

Argument Protocol

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Below I describe the Argument Protocol. It is a strategy that can be used whenever you would like to have a clear and useful argument on a topic of some importance with some friends or colleagues. To be used properly, all parties will need to be aware of the protocol.

The Protocol

There are 5 steps:

1. Consideration of argument importance,
2. Statement of conflicting positions,
3. Statement of conditions for loss,
4. Argument,
5. Review.

Step 1 - Consideration of argument importance

Goal: Establish potential rationality of argument.

The first step, before proposing to use the protocol, is for everyone involved to evaluate how important the particular argument would be, to each other. Essentially the idea is to decide whether or not it is worth investing time in the remainder of the protocol, and in particular it is appropriate to decide if the outcome of this application of the protocol is likely to be useful and good.

Step 2 - Statement of conflicting positions

Goals: Determine objective argument positions, disassociation of argument from person.

While this may seem obvious, it is appropriate to do this explicitly. This step may occur in tandem with step 3, but in general all parties should attempt to establish clear and *objective* statements of their positions. In particular, all subjective claims should be resolved.

In the resolution of subjective claims, it should also be that the argument becomes as de-personalised as possible. The hope is that by the end of this, two completely objective positions are found, and that neither party feels emotionally attached to them.

Step 3 - State conditions for loss

Goal: Ensure useful argument outcome, promote direct consideration of each others views.

Each party should state the criteria under which they will accept defeat. If a given party can't come up with a condition then they do not get to participate. It may be that the condition is essentially the negation of their conflicting position; but explicit consideration of this step may help either party to formalise their position more, and at the very least, it forces each party to consider the contradictory view to their own, and perhaps gain some insight into the others position.

Step 4 - Argument

Goal: Logically explore the topic and resolve conflicting positions.

Finally the typical argument should take place, and of course typical approaches should be followed.

Step 5 - Review

Goal: Ensure the process was useful.

Upon successful arguing on either party, the loss conditions will be reviewed, and the learnings on some party can be noted. At this stage, it is guaranteed that one person has changed their mind, and I think that is what is really important in any argument; otherwise it is useless. It is appropriate to recall that just because a mind has been changed, doesn't mean either party should feel bad. Indeed, both parties should feel *good* that the matter has been truly resolved.