



The 6 Sentence Argument (6SA)

Dr. Erik Jentges

Educational Developer | Lehrspezialist

ETH Zurich | Department of Management, Technology, and Economics | D-MTEC Teaching Innovations Lab

 @ErikJentges

What is it about?

- How to train your students' critical thinking skills?
- Our exercise builds on the assumption that writing is thinking.
- The six sentence argument (6SA) method focuses on enhancing critical thinking skills through structured writing and guided peer-review and involves several feedback loops.



Why is it important?

- For instructors, the exercise's key strength is that it can be administered online and is scalable for large courses with little additional workload.
- Training critical thinking can be integrated into existing courses to let students systematically reflect on lecture content or have them prepare for case study discussions.
- Students learn to formulate their position with clarity to convince a critical audience, and they learn to assess arguments and give constructive feedback as critical readers.

Corporate Sustainability 2019 Lecture Overview

FORMATS

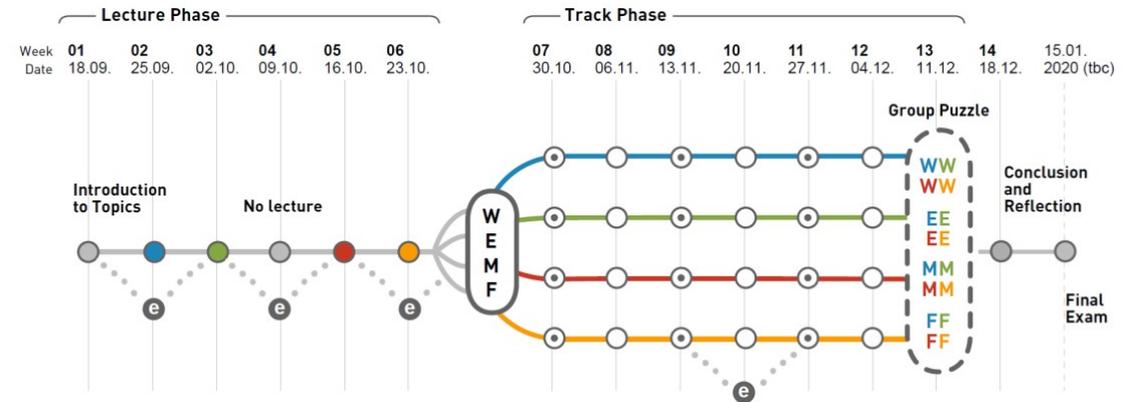
- Lecture
- E-Module (optional)
- Coached Session
- Team Assignment

TRACKS

- Assessment
- Strategy
- Technology
- Finance

TOPICS

- W Water
- E Energy
- M Mobility
- F Food



Integrating 6SA into a large lecture

- Make it Matter:
 - Link it with course assessment (same/similar exercise in final exam)
 - Keep the grading simple (e.g. bonus for complete participation in the process)

Grading			
100%	40%	Track (required) 03	Graded deliverables based on group work.
	60%	Exam (required) 01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Computer assisted exam ❖ 90 minutes, closed book ❖ Multiple Choice questions ❖ One case study with 6SA text <p>❖ Tentative exam date: Jan 16, 2019</p>
	*	E-modules (voluntary) 02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ *Completing all E-Modules on time and earning "pass" grade adds 0.25 points to your exam score (e.g. 4.75 → 5.00) ❖ Same question format as exam

Corporate Sustainability HS20



Overview

Introduction

- What are critical thinking skills?
- How Can You Develop Your Criti...
- The 5-Step Learning Process
- The 6SA Structure
- The Purpose of the 20-Word Limit

Case 1: Assessment of Corporate S...

- Assessment Case and 6SA Writi...
- Submit your work
- Giving Constructive Feedback
- Getting Started on Peer Assess...
- Calibrating Assessing 6SAs
- Review your own work
- Checkpoint 1



Submit your work 2

Edit

In this activity, you will submit your work.

6SA Writing Assignment

Imagine that there is a public TV talk show on the topic of "Microplastics – from small particles to big problems?" with Bjorn Hansen, the head of ECHA, and Alexandra Palt, chief sustainability officer of L'Oréal. You are invited to join the debate as an ETH student expert. Based on your expertise from the Corporate Sustainability lecture, suggest what to do with microplastics in an argument that has the 6SA format.

Add your submission below.

