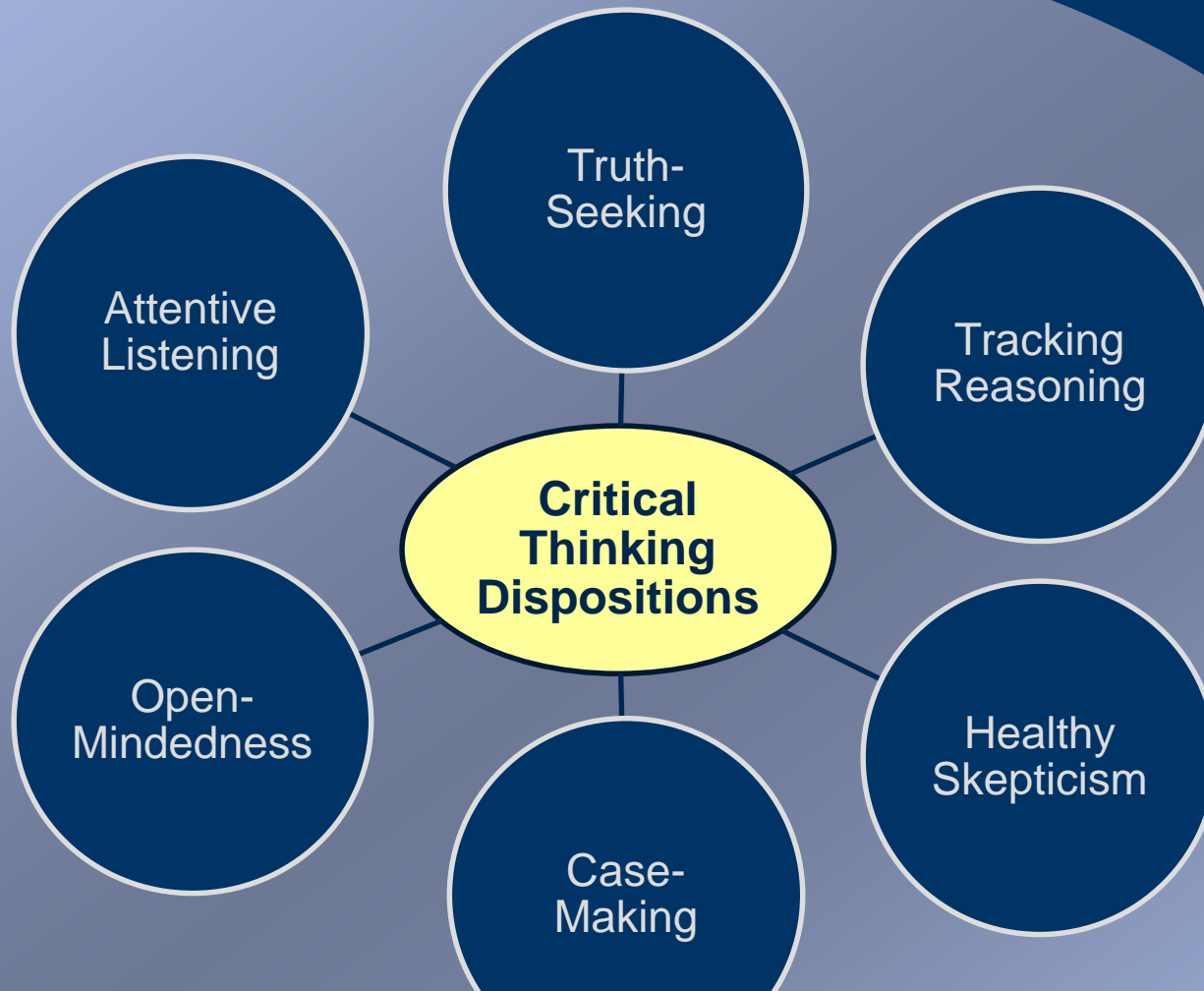


# Deliberating for the Common Good



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Structured Academic Controversy is a carefully constructed and deliberative discussion process that promotes civil discourse and critical thinking.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1988). Critical thinking through structured controversy. *Educational Leadership*, 45(8), 58 – 64.

