



# ARCHER:

A framework for  
inspiring reflection in others and helping  
the world come to better ideas.

**DRAFT PROPOSAL 0.4**

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# About this proposal

Since the time of Socrates and probably long before questions have been used to great effect in encouraging others to work through and reflect on the ideas that they hold. In a time where dialogue seems increasingly to be either blunted by social convention or weaponised to defeat a differing perspective, ARCHER aims to provide a way to restore honest and constructive dialogue.

In providing a strict objective and defined set of principles; it becomes possible to evaluate an interaction against the ARCHER standard; even such interactions that did not set out to follow the standard. An evaluation can be made by understanding how well the interaction focused on the ARCHER objective and how well it adhered to each of the six ARCHER principles.

ARCHER provides a clear opinionated objective, but is open to the method of achieving that objective. There can be multiple approaches to achieving this objective.

method can be encouraged and progress both measured and understood.

It is hoped that this framework establishes ARCHER as something that can be more easily learned and taught; and for which new techniques can be developed.

# ARCHER

## ARCHER overview

ARCHER (pronounced as 'Archer') is an acronym for Agnostic, Respectful, Charitable, Honest, Epistemology and Reflection.

ARCHER represents an opinionated objective and set of principles. Only by adhering to the principles in pursuit of the objective are the requirements of the ARCHER standard be met.

Any method that archives the objective whilst maintaining the principles is valid. Throughout this document references to a conversation partner can be seen as referring to the subject in which we wish to inspire reflection regardless of method.

## The ARCHER objective

**ARCHER** seeks to  
**respectfully** and **honestly** encourage  
others to **critically reflect** on reasons  
they think something is **true**.

# The six ARCHER principles

The ARCHER standard means maintaining all of the following six principles:

## 1. **Agnostic**

Treat all claims equally regardless of personal belief and opinion. This does not mean your personal view on all claims should be agnostic, but that your position should be irrelevant to the interaction. This removes the burden, implied or actual, that a person needs to know the truth of a position before helping someone else explore it. Every interaction should start from as neutral a position as possible in order to maintain a collaborative mindset.

## 2. **Respectful**

Always engage in a friendly, respectful and civil way. Being disagreeable is a form of persuasion, and can lead to defensiveness. If there is a breakdown in rapport, and rapport cannot be reestablished then it is better to end the interaction. A disagreeable experience might indicate to a person that the act of exploring an idea is disagreeable and make them less open to doing so again in the future; in direct opposition to our objective.

## 3. **Charitable**

Listen carefully to what our conversation partner is saying and make a genuine effort to understand their position. Always assume the best possible intention, motives and interpretation. Steelman your conversation partner's position whenever possible. Adopt a collaborative mindset where you are working with your conversation partner to explore their views; and not competing. Never take advantage of a cheap shot or call out mistakes in a manner that might demean the conversation partner.

## 4. **Honest**

Be intellectually honest. Do not engage in rhetoric or coercion. The ends do not justify

the means. Be open about what you are doing, and do not chase victory.

## 5. Epistemology

Focus not on what a person thinks is true but why they think it is true and how they judge these reasons to be reliable, and justify their confidence in their ideas.

## 6. Reflection

ARCHER aims to inspire genuine and meaningful reflection in our conversation partner, in line with the principles of critical thinking.

# Acknowledgement of bias.

Although it is Agnostic as to the claim, ARCHER is biased in favour promoting rational coherentism. reasons where rational critical thinking has been applied to the Epistemology of the claim.

# Acknowledgement of limitation

1. Inspiring reflection in a person is a difficult thing to measure. Success can be mistaken for failure, and failure mistaken for success. There is no known reliable method to measure the effectiveness of ARCHER beyond anecdotal reporting, and such reporting is limited.
  - a. *This doesn't mean that Anecdotal reporting is irrelevant to supporting the idea that ARCHER is effective; simply that no stronger evidence exists.*
2. ARCHER aims to encourage a person to reflect on the reasons they hold their position. As a result, ARCHER will be less effective in engaging with people who have spent time reflecting.
  - a. *However, this is not a problem and should not be seen as a weakness of the approach. A car might be an effective way to travel to New York and is no less effective if it can't help those already in New York achieve this goal.*

3. ARCHER aims to encourage a person to reflect, and only the conversation partner can do that reflection. It will be less effective with people unwilling to be open to or engage in reflection, sometimes known as being doxastically closed.
  - a. *Whilst there are ways to encourage openness, such as listening and being open, respectful and empathetic, we should never try to force someone to be open, nor should we consider it our failure if they are not.*
4. ARCHER invokes rational critical thinking to explore the methods used to hold a position; therefore, it will be ineffective in addressing positions held for reasons that are knowingly irrational or outside of the realm of critical thinking.
  - a. *When encountering such positions, it can be helpful to question the value of holding a position that is knowingly irrational or outside the realm of critical thinking. Most people operate by applying critical thinking in all areas of their lives, whether they know it or not. The motivations behind creating a special case for a position can be a great place to explore.*

# Addendum

The following material are guidelines and notes regarding ARCHER and do not represent part of the ARCHER standard, but may provide useful additional context and clarity.

