

Introduction to Argumentation

“My father used to say, ‘Don’t raise your voice; improve your argument’.”

– Desmond Tutu, South African Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner

Argumentation is an important skill for every form of communication, including the academic sphere. To try out a simplified variation on the tasks you will be asked to do at the end of the semester (the position paper and short presentation), in this first lesson you will look at the topics below and try to express your ideas about one of them through group discussion and argumentation.

Task 1: After a quick reading (skim reading) of the topics below, choose one and develop a simple **conclusion** (that is, write down which side of the argument is stronger for you and why).

Task 2: After discussing your personal conclusions in a small group, you can look at the additional arguments (pros and cons at ProCon site.) As you go through these, try to determine which ones are the most important to you. To be fair in your argumentation, you **should find the best arguments of both sides**, and try to logically refute the opposing side.

Task 3: For homework, you can use MS TEAMS to speak together outside of class-time to discuss your final ideas about the topic you covered in class, OR any other topic that you come across in the ProCon site. With your group, you will rework your best arguments and conclusions into a short 5-6 minute-long presentation to be given in the following class. This may be a simple **talk or visual presentation** (e.g. Powerpoint) and should represent the **main arguments and main conclusions** you have arrived at as a group on any agreed upon topic. Feel free to include any other extra research you may do on your topic (in addition to ProCon). If you feel strongly about a topic that your group does not agree on, you may search for another team member on the Discussion Forum.

Topic 1: Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Intro: UBI is an unconditional cash payment given at regular intervals by the government to all residents, regardless of their earnings or employment status. Pilot UBI programs have taken place or are ongoing in the United States, Brazil, Canada, Finland, and other parts of the world. In 2017, Hawaii passed legislation creating a working group to study UBI. In that same year, 77% of Swiss voters rejected a proposal to introduce a UBI.

The Alaska Permanent Fund (AFP), created in 1976, is the only genuine UBI in existence today. Funded by oil revenues, AFP provides dividends to permanent residents of the state (\$1,022 in 2016, \$2,072 in 2015, \$1,884 in 2014).

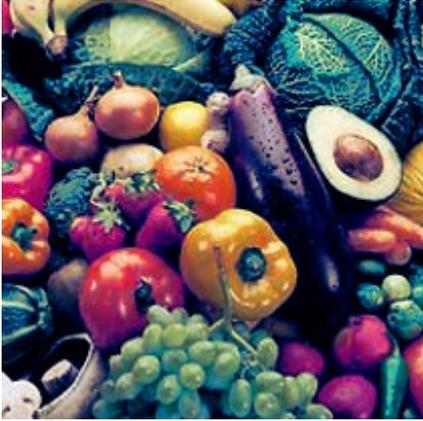
Pro: Proponents of UBI say that it reduces poverty and income inequality, encourages employment and skills training, and values normally unpaid roles such as homemakers and caregivers. They also say it improves the health of recipients and empowers women. Massive unemployment caused by automation could be mitigated.

Con: Opponents of UBI say that it does not reduce poverty, that it deprives the poor of needed targeted support, provides a disincentive to work, and weakens the economy. They also say it is unaffordable and less effective than targeted aid and welfare.

Conclusion:

Adapted from Pro Con Universal Basic Income at <https://www.procon.org/headlines/universal-basic-income-top-3-pros-and-cons/> viewed on 5.10.2020.

Topic 2: Should People Become Vegetarian?



Intro: In 2016, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that Americans ate an average of 54.3 pounds of beef, 92.1 pounds of chicken, and 50.4 pounds of pork, per person, per year. Vegetarians, about 3.3% of the US adult population and 4% of the US youth population, do not eat meat (including poultry and seafood). In their Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020, the USDA and the US Department of Health and Human Services outline three "healthy eating patterns" or "balanced diets" - two include meat, one is vegetarian.

Pro: Many proponents of vegetarianism say that eating meat harms health, wastes resources, causes deforestation, and creates pollution. They often argue that killing animals for food is cruel and unethical since non-animal food sources are plentiful.

