



Case 17

A good choice for whom?

Ten free seats, thirty people who want one. How should the crew decide?

Clubs, schools and governments constantly decide who gets limited seats, money or time, and every method helps some people and costs others. Students who can name the trade-off out loud make fairer decisions and can challenge unfair ones without pretending there's a perfect answer.

In the real world

NPR, 2020 The Ethics Of Who Gets The COVID-19 Vaccine And When

Scientific American, 2020 How to Decide Who Should Get a COVID-19 Vaccine First

Anika

I'm not asking the plan to revolve around me. I'm asking you to count the cost instead of saying nobody loses.



You'll make

Decision note, 150 words

Time

About 50 minutes

Level

Grades 9–10

The case file

Look at what's actually here before deciding what it means.

Fictional case material

1

§ Workshop sign-up sheet, opened Monday 9 a.m.

"Free workshop: 10 seats. Add your name to show interest. How seats will be chosen: to be announced." Thirty names by Wednesday; the first 22 were added before 10 a.m. on Monday.



Who saw this first, and who might have seen it late? What would first-come, first-served mean for these thirty names?

Fictional case material

2

Crew dinner debate thread, Sunday 8:30 p.m.

Gia: first come is easiest to run, we just take the top ten.

Anika: I'm at rehearsal most days, I'd see it after it's full.

Mateo: lottery?

Gia: then we need a sign-up window and someone to run the drawing.



Which cost does each person mention, and which costs does nobody mention?

Fictional case material

3

Three selection options on the whiteboard, Sunday night

A. First come, first served: fast to run; favors whoever sees it first. B. Lottery after a three-day sign-up: equal chance for everyone; needs a sign-up window and a drawing. C. Needs-based rubric: prioritizes people who can't afford the paid version; needs personal information and someone to judge it.



Which option does each ethical lens favor? Which option asks applicants to give up the most privacy?

Fictional case material

4

"No. I want the group to count the effect instead of saying nobody loses. Then we can look for an adjustment."

Anika, 16, balancing rehearsal and getting home



What is Anika asking for, and what is she explicitly not asking for?

Outside the story

The case is fictional. The questions in it are not. Here is where they show up in the real world.

Still missing

How many of the thirty applicants have the greatest need, whether a second session is possible, who would see personal information under a needs-based rubric, and how the twenty people without seats would like to be told.

Real-world evidence



Real source

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

Summary, not a quotation: the framework suggests examining a decision through several ethical lenses, such as its consequences, the rights it respects, whether it treats people justly, the common good, virtue and care, and notes that the lenses can point in different directions.



article

The Ethics Of Who Gets The COVID-19 Vaccine And When

[NPR, 2020-12-20](#)

A bioethicist explains how leaders chose who went first when there wasn't enough for everyone.



article

How to Decide Who Should Get a COVID-19 Vaccine First

[Scientific American, 2020-09-03](#)

Lays out competing criteria such as risk, fairness and benefit, the same lenses the crew uses.

Discuss before deciding

- Which item did you trust first, and why?
- What would you need to see before repeating the strongest claim?
- Who is missing from these documents?

If this, then what?

Follow each method to its consequences. Who carries the cost under each one, and what makes the chosen process legitimate to the twenty who lose?

First come, first served

The ten fastest responders get seats; people at rehearsal or work see the sign-up late

Anika and others who check messages late

Lottery after a three-day sign-up

Each of the thirty has the same chance, and need is not considered

Needs-based rubric

Those with the greatest need are prioritized; applicants must share personal information

Applicants asked to disclose their finances

Words that do the work

Ethical lens

Perspectiva ética

A way of examining a decision, like its consequences, fairness, rights or care for people involved.

Gia looks at how many people get in. Anika looks at whether the process is fair to people who can't stay late.

Trade-off

Tensión entre opciones

A choice where helping one goal limits another.

First-come is quick for Gia to run but favors whoever sees the message first. A lottery is fairer to Anika but needs a sign-up period.

Equality

Igualdad

Treating everyone the same way, like giving each person an equal chance.

A lottery gives all thirty people the same chance at a seat.

One student's draft

Write a 150-word decision note defending one option, its strongest objection and one revision, using two ethical lenses.

We should use a lottery after a three-day sign-up. Looking at fairness, a lottery gives all thirty people the same chance¹, while first-come, first-served rewards whoever sees the message first, which is unfair to people like Anika who can't check their phones during rehearsal². Looking at consequences, a lottery also makes the most people happy, because everyone will feel they had a fair shot³. The strongest objection is that a lottery ignores need: someone who can't afford the paid version of the workshop has the same chance as someone who can⁴. To reduce that cost, we will run a second free session for the twenty people who don't get in. We would rethink this if we can't actually run a second session.

