

The question	
‘What should we do this weekend?’	‘To what extent has racism been reduced in the UK?’
<p>Note that the immediate reply doesn’t really answer the question, but, instead, qualifies it: ‘[Whatever we do, it should be] something interesting.’</p>	<p>One immediate response to the question might be to challenge or qualify the question. To explore the evidence of a reduction in racism, we might argue, it is necessary to consider different forms of racism, such as ‘cultural’ or ‘institutional’ racism. This statement doesn’t answer the question, but sets up clearer parameters for what follows by introducing two useful social science <i>concepts</i>.</p>
<p>The discussion progresses: first we have a bit of historical background about last weekend’s activity. But, while crazy golf is interesting or enjoyable to Tom and Sunita, it isn’t interesting enough for everyone. In essay-writing terms, putting forth a weak argument is known as presenting ‘a straw man’. A straw man demonstrates that you have considered other ideas (crazy golf), but dismisses them quickly (not everyone enjoys it; the group did it last weekend), so you can</p>	<p>In this example, a ‘straw man’ might be the citation of the Race Relations Act 1976, which addressed race inequalities and could be seen as laying the groundwork for the elimination of racism in the UK. But, this legalistic approach misses out a whole range of expressions and experiences of racism. It’s a useful historical starting point, and demonstrates that you have considered the statutory definition of racism. But, as indicated by the refinement of the question with the</p>

<p>move on with stronger, more convincing point(s).</p>	<p>concepts of institutional and cultural racism, you have better points to make.</p>
<p>A better suggestion (perhaps) is ‘going to a movie’. <i>Reasons</i> for going to a movie are: it is going to rain and the group hasn’t been to a movie in ages. To turn this into a social science style <i>claim</i>, you might say: ‘Going to a movie is the better choice.’ The two reasons given would seem to support this.</p> <p>However ...</p>	<p>You might say that some forms of racism have decreased, with your <i>reasons</i> for making this <i>claim</i> being <i>evidence</i> of less overt racism in the form of discriminatory signage, or boys and girls of different ethnicities attending the same schools.</p> <p>However ...</p>
<p>A counterpoint is then raised: going to the movies is expensive. Depending on the income of the members of the group, this may well be true. For the purposes of this example, we’ll assume that the expensiveness of movie-going is a given. If this were a social science argument, we would need to address ‘expense’, referring, for instance, to disposable incomes, or comparing costs of different weekend activities.</p>	<p>A counterpoint might be that other forms of racist discrimination are still prevalent. <i>Evidence</i> to support this <i>claim</i> might include differences in the numbers of job interviews given to equally qualified black and white men. Remember, you would need to support this claim, probably with statistics.</p>
<p>The counterpoint is quickly resolved: Shakil has a two-for-one card.</p>	<p>The counterpoint may not be easily resolved, although you could note that</p>

	<p>there is (somewhat) different evidence in different employment sectors (although this could be another ‘straw man’ and there might not be an explanation for the differences between sectors).</p>
<p>As far as a discussion about what to do over the weekend, the two-for-one card might settle it. If this were a social science argument, however, would this be enough?</p> <p>Hopefully, you will agree that the answer is ‘no’. You will have noticed that the discussion missed out the initial qualification: that the group should do ‘something interesting’. There is a taken-for-granted assumption that movies are interesting, which is not good enough for a social science argument.</p> <p>There has also been no evaluation of the claims or reasons/evidence: Is it really going to rain? Is it going to rain <i>all</i> weekend?</p>	<p>What we have is a fairly balanced argument, with claims and counter-claims, some weaker or supported with weaker evidence than others.</p> <p>Do you think that this qualifies as a social science argument?</p> <p>Hopefully, you will agree that the answer is ‘no’. As with the ‘weekend’ example, the ‘circuit of knowledge’ has not been fully addressed: evaluation is missing.</p> <p>This argument will also require citation of much more evidence, and a stronger development of the initial point of clarification about different forms of racism. There is, however, the outline of a social science argument.</p>