# Learning Outcomes for a Structured Academic Controversy

As a result of participating in this activity, students can/ will be able to....

1. Articulate background knowledge related to the controversial issue.
2. Construct and share reasoning in favor of a position.
3. Analyze and evaluate reasoning from multiple perspectives.
4. Collaboratively synthesize multiple perspectives to formulate a position that can motivate decision-making.



# Preparation for a Structured Academic Controversy

1. Identify a genuinely contested issue that is relevant to your discipline (i.e. involves content or methodology from your discipline but is not settled by your discipline).
2. Formulate a question that encourages examination of the issue and articulation of opposing viewpoints.
3. Identify two incompatible positions in response to this question.
4. Assemble or prepare resources supporting each of the positions.
5. Create instructional materials to guide students through the process.



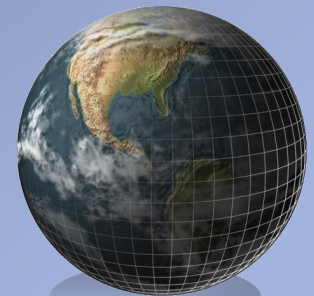
# Steps in a Structured Academic Controversy

1. The entire class reads common background material on the issue.
2. Class is divided into groups of four.
3. Each group is divided into two pairs.  
Each pair is assigned a different position on the controversial issue.
4. Each pair is given and reads through a set of additional primary and secondary sources to find support for its position.
5. Each pair constructs an argument that supports its position.



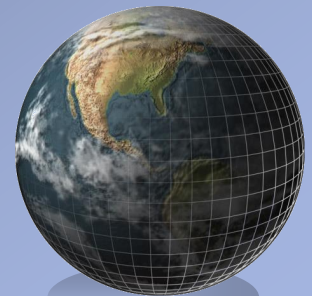
# Steps in a Structured Academic Controversy

6. The first pair presents its position and argument to the second pair.
7. The second pair asks clarifying questions to ensure that it correctly understands the argument.
8. The second pair presents its position and argument to the first pair.
9. The first pair asks clarifying questions to ensure that it correctly understands the argument.



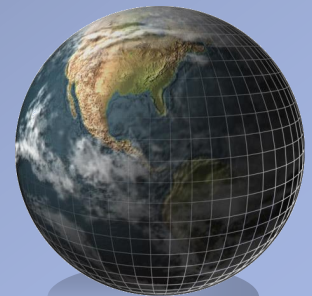
# Steps in a Structured Academic Controversy

10. The pairs reverse perspectives: Each pair takes its understanding of the other pair's argument and attempts to correct and bolster the reasoning.



# Steps in a Structured Academic Controversy

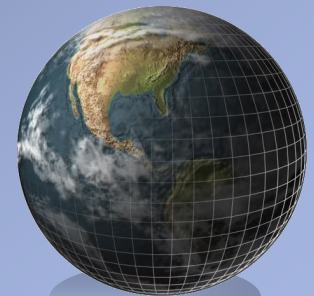
11. The pairs take turns presenting their new position and argument to the other pair.
12. The pairs dissolve back into a group of four and, drawing upon the arguments that have been constructed, discuss what they take to be the strongest reasoning.
13. The group of four constructs an argument in favor of one of the positions or in favor of a compromise position and identifies possible implications for decision-making.





# Steps in a Structured Academic Controversy

14. The instructor calls the whole group back together to debrief on the activity. The instructor lists on the board compelling arguments for and against each position. Next, the instructor asks for ways that the activity helped students explore and discuss this issue. This can be extended to include a discussion of how deliberating this issue with people of differing viewpoints can promote informed decision-making.



# Gun Rights and Regulation in America



Should more gun regulation be enacted to help keep Americans safe?