## Addendum 1: Mindset

### **Progress, not perfection**

Human Interactions are complex; failure to stick to the principles does not mean the interaction was a failure. Aim to stick to the principles, work on how to adopt them better, but recognise that no conversation is perfect.

### **Inspiring reflection, not changing minds**

The objective is to inspire reflection, not changing minds. Change should be internal; and comes from genuine reflection.

### **You may be wrong about what you believe to be true.**

Being wrong feels a lot like being right; and this is no less true for us as it is our conversation partners. For this reason, you should be Agnostic and honest in how you treat all claims being explored. This does not mean your personal view on all claims should be Agnostic, but that your position should be irrelevant. In doing so you will never have cause to regret how you approached a past conversation even if you subsequently change your mind about a position.

### **The Collaborative mindset**

Every conversation should start from a natural position. However familiar you are with a position, you should avoid making assumptions about the reasons a person holds that position. Allow them to explain their position, ask questions as if you are encountering the position for

the first time. Work together to explore the position and discover answers, adopting a collaborative mindset.

### **Conversation is not a zero-sum game**

Do not frame the conversation as one to be won or lost. It certainly cannot be won at the expense of the other party losing. If you find that you or your conversation partner are adopting that mindset, work to correct it immediately and re-establish the Collaborative mindset.

### **Success is not visual, don't look for it**

Sometimes there are clear indicators of reflection in our conversation partner; other times however reflection may not be as clear, or may not occur until long after the conversation has concluded. For this reason it can be a mistake to chase signs of reflection, or consider a conversation a failure if they are not present.

## **Addendum 2: Notes on the use of the term Interlocutor vs conversation partner**

The term Interlocutor means a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation; and is a term used in more academic and philosophical contexts. As it does not appear in common everyday use; it creates a needless comprehension barrier to people unfamiliar with the term. The phrase 'conversation partner' in contrast contains no such barrier to comprehension at the cost of a single extra syllable.

## **Addendum 3: Notes on Aporia**

### **What is Aporia**

The term Aporia is often used in classical Rhetoric and like the word Interlocutor is not common in everyday use. However unlike the term 'Interlocutor' the idea expressed by 'Aporia' isn't easily

translated into a simple language alternative. Therefore it can be useful to understand the meaning of Aporia and how it relates to ARCHER.

The original Greek meaning of Aporia is "lacking passage", "reaching an impasse" or "difficulty in passage". In simple terms it refers to noticing the way forward isn't clear.

In the context of ARCHER; Aporia is used to refer to the feeling someone experiences when they notice a contradiction, inconsistency or gap in their thinking. Once they have noticed it, they may be unsure about how they wish to resolve this contradiction, inconsistency or gap; and so the way forward isn't clear.

In Rhetoric and in the context of ARCHER we might say that person is experiencing Aporia.

### **Aporia is not the objective**

Aporia can be an excellent indicator that the interaction that useful critical reflection has occurred; and inspiring critical reflection is a major part of the objective of ARCHER.

However, Aporia isn't always obvious to an outside observer, it doesn't always happen immediately, and may not happen at all. Therefore; the absence of noticeable Aporia is not an indication that useful critical reflection has not occurred.

### **False Aporia**

Certain experiences can create the appearance of Aporia but are not the result of a person noticing a contradiction, inconsistency or gap in their thinking. For example a person who is confused or a little lost in the conversation may not feel comfortable saying so; and give the outward appearance of Aporia. People may also wish to imply Aporia as a courtesy to perhaps draw the conversation to an end; if you have ever said "That's really interesting" to someone whilst thinking "I couldn't care less" then you may know how this can feel.

### **Do not resolve Aporia**

Pressing on once an aporia moment has been reached could be seen as uncharitable; as the conversation partner has not yet been able to resolve the Aporia, and so could be vulnerable to

suggestions as to how to resolve it. In the context of ARCHER we do not wish to provide answers; only help people critically reflect on their position.

A genuine Aporia moment can be a great time for the interaction to end; as it will leave the conversation partner with something to think about. You can always arrange a further interaction with the person at a later date once they have had time to reflect on and perhaps resolve the Aporia themselves.

## **Addendum 3: Street Epistemology**

Originally conceived in 2013 as a set of arguments and methods of arguing against religious ideas; Street Epistemology has given rise to a large and passionate community of individuals who wish to champion critical thinking. The idea of Street Epistemology has grown and evolved, resulting in various ideas about its objectives, methods and approaches. Not all of these ideas are mutually compatible, making it hard to say anything definitive about Street Epistemology without the risk of contradicting an alternative view.

Originally ARCHER was conceived of as a subset of the Street Epistemology movement, an opinionated perspective on the principles that could be described and adopted. However, this concept created too much confusion and so it became clear that ARCHER should more properly be understood as separate from and independent of Street Epistemology. This separation also allows those who wish to practise engaging with ARCHER to do so without reference to Street Epistemology.

Based on the similarity of perspectives it might be reasonable to say

1. Those who do ARCHER could be said to be doing Street Epistemology.
2. Not all those doing Street Epistemology are doing ARCHER.