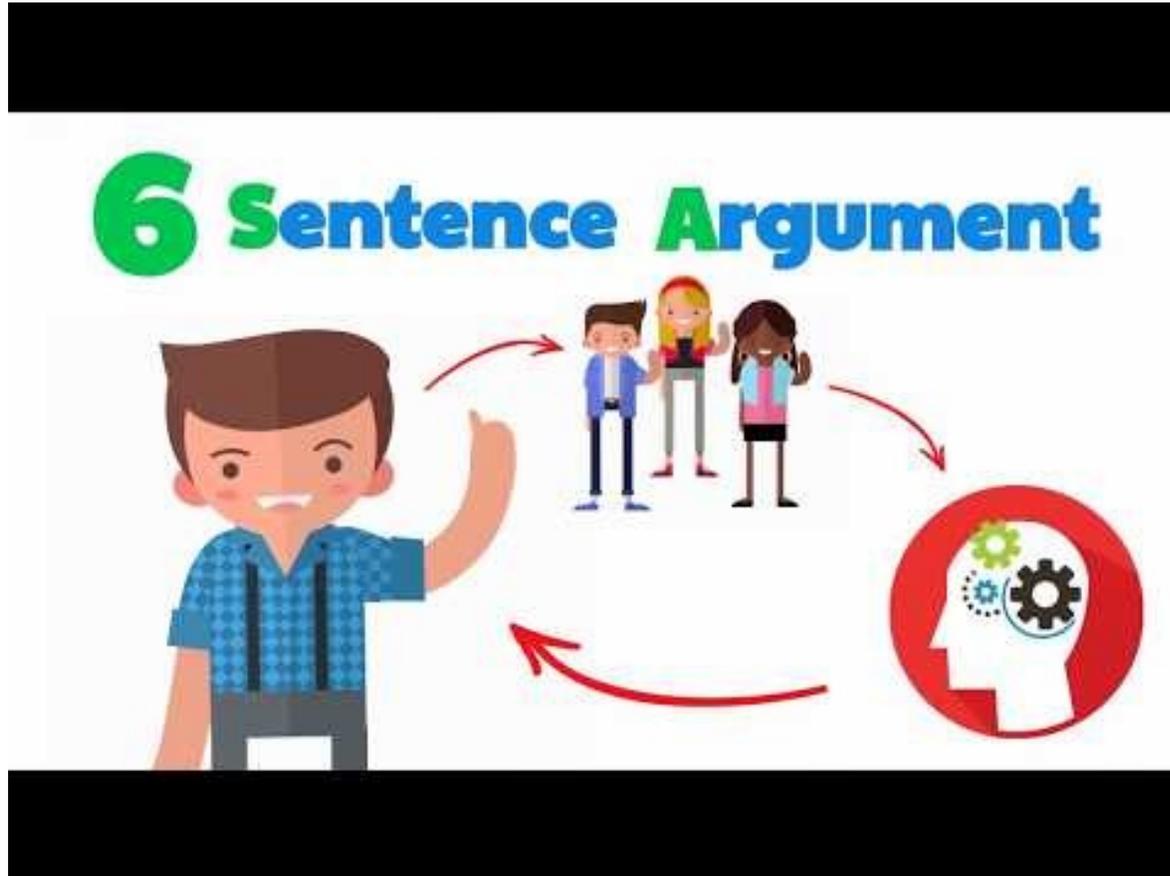
PREREQUISITES

Technology Case

146 View submissions

146 submissions Last submission made 9 days ago

6SA Explainer Video



Video Links

Developing Critical Thinking Skills

<https://youtu.be/lwnwq3buLjI>

The 6SA Structure

<https://youtu.be/3FnYxTPiAdg>

Example 6SA

#	Six Sentence Argument	Score	Review Comments
1	Over 6,000 letters urge Duolever to protect Nigeria's forests by buying no more palm oil from Bilmar, our largest supplier.		
2	We should respond by immediately stop buying Nigerian palm oil and by pressuring Bilmar to halt their plans in Nigeria.		
3	Any other reaction will damage our reputation persistently and let our Strategy for Sustainability appear as an empty promise.		
4	However, we would risk losing our most important and shortly irreplaceable supplier of RSPO-certified palm oil.		
5	Since without us, Bilmar could not sell large portions of their produced palm oil, the aforementioned risk is manageable.		
6	To protect our good reputation, we should stop sourcing Nigeria palm oil from Bilmar until they have improved.		
Overall Score and Assessment:			