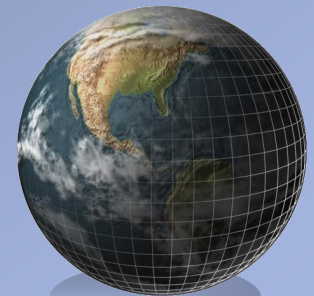
<https://www.procon.org/>

<https://gun-control.procon.org/>

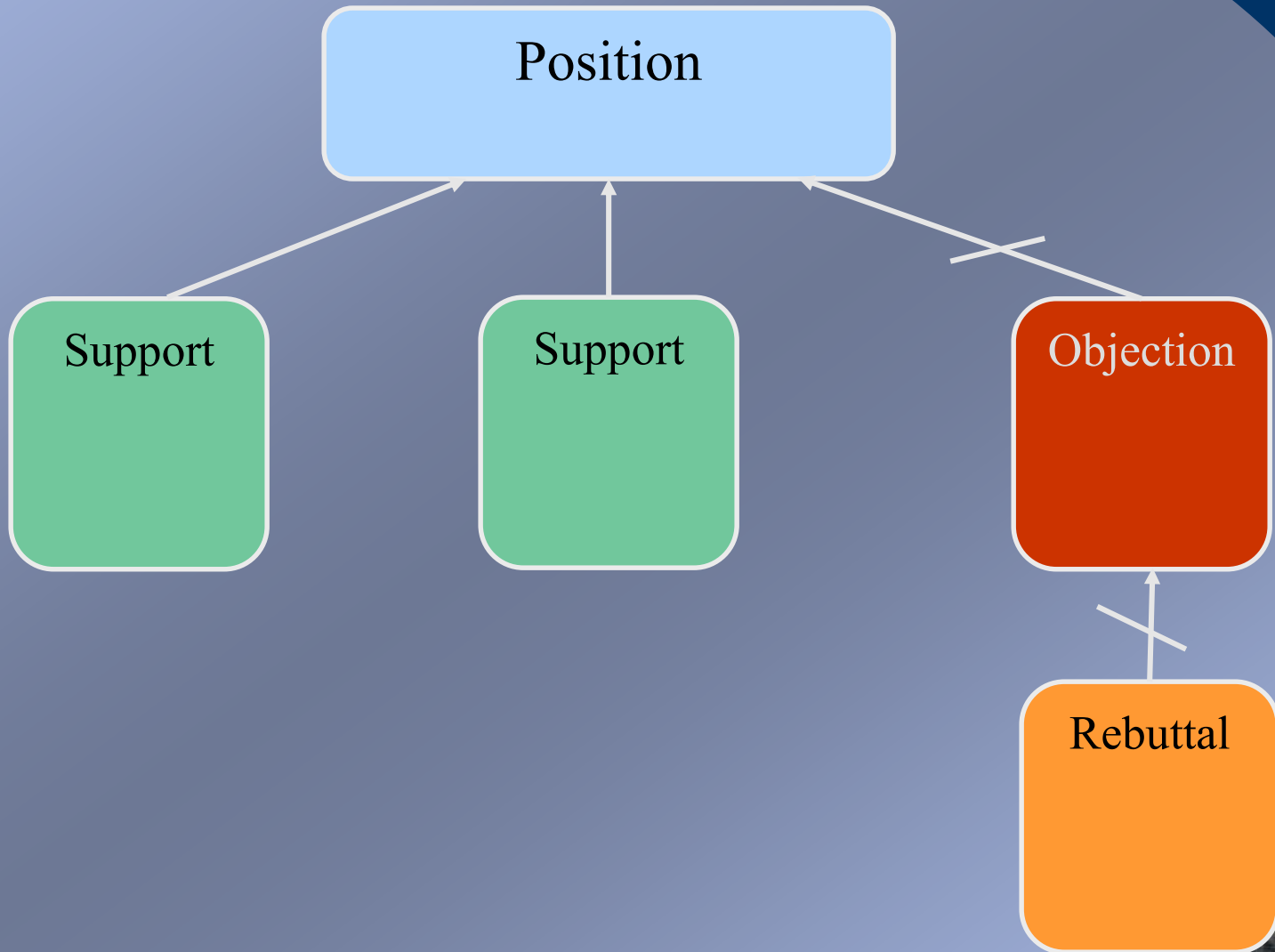
<http://www.did.deliberating.org/lessons/index.html>

