECHANIC

Off-Topic Token

Participants may use off-topic tokens to signal concern that a contribution is drifting away from the discussion.

Because people approach topics from very different perspectives, it is not always clear whether something is truly off-topic or simply unfamiliar. For this reason, give the benefit of the doubt the first time. Do not place a token on an initial instance that seems off-topic or challenges the premise.

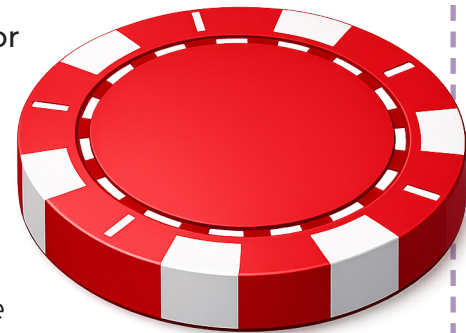
If a participant repeats, extends, or returns to a point that still seems off-topic or against the ground rules, you may place an off-topic token.

When a token is placed, the facilitator will say:

- ◇ *“There is concern that we are going off-topic.”*

If three tokens are placed on a participant during their turn, their turn to speak ends.

Off-topic tokens never apply when a special role is being carried out. In particular, Advocates and Challengers may explore or challenge the boundaries of the topic as part of their role. Time is built into the format to question and critique them directly, so tokens are not used for this purpose.

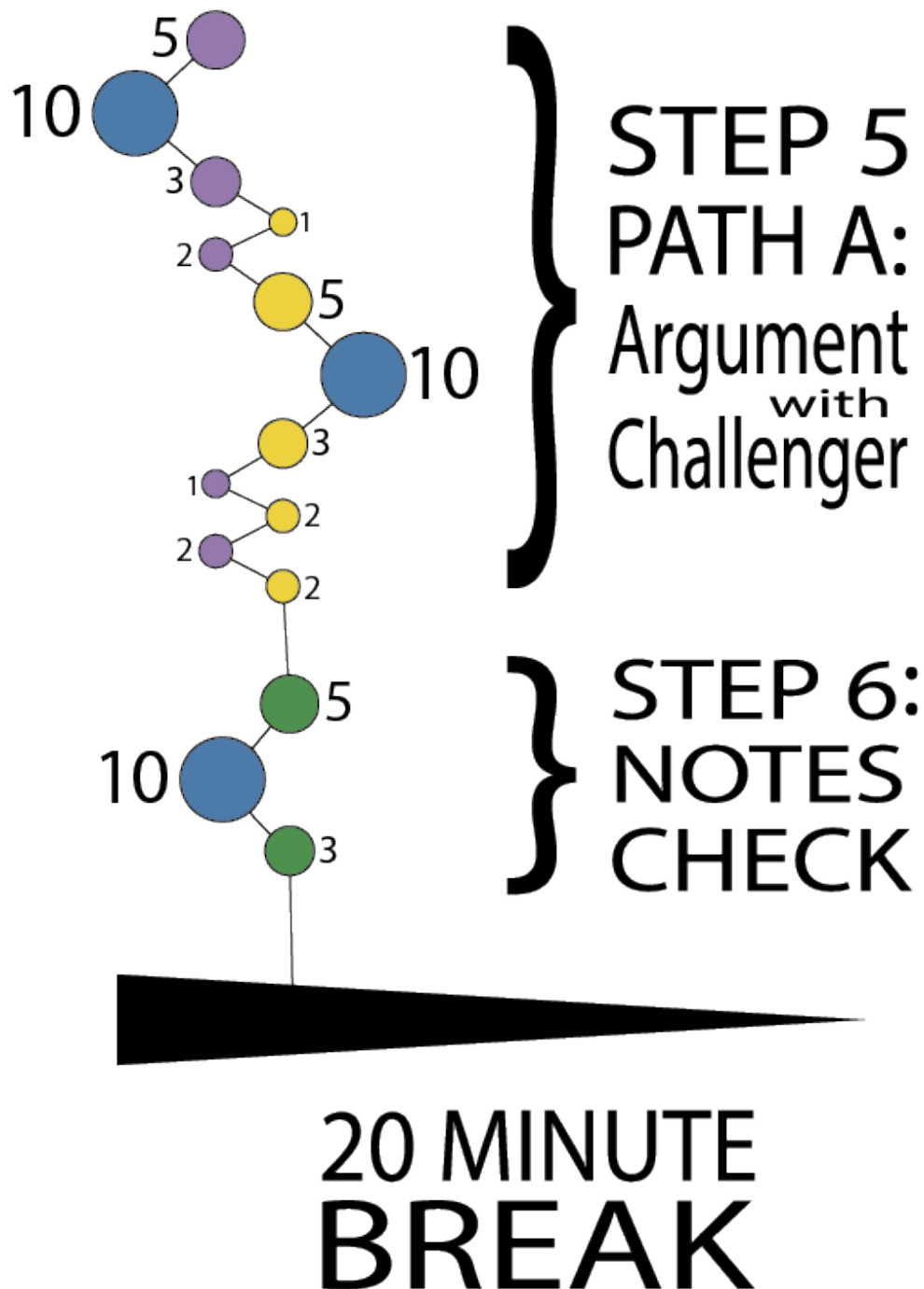


Emphasis on Steps 5 and 6

This visual representation of the format focuses on two steps. Note the rhythm and flow:

● Advocate gets 5 minutes to open → ● General Participants have 10 minutes for questions →
● Advocate responds → ● Challenger has 1 minute to ask a question → ● Advocate answers.
This pattern is mirrored when the Challenger presents their opposing argument.

