



7.4 Line-by-line Challenge

This activity introduces basic argumentation skills. In this activity, students practice line-by-line refutation. It is a good way to get the whole class producing arguments and thinking critically.

Time Allotment

One class period

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- develop skills in directly responding to specific arguments.
- develop skills in generating arguments under time constraints.
- be introduced to the concepts of extending and defending arguments.

Method

Ask each student to take out a piece of paper, write his or her name on it, and draw a line top to bottom down the middle of the page. In the left hand column, ask them to write a one-sentence argument on a topic of interest. Tell them to make sure that they choose a topic that they are willing to defend.

After they write the sentence, ask students to pass the paper to the person sitting next to them. Then, have that student write one counter-argument on the left side of the page.

Continue to pass the sheets around until each sheet has collected several counter-arguments on the left side of the page. For the first couple times the sheet is passed, remind students to leave sufficient space between each counter-argument (at least two inches). Time the exercise to keep the papers moving, given students 30 seconds or a minute to write a counter-argument.

Once each sheet has four to five counter-arguments, ask the students to return the paper to its original author.

Tell students to number the counter-arguments on the page, and use line-by-line refutation to answer each counter-argument. Depending on the skill-level of the students, you can insist that students develop multiple responses to counter-arguments where necessary. Students might also group counter-arguments for response where necessary. In order to simulate the environment of a debate round, it might make sense to limit the amount of time they have to do this.

Select students to give two-minute speeches, in which they present their original argument to the class and then, one by one, list and refute the responses their classmates have written on the page. Insist that students number arguments and are clear about the argument to which they are responding.