# Directions for the SAC Activity

1. Read the common set of materials to prepare for the Structured Academic Controversy.
2. You will be placed into groups of four.
3. Within your group, you should divide into pairs (Pair 1 and Pair 2). Pair 1 will support one viewpoint (Viewpoint A) and Pair 2 will support the opposing viewpoint (Viewpoint B).
4. Read through the additional materials. Each pair should be looking for support for its position.
5. Each pair should develop an argument/case for its position to present to the other pair.

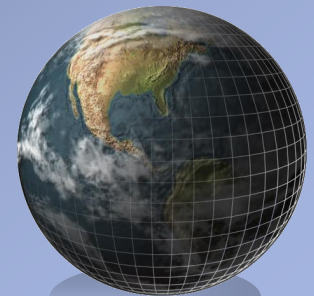


# Round 1



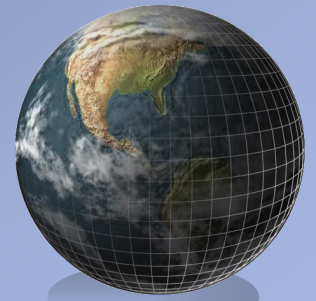
# Directions for the SAC Activity

6. Pair 1 has a designated time-frame to share its argument for Viewpoint A with Pair 2. Pair 2 should take notes on the points being presented.
7. Once Pair 1 has presented, Pair 2 has a designated timeframe to ask clarifying, not argumentative, questions.
8. Pair 2 has a designated time-frame to share its argument for Viewpoint B with Pair 1. Pair 1 should take notes on the points being presented.
9. Once Pair 2 has presented, Pair 1 has a designated timeframe to ask clarifying, not argumentative, questions

