

Case 19: What should Gia say in her two-minute comment?

Gia has two minutes to speak to the parks committee about the court lights, but her draft is three pages long.

On your own Read What happened and underline the sentence that says what item 4 proposes. About 4 minutes.



Gia and Mateo sit on a front stoop, each holding pages of notes.

Your role: You're the one holding the timer and listening for the request. **New skill:** Fit a request to the body's remit and time limit.

What happened

It is Tuesday, 5:40 p.m. The parks committee meets at 6. Item 4 on its agenda is a proposal to turn off the park's court lights at 8 p.m. The reason given is complaints about evening noise from nearby residents.

Gia, 21, wants to speak against item 4. It is her first time speaking at a public meeting. Each speaker gets two minutes. On Monday night, Gia wrote a three-page draft. When she reads page one out loud, it takes two minutes and forty seconds.

Mateo, 22, is timing her from a bench. He follows every word, but he cannot tell what she wants the committee to do. The draft also mentions a friend's private situation, and page two is about the bus. Everything Gia says will become part of the public record, along with her name.

Your question: What should Gia keep in her two-minute comment, and what should she cut?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example, then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Agenda item An agenda item is one topic listed on a meeting's official schedule of business.

En español: punto del orden del día

In this case: Item 4, "Evening court hours," proposes turning off the court lights at 8:00 p.m. Its action is a committee recommendation to the full council.

Remit A remit is the set of matters that a committee or other body is responsible for and can act on.

En español: competencia

In this case: The parks committee can recommend court hours. It cannot change bus routes, so page two of Gia's draft belongs with a different body.

Public record A public record is information a government keeps that anyone can ask to see, such as meeting comments.

En español: registro público

In this case: Comments and speakers' names become part of the public record. That is why Gia leaves her friend's private situation out of her comment.

Who is involved



Gia

Speaking at a public meeting for the first time

"I timed page one out loud. Two minutes forty. There are three pages."



Mateo

Timing Gia's practice run from a bench

"I followed all of it. I still couldn't tell you what she wants them to do."

Before you look at the evidence, what do you think Gia should say in her two minutes?

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reading passage

Public comment as civic craft

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 6 minutes.

Words to know

- **Agenda item:** An agenda item is one topic listed on a meeting's official schedule of business.
- **Remit:** A remit is the set of matters that a committee or other body is responsible for and can act on.
- **Public record:** A public record is information a government keeps that anyone can ask to see, such as meeting comments.
- **Proposal:** A proposal is a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet.
- **Decision-maker:** A decision-maker is the person or group with the power to make a particular choice.

The story: A comment built for its audience

Gia, 21, plans to speak against a parks committee proposal. Item 4 would turn off the park's court lights and close the lighted courts at 8 p.m., citing residents' complaints about evening noise. The agenda frames the action as a committee recommendation to the full council. Speakers sign up by 5 p.m., get two minutes each and become part of the public record by name. Written comments are accepted in advance.

Gia's draft reflects a common first-time pattern. It is three pages long, with page one alone at two minutes and forty seconds. It centers on a request no one can grant, "Please don't close the park," when the item concerns lights and hours. It spends a page on the bus, a real issue outside the committee's authority. It includes a friend's private circumstances. It also addresses the committee as "you guys" who "never listen to young people."

Mateo, 22, times a practice run from a bench and listens as a committee member would. His diagnosis is that the comment contains no request he could repeat back. His intervention is a question rather than an edit: if the committee remembers one sentence, what is it? The answer becomes the opening line.

Your role is to hold the timer and listen for the request.

❓ **Stop and think.** Why might an unrepresentative pool of commenters make Gia's comment more valuable, not less?

Remit, sequence and the public record

An **agenda item** is one topic listed on a meeting's official schedule of business. A **remit** is the set of matters that a committee or other body is responsible for and can act on. Effective participation depends on matching the request to both. Item 4 is about lighting and hours, and the committee's remit extends to recommending court hours. The bus is out of scope, so under Case 10's principle of routing problems to the responsible office, it goes elsewhere.

The case assembles earlier skills into a single practical sequence. Case 4 introduced the **proposal**, a change that someone suggests and that has not been approved yet, and the **decision-maker**, the person or group with the power to make a particular choice. The agenda reveals a two-step structure. The committee recommends, and the council decides. That tells Gia both what to ask for and that later chances to speak may exist.

