

“How Might a Philosopher Respond To This Objection?”

A common feature of writing prompts in philosophy is developing how a certain author might respond to an objection to their argument. This can be difficult because we do not know exactly how the author might reply. This type of prompt requires you to make a **conjecture**, a conclusion formed on the basis of incomplete information.

Instructors are typically looking to see if you understand the material, and whether you can apply the material. Here are a few steps to help you get started:

The **first step** to tackling this sort of writing prompt is to make sure that you have a solid understanding of the information needed to make a conjecture, such as:

1. Understanding the author’s position on a topic.

→ Why has the author taken their particular stance?

2. Understanding the author’s argument about the topic.

→ What is the author’s conclusion?

→ What premises does the author rely on to support their conclusion?

→ What evidence does the author have to support their premises? If they do not use evidence, what assumptions do they rely on?

→ How do the premises lead the author to their conclusion?

3. Understanding the objection to the author’s original argument.

→ Is the objection based on a fallacy committed by the author?

→ Is the objection based on inconsistencies in the argument?

→ Does the objection respond to a particular premise of the author’s original argument?

→ Is the objection in response to unintended consequences of the author’s conclusion?

Once you have a solid foundation for beginning to come up with how the author might reply to the objection, the **second step** is to find a response to the original objection. This requires that you understand the original objection (3), and can come up with a response to it. There are two main options an author might choose to respond to an objection:

A. The author could admit that the objection was valid but that their original argument is still acceptable.

B. The author could reject the objection and explain why.

To determine which route the author might take, you can ask yourself certain questions about the objection, such as:

- If the objection is based on a fallacy committed by the author:
 - Did the author really commit the fallacy?
 - If they did, does it invalidate their argument or are there ways to get around it?
- If the objection is based on inconsistencies in the argument:
 - Are there actually inconsistencies in the argument?
 - If yes, do they weaken the argument substantially?
 - Can the author justify or amend the inconsistencies?
- If the objection responds to a particular premise of the author's original position:
 - Does the objection invalidate a premise or show that the premise does not support the conclusion?¹
 - Can the author provide evidence to support the premise? Or show how the premise does in fact justify the conclusion?
- If the objection is in response to unintended consequences of the author's conclusion:
 - Are the unintended consequences enough to reject the author's entire argument? That is, are the unintended consequences *always* applicable or only for certain scenarios?¹

The **third step** is to make sure that the objection you have found is consistent with the author's position (1) and original argument (2). That is, make sure that your interpretation of how the author might respond to the objection does not contradict or stray too far from the author's original argument.

The **Fourth Step** is to introduce the response to the objection such that the reader knows you are making a conjecture about how the author *might* have responded given your knowledge of *their* position, but that ultimately the author could have responded differently.

Finally, the **Last Step** is to support how you think the author would have responded with examples, drawing from the author's position (1) and original argument (2).

Works consulted:

1. *Philosophy*. The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Web. 2 Dec. 2018. <<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/philosophy/>>
2. *Understanding Assignments*. The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Web. 2 Dec. 2018. <<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/understanding-assignments/>>