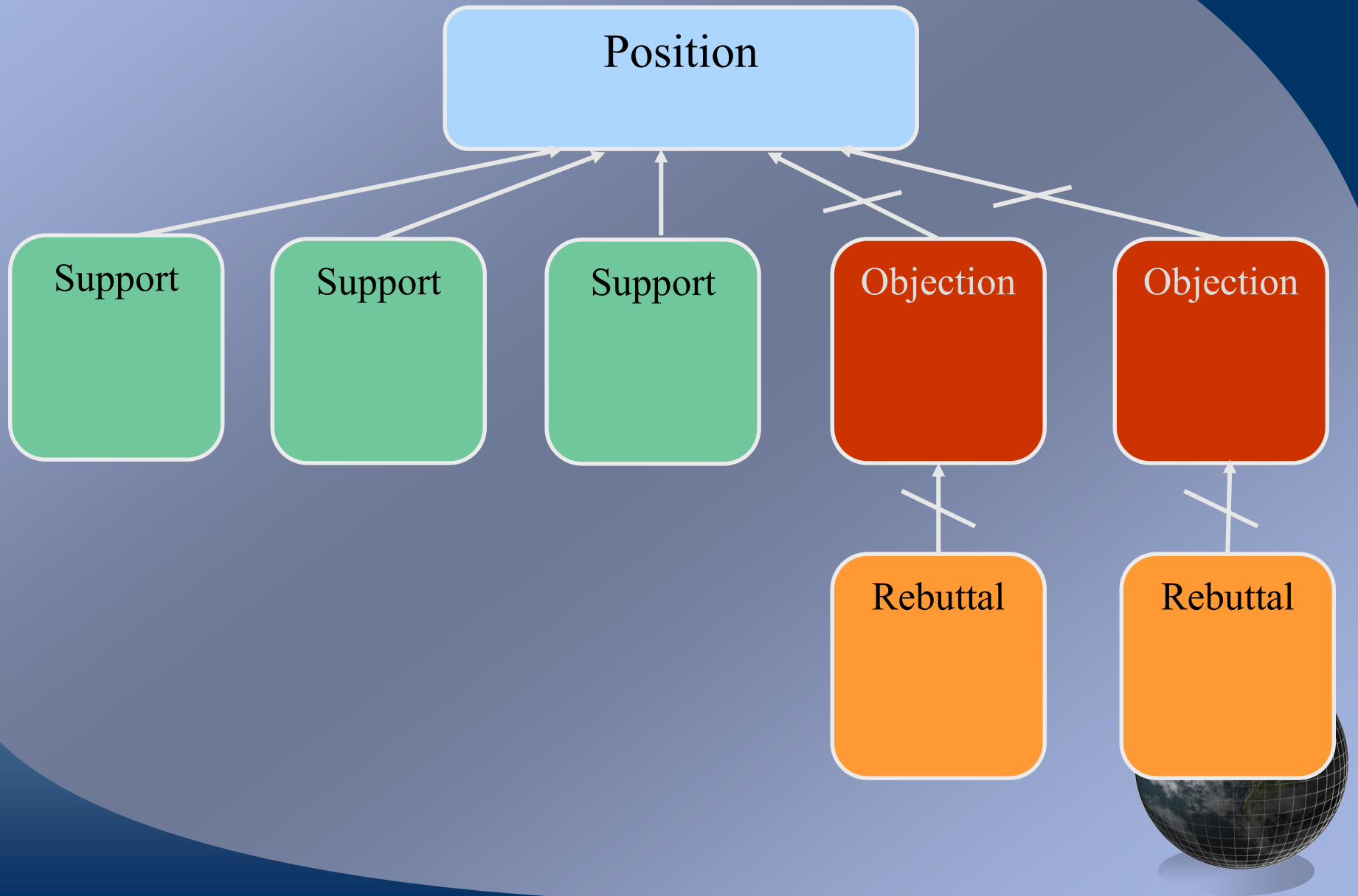


# Directions for the SAC Activity

10. The pairs reverse perspectives: Each pair takes its understanding of the other pair's argument, returns to the readings, and attempts to correct and bolster the reasoning.