- 1 Accurate use of the fairness lens: it names exactly what the method treats equally.
- 2 Strong: a concrete cost of the alternative, tied to a person in the case.
- 3 Revise: this guesses at feelings. Under the consequences lens, a lottery still leaves twenty people without seats, so name the outcomes it actually produces.
- 4 Good: the writer states the strongest objection at full strength instead of a weak version.

Works well Uses evidence Gap to fix Think about the reader

One revision

Before

~~Looking at consequences, a lottery also makes the most people happy, because everyone will feel they had a fair shot.~~

After

Looking at consequences, every method seats exactly ten people, so the real difference is which ten; a lottery spreads the chance evenly but does nothing extra for those with the greatest need.

The revision applies the consequences lens to actual outcomes rather than predicted feelings, and it sets up the objection that follows.

Teacher commentary

The note chooses clearly, uses the fairness lens precisely and states a strong objection with a realistic revision and a condition for reconsidering. Its consequences lens rests on a guess about how people will feel. Grounding that lens in actual outcomes moves the note from Proficient to Advanced on Reasoning.

Teach it in one period

Grades 9–10

Write a 150-word decision note defending one option, its strongest objection and one revision.

Sources

Case options and the Markkula Center framework summary.

Product

Decision note, 150 words

Objective

Students defend one allocation option with two ethical lenses, including one that challenges their choice, and revise it in response.

Assessed by

The note is scored with the case rubric, with a check that two lenses are used accurately and that the revision responds to the named objection.

45 minutes	You	Students	Check for
5 min The problem	Present ten seats, thirty sign-ups, and Anika’s note that she can’t stay late.	Write your gut answer and one reason.	Everyone has a position before discussion.
10 min Three options	Describe first-come, lottery and needs-based rubric.	For each, list who gains and who carries the cost.	Each option has at least one named cost.
10 min Two lenses	Introduce consequences and fairness lenses (Markkula Center).	Apply both lenses to your preferred option.	Students find a cost in their own preference.
12 min Decision note	Model a 150-word note: choice, reason, strongest objection, revision.	Write the note.	Note includes an objection and a revision.
5 min Hear the cost	Pairs read notes aloud to someone who prefers a different option.	Listener names one thing the note missed.	Each writer receives one specific challenge.
3 min Exit	Frame: “I would reconsider if __.”	Complete the frame.	Condition is concrete and checkable.

Before class

- Prepare the case documents, one set per pair:
- ✓ Workshop sign-up sheet, opened Monday 9 a.m.
 - ✓ Crew dinner debate thread, Sunday 8:30 p.m.
 - ✓ Three selection options on the whiteboard, Sunday night
 - ✓ Anika, 16, balancing rehearsal and getting home
- Every document is fictional case material, printable from the online field guide.

Questions to keep asking



Onda
First-come favors people who see the message first. Anika checks her phone after rehearsal.



Pauta
Publish the rule before sign-ups open, not after you see who applied.



Duda
Which part of your reasoning is doing the most work?

Support every student, then assess

Success looks like

- ✓ Clear choice and reason
- ✓ Names the strongest objection
- ✓ Proposes a realistic revision
- ✓ Uses two lenses accurately

Supports at this level

- Decision-note template
- Lens cards: consequences, fairness, rights, care

Access

- Provide the three options as picture cards
- Read Markkula lenses aloud with one-line summaries
- Spanish vocabulary: justo, igualdad, equidad, sorteo
- Allow oral decision notes
- Reduce to comparing two options

Stretch

- Research how a real program uses a lottery and what critics say
- Design a hybrid method and test it against all three lenses

Challenge: Use two lenses, including one that challenges your choice.

Rubric	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	No reference to who is affected.	Mentions people vaguely.	Names specific people and effects from the case.	Uses case facts to show who gains and who pays.
Reasoning	Claims an option is obviously best.	Gives one reason only.	Uses a lens and names the strongest objection.	Uses two lenses and proposes a revision tied to the objection.
Audience & purpose	Ignores the twenty who miss out.	Mentions them briefly.	Explains the process to all applicants.	Builds legitimacy by publishing criteria and a remedy.
Revision	No change.	Wording only.	Adds a named cost and revision.	Explains how the revision addresses the objection.

Standards this can show

SL.9-10.1 Common Core 9–10

W.9-10.1 Common Core 9–10

SL.9-10.3 Common Core 9–10

SL.11-12.1 Common Core 11–12

W.11-12.1 Common Core 11–12

SL.11-12.4 Common Core 11–12

Grades 6—8

Hold a small-group discussion, then write a short note to the thirty students explaining how the ten seats will be given out.

