

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.

Let's look at an example from an S.E.C.-Marked Exam...

This essay is drawn from an essay in the 2021 exam. Look at the title below and think how you might construct an "Alternative/Comparative Perspective" that might be worthy of 15/15 in that aspect of the marking scheme.

Question 7 (100 marks)



<https://www.equalpayday.be/europa/>

In the European Union, women are paid 14.1% less per hour than men on average. This equals almost two months of salary in a year.

This is why the European Commission marks 10 November as a symbolic day to raise awareness about the fact that female workers in Europe still earn on average less than their male colleagues.

Discuss whether the gender pay gap is a complex issue, which goes far beyond the issue of equal pay for equal work.

[Your answer should include contemporary examples and evidence to support your argument. You should also refer to the ideas of two theorists at least one of whom must be named on your course.]

To play devil's advocate, and look at both sides of the argument, as Robert Nozick once stated "The invisible hand of the Market will take care of it" Meaning if society deems the gender pay gap is pressing enough the market will take care of it. He is against regulation ~~to~~ to improve this issue. He may state ideas such as political parties in Ireland must meet a quota of over 30% of candidates must be of a certain gender, is unnecessary. Society will deal with it and the need to regulate things is unnecessary. That the more we progress the more we fix issues of concern. One may certainly argue forcing people to meet quotas or to be more open-minded is counter productive. The wage-gap doesn't need a symbolic day to raise awareness it needs systematic changes.

Remember, an "alternative or comparative" perspective doesn't always have to be a direct argument! It could also be:

<p>Different perspectives in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Class • Gender • Ability • Nationality • Sexuality etc... 	<p>Different settings/locations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural • Urban • Suburban • LCD 'vs' MDC • Northern Ireland 	<p>Comparison between different political entities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland 'vs' EU • or UN • or OECD • or Council of Europe 	<p>The 'Regan' approach (from King Lear, not US President): "I find she names my very deed of love/ Only she comes too short"</p> <p>A different supporting perspective that "goes beyond" the standard interpretation. i.e. Nussbaum & the "capabilities approach"</p>
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