Con: Many opponents of a vegetarian diet say that meat consumption is healthful and humane, and that producing vegetables causes many of the same environmental problems as producing meat. They also argue that humans have been eating and enjoying meat for 2.3 million years.

Conclusion:

Note: For the purposes of this site a "vegetarian diet" is one that does not contain any meat (including poultry and seafood), but can contain eggs (ovo) and dairy (lacto) products, which is why the diet is sometimes called the ovo-lacto vegetarian diet. Vegans do not eat any animal products including meat, eggs, and dairy products.

Adapted from Pro Con Vegetarianism at <http://vegetarian.procon.org/> viewed on 17.9.2016.

Topic 3: Should Churches* Remain Tax-Exempt? (meant as religions temples, mosques, synagogues, etc.)



Intro: US churches* received an official federal income tax exemption in 1894, and they have been unofficially tax-exempt since the country's founding. All 50 US states and the District of Columbia exempt churches from paying property tax. Donations to churches are tax-deductible. The debate continues over whether or not these tax benefits should be retained.

Pro: Proponents argue that a tax exemption keeps government out of church finances and upholds the separation of church and state. They say that churches deserve a tax break because they provide crucial social services, and that 200 years of church tax exemptions have not turned America into a theocracy.

Con: Opponents argue that giving churches special tax exemptions violates the separation of church and state, and that tax exemptions are a privilege, not a constitutional right. They say that in tough economic times the government cannot afford what amounts to a subsidy worth billions of dollars every year.

Conclusion:

Adapted from Pro Con Churches and Taxes at <http://churchesandtaxes.procon.org/> viewed on 17.9.2016.

Topic 4: Can Nuclear Energy Achieve Net Zero Carbon?

Intro: Debates about nuclear energy range from whether it should be included in green or clean plans as a non-renewable energy, whether nuclear power should be phased out of use, whether the US federal government should subsidize nuclear energy, and whether the expansion of nuclear energy contributes to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. According to the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI), “Nuclear energy comes from splitting atoms in a reactor to heat water into steam, turn a turbine and generate electricity. Ninety-four nuclear reactors in 28 states generate nearly 20 percent of the nation’s electricity, all without carbon emissions because reactors use uranium, not fossil fuels. These plants are always on: well-operated to avoid interruptions and built to withstand extreme weather, supporting the grid 24/7.”

Pro: Proponents of nuclear energy argue that the energy source is clean, has zero emissions, and is able to reliably support an electricity grid 24/7/365. Nuclear energy is a perfect complement to weather-dependent renewable energies that should be subsidized to replace fossil fuels. Further, nuclear energy protects national security interests by helping to maintain global non-proliferation standards.

Con: Opponents of nuclear energy argue that the energy is not clean because it leaves behind dangerous, radioactive nuclear waste that must be stored. Building new nuclear plants is expensive and subsidies should be directed to sustainable energies. Further, the danger of a nuclear meltdown like Fukushima or Chernobyl are always present, and any access to materials for nuclear power means nuclear weapons can be made.

Conclusion:

Adapted from Pro Con at <https://alternativeenergy.procon.org/questions/should-nuclear-energy-be-used-to-achieve-net-zero-carbon/> viewed on 9.9.2022.

Topic 5: Are Social Networking Sites Good for Our Society?



Intro: 76% of American adults online use social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest, as of July 2015, up from 26% in 2008. [26] [189]. On social media sites like these, users may develop biographical profiles, communicate with friends and strangers, do research, and share thoughts, photos, music, links, and more.

Pro: Proponents of social networking sites say that the online communities promote increased interaction with friends and family; offer teachers, librarians, and students valuable access to educational support and materials; facilitate social and political change; and disseminate useful information rapidly.

Con: Opponents of social networking say that the sites prevent face-to-face communication; waste time on frivolous activity; alter children's brains and behavior making them more prone to ADHD; expose users to predators like pedophiles and burglars; and spread false and potentially dangerous information.

Conclusion:

Adapted from Pro Con Social Networking at <http://socialnetworking.procon.org/> viewed on 17.9.2016.