Use

The three options and Gia and Anika's perspectives.

You'll make

Note, 4—6 sentences

Show it your way
Write it

Write a 4—6 sentence note with the frame "We chose __ because __. This is hard for __."

Say it

In your group, take a role (facilitator, recorder or questioner) and explain aloud which method you picked and who it is harder for.

Show it

Fill the who-gains / who-pays chart for all three options, with a simple icon for each person affected.

Done when

- ☐ Explains the method clearly
- ☐ Gives a reason
- ☐ Names who it's harder for
- ☐ Offers one fix

Need a boost?

- Who-gains / who-pays chart
- Frames: "We chose __ because __. This is hard for __."
- Discussion roles: facilitator, recorder, questioner
- Vocabulary: fair, equal, need

Option 1 What would it do?

Option 2 And this one?

My call One sentence.

Because the evidence shows Point to a numbered item in the case file.

Who pays for this choice**What would change my mind**

Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Grades 9–10

Write a 150-word decision note defending one option, its strongest objection and one revision.

Use

Case options and the Markkula Center framework summary.

You'll make

Decision note, 150 words

Option 1 What would it do?

Option 2 And this one?

Done when

- ☐ Clear choice and reason
- ☐ Names the strongest objection
- ☐ Proposes a realistic revision
- ☐ Uses two lenses accurately

My call One sentence.

Need a boost?

- Decision-note template
- Lens cards: consequences, fairness, rights, care

Because the evidence shows Point to a numbered item in the case file.

Who pays for this choice

What would change my mind



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Take it off the page

Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.

Honors**Argue whether equal chance or greatest need should guide how public programs with limited seats choose participants.****Use**

Case materials plus one teacher-selected example (a charter-school lottery or a summer-jobs program).

You'll make

Argument, 600—700 words

Thesis A claim someone could reasonably disagree with

Done when

- ☐ Clear, qualified thesis
- ☐ Accurate public example
- ☐ Engages the strongest opposing lens
- ☐ Considers implementation

Reason 1: claim, evidence, commentary

Reason 2: claim, evidence, commentary

Need a boost?

- Claim/counterclaim chart
- Examples of each method in public life

The strongest counterargument, and your answer

Why it matters beyond this case



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Pre-AP

Hold a Socratic seminar on “Is first-come, first-served fair?” using the three options, then write an evidence-based reflection on how your view changed.

Use

The three selection options and the crew’s dinner debate.

You’ll make

Seminar participation plus reflection (200 words)

First line Start with the moment
Three points, each with its evidence

Last line What should people remember?
Practice 1: what worked

Practice 2: what I changed

Done when

- ☐ Contributes a question and a response
- ☐ Cites the case
- ☐ Accurately represents a peer’s view
- ☐ Explains a change or confirmation of view

Need a boost?

- Seminar norms and stems
- Higher-order question bank
- Reflection frame: I thought / I heard / I now think



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

AP English Language

Write an argument addressed to the twenty students who didn't get a seat, defending the method the crew chose.

Use

The chosen method and the case facts.

You'll make

Argument letter, about 450 words

To A real role
How it gets there Email, comment, letter, DM
Opening Who you are and why you're writing
The ask One clear request
Your evidence Two specifics beat five adjectives
Close What happens next
Done when

- ☐ Defensible thesis
- ☐ Concedes the real cost
- ☐ Offers commitments tied to the audience
- ☐ Line of reasoning is clear

Need a boost?

- Audience analysis grid
- Concession stems



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Take it off the page

Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.

AP U.S. Government

Concept application: explain how the crew's lottery and needs-based options reflect two American values, equality of opportunity and concern for outcomes, and how ideologies weigh them differently.

Use

Case and a short explainer on core American political values.