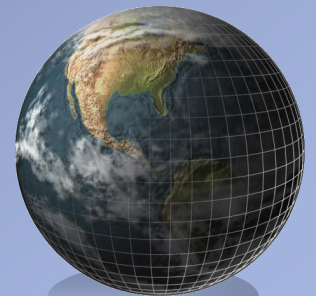


# Round 2



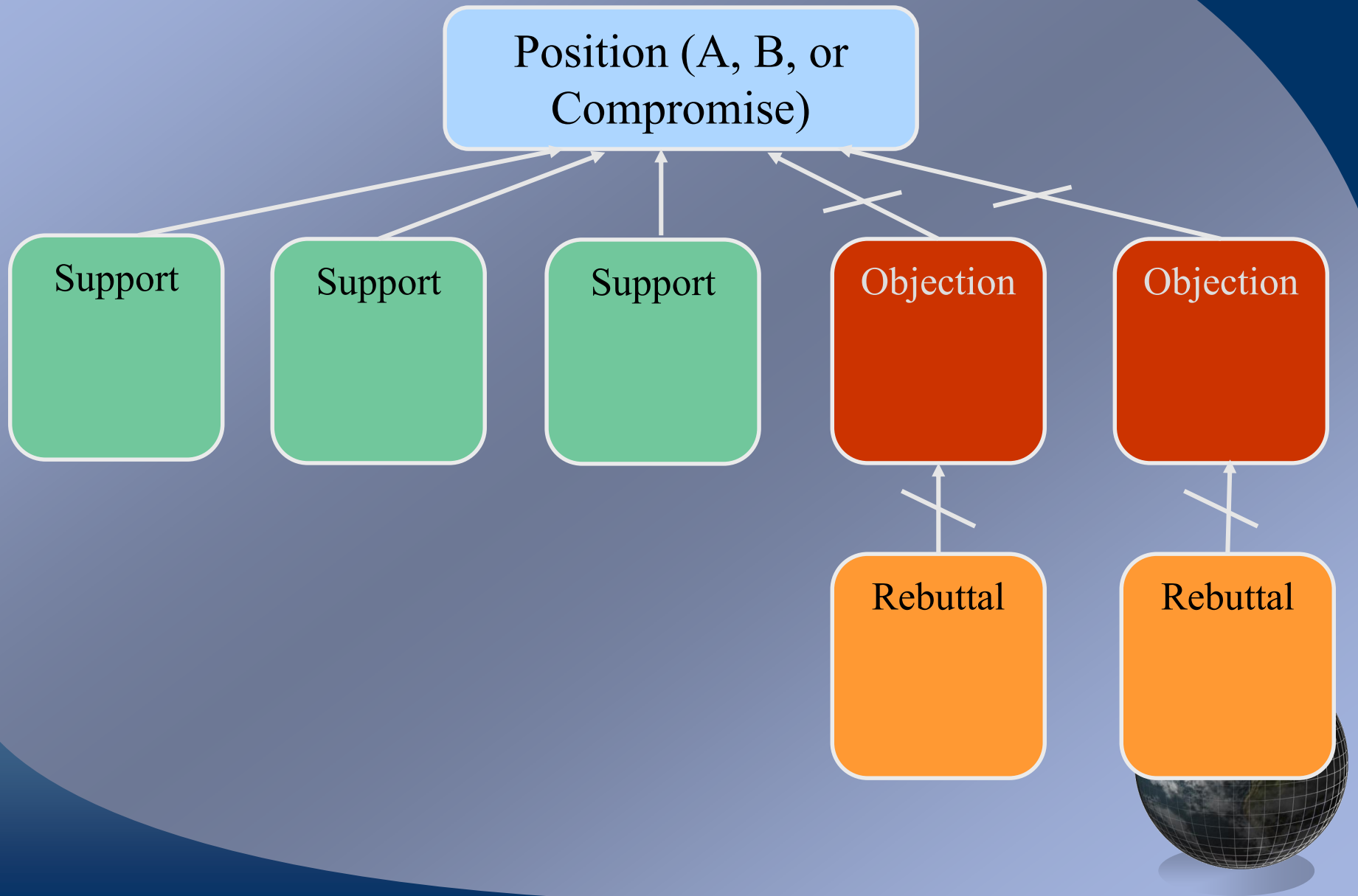
# Directions for the SAC Activity

11. The pairs take turns presenting their new position and argument to the other pair. (This will not be followed by clarifying questions.)
12. The pairs dissolve back into a group of four and, drawing upon the arguments that have been constructed, discuss what they take to be the strongest reasoning.
13. The group of four constructs an argument in favor of one of the positions or in favor of a compromise position and identifies possible implications for decision-making.





# Synthesis



# Directions for the SAC Activity

14. The instructor calls the whole group back together to debrief on the activity. The instructor lists on the board compelling arguments for and against each position. Next, the instructor asks for ways that the activity helped students explore and discuss this issue. This can be extended to include a discussion of how deliberating this issue with people of differing viewpoints can promote informed decision-making.

<https://www.rationaleonline.com/>



# Benefits of SAC Activity with Argument Mapping

- ✓ Mastery of the argument schema (difference between support, objection, rebuttal, etc.).
- ✓ Familiarity with a conceptual tool that can be used for deliberation.
- ✓ Cultivation of a method for weighing reasoning (and so rejecting both dogmatism and relativism).
- ✓ Acquaintance with a method for collaborative reasoning and decision-making.

What controversial topics and questions might work in your classes?

