

Title	Prove It!
Time	30 minutes
Preparation	None
Materials	White Board, Pen
Prior Knowledge	<p>This exercise is useful in the context of post-modernist concepts such as “metanarrative”. Students need to have had at least a general introduction to the difference between “modernist / post-modernist” thought.</p>
Objective	<p>When discussing / introducing the post-modernist concept of “metanarrative”, students will quite happily(?) accept the critique in terms of things like religion and various sociological “ism’s” (Functionalism, Marxism, Feminism, etc.), but they tend to balk at the idea of “science” as just one more “Big Story”.</p> <p>The concept of relativism in post-modernist theory (often misrepresented as a kind of “anything goes” moral relativism) can be a useful way of illustrating the argument that “even science” is underpinned by subjective judgement.</p> <p>A simple way of applying this idea is to get students to think about something familiar which they value highly (some form of clothing or footwear usually does the trick) and demonstrate how concepts like “better” and “superior” (as in “science is a superior form of belief system to religion because...”) are inherently subjective.</p>

1. Either choose something before the class or, better still, ask your students to suggest something tangible they believe is better or superior to something else. Then get them to suggest something that is worse or inferior to whatever they've chosen.

In this example, we can contrast the competing claims of:

- a. Nike Supa-Stretch Trainers (very expensive and desirable) and
- b. Crustys CheapNasty Trainers (not very expensive or desirable)

2. Either in groups or as a class, ask the students to list every possible reason that supports the argument that trainer (a) is better than / superior to Trainer (b).

You can, if you wish, suggest things like: Cost, Quality, Style, Status, Colour, etc., but they'll probably be only too willing to provide suggestions (especially if you are the kind of teacher ("Hello") who favours Crustys Trainers).

3. Put three headings on the White Board (Reason, Nike and Crustys). Beneath "Reason" write the various categories of "superiority / inferiority" the students' suggest. Beneath the Nike heading, briefly note why it is superior and beneath the Crustys heading briefly note why it is inferior.

For example:

Reason	Nike	Crustys
Quality	Hard-wearing	Falls-apart easily

4. Once this has been completed tell the class that, according to **their judgement** about "**value**", the Nike Trainers are "superior". Then tell them that, since **you** are the most **powerful** individual in the room, you will now assess the relative worth of the two items according to **your judgement of "value"**.

In this respect you simply **reverse** whatever the students decided. For example, if they decided that "quality" was a distinguishing feature and they valued "hard-wearing" above "falls-apart easily", you now decide that "falls apart easily" is the most important aspect of "quality".

5. After you've finished (and be prepared for expressions of horror, pity, amazement etc. – you can take it, you're a professional. And anyway, since you have the power to decide, what do you care about what they think?), the class should be in a position to understand:

- a. That questions of value are subjective. How you decide to "judge value" (using what criteria) is social in origin.
- b. Any claim to superiority is always underpinned by subjective judgement (even when, as in the case of "science", it **appears** not to be...).

6. You are now in a position, if you so desire, to move on to a discussion of post-modernist critiques of "science" and its argued status as a metanarrative...