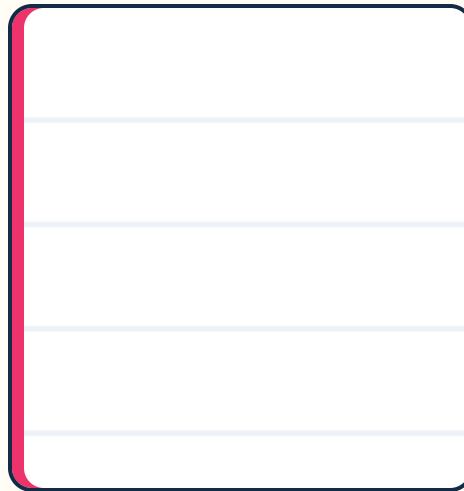
You'll make

Concept-application response, about 300 words

Version A What it says or shows



Version B Same moment, told differently

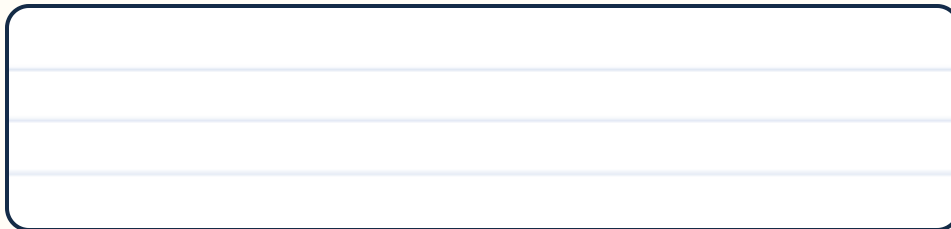
**Done when**

- ☐ Accurately describes the values
- ☐ Applies them to the options
- ☐ Fair to ideological perspectives
- ☐ Accurate public example

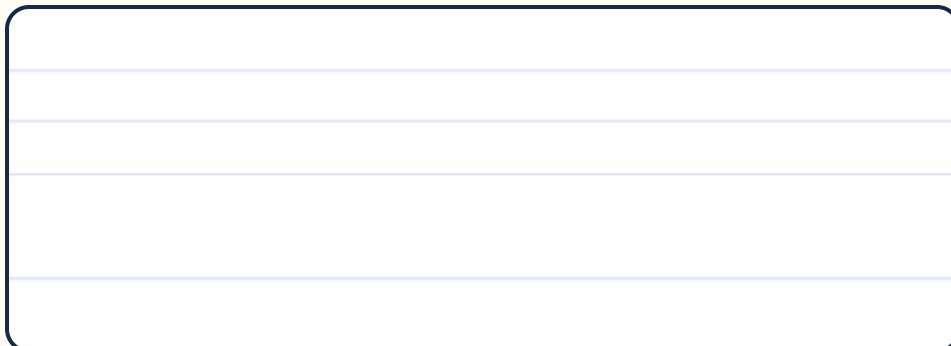
Need a boost?

- Values chart
- Ideology comparison chart
- Vocabulary: equality of opportunity, individualism

The difference that matters What does one version leave out, add or frame differently?



Who would react differently, and why



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Take it off the page Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.

AP Seminar

Team presentation: “How should limited public opportunities be allocated?” Members research lotteries, needs-based selection, merit and first-come systems in real programs, then present a recommendation to the crew.

Use

Case plus teacher-approved sources on allocation methods.

You'll make

Individual research report (800—1,000 words) plus 8-minute team presentation

Slide 1: The moment

What you'll say

Slide 2: The question

What you'll say

Slide 3: The evidence

What you'll say

Slide 4: Your ask

What you'll say

Done when

- ☐ Accurate research
- ☐ Multiple methods compared
- ☐ Synthesized recommendation
- ☐ Addresses the people left out

Need a boost?

- Lens assignments
- Comparison matrix
- Presentation storyboard



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Take it off the page

Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.

Pre-IB

Write a reflective essay on the question: can a fair process produce an unfair result? Use the crew's seat decision as the main example and one public allocation, such as a school admissions lottery, as a second. Then take part in a structured paired discussion and add a paragraph on what your partner changed in your thinking.

Use

The sign-up sheet, the dinner debate thread, the whiteboard options, the Markkula Center framework and one teacher-selected article on a public lottery.

You'll make

Reflective essay (500—600 words) plus a paragraph on the discussion

Thesis A claim someone could reasonably disagree with

Reason 1: claim, evidence, commentary

Reason 2: claim, evidence, commentary

Done when

- ☐ Distinguishes procedural fairness from outcome fairness precisely
- ☐ Uses two examples without treating them as identical
- ☐ Engages a real counterexample
- ☐ Discussion paragraph shows genuine listening

The strongest counterargument, and your answer

Why it matters beyond this case

Take it off the page

Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.

IB MYP

Investigate “What makes a fair share?” and design an allocation process for a real school resource.

Use

Case materials; global context: Fairness and development.

You'll make

Process design plus 200-word reflection

Option 1 What would it do?

Option 2 And this one?

Done when

- ☐ Statement of inquiry is clear
- ☐ Process has published criteria
- ☐ Tested and revised
- ☐ Reflection addresses fairness

My call One sentence.

Need a boost?

- Statement of inquiry frame
- Process design template

Because the evidence shows Point to a numbered item in the case file.

Who pays for this choice

What would change my mind



Prefer typing? Scan to do this in the online workspace.

Take it off the page

Ask how your school decides who gets limited spots.