

Stasis: Taking a Stand

“Stasis” has several meanings in English, among them “a stoppage of the normal flow” and “a state of balance or equilibrium.” For the ancient Greeks, the word “*staseis*” meant “to take a stand,” which is closest in meaning to how we use the word “stasis” in argumentation theory and practice today. (Think about the metaphor of “taking a stand on an issue”: *e.g.*, what’s your stand on the drinking age?)

Although the stasis questions listed below are usually applied when two disputants cannot reach mutual agreement on either the issue itself or the details of the issue, they can be quite useful as both an invention heuristic and a large-scale organizational structure for written and spoken arguments.

The stasis questions are as follows:

- **Conjecture or Being:** Did something happen? and/or Is there a problem or issue?

These questions should help you think about the problem or issue in general terms: What makes it a problem? What circumstances led to the problem? What kinds of issues caused the problem? Who is affected, why, how, etc? Essentially, this part of your argument would provide the reader with the necessary background or context to understand your subsequent arguments.

- **Definition:** What exactly is the issue? and How can it best be defined or understood?

These questions should help define not only the issue itself but also the various contingencies, the related issues. They also help clarify your focus and purpose.

- **Quality:** How serious is the issue or problem? What are the extenuating circumstances? Is it the consequence or result of negligence on someone’s part, or are there forces or factors beyond the control of the parties involved?

These questions help you to distinguish between “serious” and “trivial” and to define both. They also help you consider how your audience might view this problem or issue and think of ways to prove that the problem is, in fact, serious enough to merit discussion, consideration, and action. These questions can also help you think about what sorts of emotional responses a good description of the problem ought to elicit.

- **Procedural or Judicial:** Who has jurisdiction? and What should be done?

These questions guide you toward decisions about what you want to happen or if you want anything to happen at all. They also help you think about what actions or beliefs you can reasonably expect your audience to take or hold.