

Where does this fit on the Marking Scheme?

ANALYSIS & SYNTHESIS (15)

Examiners want to see if you have given an “argument based on a **critical** and **perceptive analysis of the evidence**.” i.e. make sure you’re familiar with criticisms of key thinkers’ ideas & have supporting examples.

Presenting a



Balanced Argument

How do I present both sides without undermining my own position?

Also marked in **EVALUATION (15)**, where the examiner will be looking for evidence that you “**Comprehensively integrate comparative / alternative perspectives**. Draws insightful, independent conclusions & confidently justifies own position.” i.e. a lack of ‘alternatives’ weakens your essay!!!

The SEC’s Chief Examiner’s Report, 2019 reiterates the marking scheme by stating that:

“Critical engagement with the issue was demonstrated through the analysis of the evidence in conjunction with the integration of comparative and alternative perspectives.”

In other words, to show that you are undertaking a genuine ‘critical evaluation’ of an idea, you need to demonstrate to the examiner that you have considered both sides... But how???

Don’t introduce the counter-argument until you have firmly established your own position.

In your essay introduction briefly mention that you will consider different perspectives, but you don’t need to undermine your position too early. I suggest the **4th paragraph** should present a ‘counter-narrative’.

Don’t be too dismissive in how you treat the alternative perspective.

Oftentimes on the course, there are key thinkers who directly oppose one another. Consider placing yourself somewhere on the spectrum between the two, rather than siding wholeheartedly with one or other. Be critical of both perspectives...

Don’t neglect the benefit of playing ‘Devil’s Advocate’ in helping to crystalize your own views.

In Pol-Soc essays, as in life, the most effective way of winning any argument is to anticipate & disarm your opponent by hobbling their key arguments. Why not do that by directly challenging their rebuttal?

It’s important, not only that you present a balanced argument, but it’s also important that you let the examiner know that you are **self-consciously** doing so. Here are some **suggested first lines** for paragraphs that will help you signal to your reader what you are up to... Which suits your writing style best?

- “In the debate around this topic, a number of alternative perspectives contribute worthwhile considerations.”
- “Not everyone agrees with the position I have outlined here. X, for example, disagrees on the grounds that...”
- “In the future, it will be worthwhile to see if the predictions of some of the detractors will come to pass. These criticisms have included...”
- “Playing Devil’s Advocate for a moment, ...” or “Stepping back and taking a broader view, I can see that...”
- “It would be somewhat arrogant to think that this is the only possible interpretation of the evidence/data...”
- “While in the past, others have argued against this proposition by saying X, it is now clear that their arguments don’t hold water.” (this is very effective when dealing with historical perspectives, i.e. Locke, Hobbes, Marx)
- “While I respect those who offer an opposing voice on this issue, I don’t find their arguments sufficiently compelling to counter-act the position I have articulated here.”
- “In an effort to avoid confirmation bias when investigating this issue, I made sure to consult a wide range of perspectives. Of these, the most persuasive arguments were...”
- “I find myself conflicted in forming a definitive judgment because...” or “On the balance of evidence presented, I think...”

But don’t worry too much if you get to the end of your main arguments and don’t feel like you have fully articulated a ‘counter-argument’ or ‘counter-narrative’. You can still address it in your **conclusion**. It’s better to include even 2-3 sentences that suggest you are aware that there are alternative perspectives. If you’re totally stuck and can’t think of an alternative perspective, consider **how the media influences the way in which issues are ‘framed’**. It’s an opportunity to mention Noam Chomsky. And don’t forget **Nozick**, who can be an effective foil to virtually any argument because he doesn’t mind what you do, **so long as everyone in your ‘Utopia’ agrees and it doesn’t impose any taxation cost on the rest of society!**

Warning! – Presenting 2 (or more) perspectives, doesn’t mean that you have to deal with each position at equal length.