

ALARA — Quick Reference

Counterarguments are openings, not attacks. Five steps turn a rebuttal into a follow-up meeting.

The five steps

A — Acknowledge

Name the objection in their words, not yours. Invite dialogue, don't end it.

L — Listen

Stop talking. Let them say more. Most objections have a second layer.

A — Affirm

Validate the legitimate concern. This is the step most advocates skip.

R — Redirect

Bridge to your evidence or your reframe. Earned by the first three steps.

A — Ask

End with a question that keeps the conversation open.

Sentence-starters by venue

School board (budget objection)

A: "You're concerned the budget is already stretched."

R: "That's exactly why I'm proposing this as a Title I reallocation, not new spending."

Ask: "Would it help if I sent the line-item breakdown by Friday?"

Zoning hearing (neighbor concerns)

A: "You're hearing real concerns from my neighbors about parking and density."

R: "The plan includes one dedicated off-street space; the parking study keeps net street parking flat."

Ask: "Would the council be open to a 30-day notice period with the neighborhood council?"

Library board (precedent objection)

A: "You're worried about setting a precedent that pushes other branches to ask for the same."

R: "This branch serves the only ZIP code in the district without a competing public option after 5pm."

Ask: "Could we revisit at the 90-day mark to check usage data before extending elsewhere?"

When you don't have the answer

"That's a fair concern and I want to be honest — I don't have a complete answer for that yet. Can I come back to you within a week with what I find?" Admitting a gap and closing it looks more credible, not less.