Then: ● Note Taker addresses the group → ● General Participants get 10 minutes to react →
and the ● Note Taker recalls factual claims before the group takes a 20 minute break.



The Argument Game

4. Path Selection: What is being argued?

5 – 10 min

The Note Taker

- ▶ summarizes potential framing problems and requested definitions that have not been clarified.
- ▶ reads the wording of a proposal, especially when it has undergone changes.

The Time Keeper Keeps Track of Different Time Allotments.

- ▶ if there is an advocate of a proposal, but no challenger, up to 5 minutes may be spent to find a challenger
- ▶ if there is no advocate, up to 10 minutes may be spent to find both an advocate and a challenger.

If there is an Advocate of and Challenger to a proposal:

» **Move on to Step 5. PATH A**

If there is an Advocate of a proposal, but no Challenger:

- Up to 5 minutes may be spent to find a Challenger.
- The proposal is read. The group is asked if anyone will argue against the proposal and fill the role of Challenger.
- Participants may ask for clarifications about the proposal at this time.
- If no one agrees to be a Challenger after 5 minutes:

» **Move on to Step 5. PATH B**

If there is no Advocate of a proposal:

- Up to 10 minutes may be spent to find both an advocate and a challenger.
- Potential proposals are suggested to the group.
- The group is asked if anyone will fill the role of Advocate and argue in favor of a proposal—whether in whole, in part, modified in some way, or for an entirely different proposal.
- If a participant wants to advocate for a proposal, they will clarify what they are arguing for.
- Participants may ask for further clarifications about the proposal at this time.

If after 10 minutes, no one has agreed to be an Advocate:

» **Move on to Step 5, PATH C**

- If an Advocate for a proposal emerges, then the group is asked if anyone will argue against the proposal and fill the role of Challenger.
- The Challenger is required to repeat the proposal.

If after 10 minutes, there is an Advocate, but no Challenger:

» **Move on to Step 5. PATH B**

Call for Fact Checker

Participants may be reminded about the opportunity of taking on the role of Fact Checker before the main argument or discussion begins.

Time Keeper

► Each Step 5 Path (A, B, or C) is allotted

46 minutes total

- Some parts are not clearly allotted time. In these cases, suggestions are made.
- If there is a remainder of time allotted to general participants, they may take 1 - 2 minute turns.
- For Path B only, the advocate can choose to extend their opening argument from 5 to 10 minutes. This affects time allotted for them to respond to questions and critiques

The Facilitator

► when an allotment of time is too small to give all general participants a turn to speak, dice rolls may determine who speaks.

The Note Taker

► tracks factual claims, unanswered questions, and requests for definitions.

5. PATH A: Argument with Challenger

Advocate's argument in favor of proposal

- Proposal is repeated.
- Advocate has 5 minutes to argue for their proposal.

Questions and comments about proposal

- Participants may share questions and comments about the proposal. ——— **10m** (1 minute each).
- Advocate has 3 minutes to answer. They can choose which questions to answer.

Challenger's question requiring a response

- Challenger may ask a question requiring a response from the Advocate before making their argument (1 minute).
- Advocate has 2 minutes to answer.

Challenger's argument against proposal

- Proposal is repeated.
- Challenger has 5 minutes to argue against the proposal.

Questions and comments about opposition

- Participants may share questions and comments about the proposal. ——— **10m** (1 minute each).
- Challenger has 3 minutes to answer. They can choose which questions to answer.

Advocate's question requiring a response

- Advocate may ask a question requiring a response from the Challenger before their wrap-up argument (1 minute).
- Challenger has 2 minutes to answer.

Wrap-up arguments

- The Advocate and Challenger will each have 2 more minutes to wrap up their — **4m** arguments however they like (e.g., tying loose ends, addressing unanswered questions, engaging in rhetoric, etc.).

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5. PATH B: Argument without Challenger

Advocate's argument for proposal

- Proposal is repeated.
- Advocate has 5 minutes to argue for their proposal.
- Advocate has the option of drawing 5 minutes from their later response times to extend this initial argument time to 10 minutes.

Questions and comments about proposal

- Participants may share questions and comments about the proposal. — **10m**
(1 minute each).
- Advocate has 3 minutes to answer. They can choose which questions to answer. This time is reduced to 2 minutes if their initial argument time was extended.