Example 6SA with exemplar peer feedback

#	Six Sentence Argument	Score	Review Comments
1	Over 6,000 letters urge Duolever to protect Nigeria's forests by buying no more palm oil from Bilmar, our largest supplier.	2	Function: The introduction clearly outlines the problem that this 6SA is about. Namely, that thousands of protest letters criticize the Bilmar palm oil case (1st Point).Quality: Bringing up the large number of letters makes the problem current urgent and attracts attention as Duolevers supply chain seems to be in danger (2nd Point).
2	We should respond by immediately stop buying Nigerian palm oil and by pressuring Bilmar to halt their plans in Nigeria.	2	Function: The position applies perfectly to the situation of the case – the Bilmar palm oil deforestation – and the introduction connecting it to the strategic supply chain power of Duolever (1st point).Quality: It clearly specifies who – Duolever – should do what: should instantly stop Nigerian palm oil purchases from Bilmar (2nd point).
3	Any other reaction will damage our reputation persistently and let our Strategy for Sustainability appear as an empty promise.	2	Function: The sentence puts the position in alignment with Duolevers corporate strategy and thus provides a reason why #2 is a good choice (1st point).Quality: From my perspective, this is convincing, because indeed Duolever has built up a reputation which is at risk (2nd point).
4	However, we would risk losing our most important and shortly irreplaceable supplier of RSPO-certified palm oil.	2	Function: This is a challenge to #3, it highlights the costs and risks of maintaining the good reputation. Well done! (1st point).Quality: In my view, this is the key challenge: Losing an irreplaceable supplier has a strong impact on the whole supply chain (2nd point).
5	Since without us, Bilmar could not sell large portions of their produced palm oil, the aforementioned risk is manageable.	2	Function: It is a clear point to counter #4 as it puts the risk of losing the main supplier into – a manageable – perspective (1st point).Quality: This is a fair point. As a large buyer, Duolever has leverage (2nd point). In my opinion, the transition from this dependency to a manageable risk is still a bit difficult to grasp. It would be interesting – to some extent – to assess the details of such a risk management. Do you have an idea of how you would manage this risk? What would be the risk criteria and how would you connect them to the corporate strategy?
6	To protect our good reputation, we should stop sourcing Nigeria palm oil from Bilmar until they have improved.	2	Function: This summarizes the argument without introducing new points (1st point).Quality: It emphasizes the action and the reason. It motivates me to take action. Keeping a good reputation is indeed a good motivator. Additionally, the summary ends with a positive connotation as the aspects of improvement highlight potential for future development (2nd point).
	Overall Score and Assessment:	12	Overall: This is an excellent 6SA and it makes a good comprehensible recommendation. Through the explanation, you consistently give strong arguments to underline your position of an immediate purchase stop of Bilmar palm oil. This traceable impression comes also from the fact that you included a strong (maybe the biggest?) challenge in your argumentation which you counter with a fair point. It shows that you carefully weighted up the pros and cons of your position. In addition, all sentences fulfil the preconditions – namely the word limit and comprehensibility. Good job! Room for discussion: I wonder, if it is necessary to stop sourcing – meaning a full purchase stop of all Bilmar products from Nigeria- or whether threatening to stop sourcing – or divesting from only parts of Bilmars products – would be enough. Using Duolevers bargaining power as a main customer could be a valuable asset in negotiations without immediately losing one of its main supplier. Nevertheless, this is a point well made.

Example 2



#1 Critical Thinking Skills are of increasing relevance for today's students who need training instructions and coaching to develop these skills. [Introduction]



#2 With the 6SA method, we train students in case analysis, clear reasoning and writing, giving constructive feedback, and guided reflections. [Position]



#3 The method applies "writing is thinking" and lets students gain experience as writers to become expert reviewers for their peers. [Reason]



#4 Sceptics may question the training effect since drafting 6 sentences with max. 20 words each simply emphasizes style over content. [Challenge]



#5 However, the formalized style requires students to clarify their reasoning and lets critical readers assess the quality of an argument. [Rebuttal]



#6 The 6SA method allows students to refine their critical thinking and find more resonance with course contents through peer assessments. [Conclusion]

References



Julian Kölbel and Erik Jentges (2018): The Six-Sentence Argument*: Training Critical Thinking Skills Using Peer Review. In: Management Teaching Review, 3:2, 118 –128. DOI: 10.1177/2379298117739856



* The six sentence argument is based on Georg Brun and Getrude Hirsch Hadorn (2014): Textanalyse in den Wissenschaften. Inhalte und Argumente analysieren und verstehen. 2nd edition, vdf UTB, p. 85.