Her revised comment follows a four-part structure that works in many settings. It identifies the item, reports an observation, explains its significance and makes a single actionable request. She counted twenty or thirty people on the courts between 8 and 9, many of whom work late, and she asks for lights until 9 on weekdays this summer. The request also engages the opposing written comment, from a resident who likes the courts but hears late noise at home and has children with school in the morning. A 9 p.m. compromise gives the committee a way to act on both concerns.

The last revision concerns privacy. A **public record** is information a government keeps that anyone can ask to see, such as meeting comments. Speaking publicly means accepting that one's own words become part of that record. It does not license publishing someone else's private situation.

❓ **Stop and think.** How does the committee's role as a recommending body change Gia's strategy?

Participation, representation and professional ethics

Public comment procedures are local. Seattle City Council, for example, accepts spoken comment in person or by phone and written comment by email, with up to two minutes per speaker (Seattle City Council, no date listed). The U.S. Department of Labor advises federal rulemaking commenters that comments become public and work best with specific experience and data (U.S. Department of Labor, no date listed).

Political scientists have studied who participates. Einstein, Palmer and Glick found from meeting minutes that local commenters are often unrepresentative of the broader community (Perspectives on Politics, October 14, 2018).

Participation, representation and professional ethics, continued

Sahn examined whether and how public comment connects to policy outcomes (American Journal of Political Science, August 31, 2024). Together, these studies suggest both the limits of comment and the value of new voices. Student groups in Newark and Philadelphia have brought their own research and district data to school boards (Chalkbeat Newark, November 26, 2025; Chalkbeat Philadelphia, April 3, 2026).

The pop-culture version is instructive by contrast. In the first episode of Parks and Recreation (NBC, April 9, 2009), Ann Perkins complains at a public forum about a construction pit, and Leslie Knope promises on the spot to build a park. In our reading, real meetings run on agendas, time limits and bodies that can decide only some things.

Professional codes describe both sides of the exchange. ASPA asks public servants to “inform the public and encourage active engagement in governance” (ASPA Code of Ethics, 2013). The NCA credo endorses “freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and acknowledgement of dissent” (NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, 2024).

 **Stop and think.** Where is the line between sharing lived experience and exposing someone else’s private life?

Sources

Real source | Seattle City Council | No date listed

Public Comment

Real source | U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division | No date listed

How to Comment on a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM)

Real source | Perspectives on Politics (Einstein, Palmer & Glick) | October 14, 2018

Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes

Real source | American Journal of Political Science (Sahn) | August 31, 2024

Public comment and public policy

Real source | Chalkbeat Newark | November 26, 2025

How a Newark student coalition is using its own research to press for change in schools

Real source | Chalkbeat Philadelphia | April 3, 2026

‘Not what democracy is all about’: Philly students slam school leaders’ approach to school closures

Real source | Peacock | 2009

Parks and Recreation

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document and write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 7 minutes.

Evidence A | Meeting agenda

Item 4 on the parks committee agenda

Item 4. Evening court hours. Proposal to turn off the court lights and close the lighted courts at 8:00 p.m. Background: complaints about evening noise from nearby residents. Action: committee recommendation to the full council.

Look closely: Circle the item number, the proposed time and the action.

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Comment rules

How to comment at the meeting

Sign up to speak by 5:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting. Each speaker has 2 minutes. Written comments may be submitted before the meeting. Comments and speakers' names become part of the public record.

Look closely: Underline the deadline, the time limit and what becomes public.

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Draft

Gia’s three-page draft (excerpt)

“The park is really important to everyone and closing it is a terrible idea. I go there all the time with my friends... You guys never listen to young people. Please don’t close the park.”

Look closely: Find the request. Does it match what item 4 proposes?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence D | Written comment

A comment from a nearby resident

The courts are good for the neighborhood, but the noise late in the evening carries into our apartment. We have kids with school in the morning.

Look closely: What does this resident like, and what is the problem?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Key idea: remit

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics, then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

A **remit** is the set of matters that a committee or other body is responsible for and can act on. The parks committee can make a recommendation about court hours. It cannot change bus routes. That is why Gia's comment should ask for something the parks committee can do.