Open discussion of proposal

- Participants are asked if they have any reactions to or additional questions about the proposal that they would like to share. (2 minutes each) — **20m**
- Advocate has 3 minutes to respond to their choice of questions and reactions. This time is reduced to 2 minutes if their initial argument time was extended.

One question requiring response

- Participants have 1 minute to choose someone to ask a question of the advocate requiring a direct response.
- The chosen participant has 1 minute to ask a question.
- Advocate has 2 minutes to answer.

Wrapping up argument

- Advocate has 4 more minutes to wrap up their argument however they like. This time is reduced to 1 minute if their initial argument time was extended.

5. PATH C: Discussion

If a topic hasn't yet been established, the facilitator has discretion to use up to 3 minutes to decide on a topic.

Introduction of discussion topic

- Discussion topic is introduced.
- Each participant has 2 minutes to speak on the topic. — **20m**

Questions and comments about fellow participants' positions and opinions

- Participants may ask questions and make comments about each others' positions and opinions on the topic. (1 minute each) — **8m**
- Those who have been directly asked a question have 2 minutes to answer. They may clarify their positions without answering any question. They may also choose not to speak. — **8m**

One question requiring a response

- Participants have 1 minute to choose someone to ask a question requiring a response.
- The chosen participant has 1 minute to ask a question.
- Participants may answer the question. (2 minutes each) — **6m**
- If no participant has attempted to answer the question, the participant chosen to ask the question has 3 minutes to answer the question (or to opine on why the question was not answered).

Last Call for Fact Checker

If there is no Fact Checker, a final call for a Fact Checker is made before the group takes a break.

6. Notes Check

18 minutes

- Note Taker reports on factual claims, unanswered questions, and requests for definitions.
- Participants may react to the Note Taker's report. (1 minute each)
- Before going on break, the Note Taker suggests factual claims (or questions about facts) that would be worth looking into.
- If there is a Fact Checker, they will choose which claims or questions to look into.

7. Break

20 minutes

- The group takes a 20-minute break from the format.
- During this time, a Fact Checker may attempt to confirm (or refute) factual issues suggested by the Note Taker.

If there is there is no Fact Checker:

» *Skip Step 8 and move on to Step 9.*

8. Fact Check

15 minutes

- After the break, if there is a Fact Checker, they report their findings on factual claims (and questions about facts).
- The Fact Checker reveals their sources..
- Participants may react to and question this report and the sources used to confirm (or refute) factual issues.

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9. Final Reflection

44 minutes

Participants' final thoughts

- Participants have up to 3 minutes to share their final thoughts on the topic. Those who have spoken least go first.
- Participants may then ask each other questions about their positions and opinions on the topic. (1 minute to ask a question)
- Those who have been directly asked a question have 2 minutes to answer. They may clarify their positions without answering any question. They may also choose not to speak.

If there is an Advocate and a Challenger:

- Advocate and Challenger each have 2 minutes to share their final thoughts.

If there is an Advocate, but no Challenger:

- Advocate has 4 minutes to share their final thoughts.

The Facilitator

- ▶ questions made by participants to the group generally do not affect the format
- ▶ participants may answer or ignore such questions when their turn comes around

The Time Keeper

- ▶ will be asked to clarify who has spoken the least up to this point.
- ▶ should use 1 minute allotments in the case of there being a remainder of time left over.

10. Meta-Conversation: Generosity, Persuasion, and Logic

12 minutes

Recognizing generosity, persuasion, and logic

- Note Taker may recognize any argument or exchange that stood out in their mind as generous, persuasive, or logical. (2 minutes)
- Participants have 1 minute to contribute thoughts about the conversation that was just had. They may:
 - ◇ *recognize a generous, persuasive, or logical argument or exchange.*
 - ◇ *point out opportunities for generosity, persuasion, or logic that were missed or undermined.*
 - ◇ *share tips for communicating with people across political divides.*

Recognizing changed minds

- Participants may share if they have changed their mind about something, or if some particular point sparked their curiosity or left them with a doubt (however small). (1 minute each)

11. Format Check

5 minutes

- If there is a Rule Keeper, they report on how closely the format was followed (e.g., were any steps skipped or changed?). They may share their views about whether changes were beneficial, detrimental, or neutral. (2 minutes)
- There will be three minutes for participants to give feedback about the format.

12. Housekeeping

5 minutes

Encouragement for continuing conversation

- Facilitator says:
 - ◊ *Conversations often benefit from being reconvened after everyone's had time to reflect.*
- Participants who would like to share or receive future thoughts about the argument are encouraged to approach the Facilitator at the end to exchange contact information.
- Note Taker may use up to 3 minutes to call back to anything worth remembering or giving further thought.

Future arrangements

- Facilitator confirms the time and place of the next gathering.
- If there is already a topic, it will be announced.
- If a topic has not yet been confirmed, the Facilitator reminds participants to reach out if something comes to mind.