An **agenda item** is one topic listed on a meeting's official schedule of business. Each committee, council or board sets its own rules for who can speak, when and for how long. Seattle City Council is one real example. Its public comment page describes speaking in person or by phone and signing up before the meeting. Each speaker gets up to two minutes, and written comments can be sent by email.

A short comment can do four jobs. It names the agenda item, shares something the speaker observed, says why it matters and ends with a clear request. Before adding personal details, check whether comments become public. A **public record** is information a government keeps that anyone can ask to see, such as meeting comments. At Gia's meeting, comments and speakers' names become part of the public record.

Professional standards

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)

ASPA Code of Ethics: 3. Promote democratic participation

"Inform the public and encourage active engagement in governance. Be open, transparent and responsive, and respect and assist all persons in their dealings with public organizations."

In plain words: ASPA's code asks people in public service to make it easy for every affected person to take part in decisions.

Question: The instructions allow written comments in advance. How does that help court users who cannot come at 6 p.m.?

Your answer

The written route _____. It still _____.

'Not what democracy is all about': Philly students slam school leaders' approach to school closures

Students testified at board meetings and used district data, real public comment with a clear destination.



How a Newark student coalition is using its own research to press for change in schools

Teens brought evidence and specific requests to their school board, the formula this case teaches.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Sort the evidence

On your own Follow a comment from the speaker to the final decision and fill in each box. About 6 minutes.

Follow a comment from the speaker to the final decision. Which body hears it, which body decides, and whose concerns reach the room?

Turn off the court lights at 8 p.m.?

Who decides

Full council: takes the final action

Under which rule

Who lives with it

Your way in

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose the best opening sentence, explain why and fix the two marked phrases. About 5 minutes.

Gia has two minutes on item 4. Which opening sentence gives the committee the most to work with?

- ☐ A “The park is really important to everyone, and closing it is a terrible idea.”
- ☐ B “Good evening. I’m Gia, and I’m commenting on item 4, the proposal to turn off the court lights at 8 p.m.”
- ☐ C “You guys never listen to young people, so I hope tonight is different.”

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student’s first draft

Hi, my name is Gia and I have lived in this neighborhood my whole life. The park is really important to everyone and closing it is a terrible idea. I go there all the time with my friends and it’s one of the only free things to do around here. My friend works late and this is the only time she can play and **1** she’s been going through a lot at home. You guys never listen to young people. **2** Please don’t close the park.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps and fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Prepare the crew’s input on item 4 as a small community group. Write a two-minute spoken comment for the parks committee and a follow-up email to the full council, which receives the committee’s recommendation.

Use: Case documents: the parks committee agenda, the comment instructions, Gia’s three-page draft, the nearby resident’s comment and Mateo’s question. Real sources: the Seattle City Council public-comment page and research on who speaks at local meetings (Einstein, Palmer and Glick, 2018).

You’ll make: Spoken comment, 2 minutes (about 260 words), plus a follow-up email of 120—180 words

Time: 75 minutes

- 1 Reread Evidence A and B. Note the item, the time limit and who decides after the committee.
- 2 Reread the resident’s comment in Evidence D. Plan one request that answers it.
- 3 Outline the comment: item, who you are, what you saw, why it matters and the request.
- 4 Write a spoken comment of two minutes or less on the Your draft page.
- 5 Read it aloud with a partner and a timer. Cut until it fits.
- 6 Start the follow-up email on the Your draft page. Finish it, 120 to 180 words, on lined paper.
- 7 Check both texts against the public-record checklist.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

Who hears it, and who decides

Comment outline

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

On your own Write your draft in the boxes, using your planner from the page before. About 25 minutes.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions, mark your level in each rubric row and write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your comment name item 4 and fit in two minutes when read aloud?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Does your request respond to the resident's noise concern?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Is your email addressed to the full council, the body that decides?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Did you leave out addresses, phone numbers and anyone else's private story?	☐ Yes ☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No facts.	☐ General claim about importance.	☐ One specific observation tied to the item.	☐ Observation plus acknowledgment of another perspective.
Reasoning	☐ Attacks the body.	☐ States a feeling only.	☐ Explains why the change matters.	☐ Weighs the concern and offers a middle path.
Audience & purpose	☐ Wrong body or no request.	☐ Request is vague.	☐ Names the item and a specific request.	☐ Request fits the body's remit and includes a follow-up.
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Shortens only.	☐ Removes private details and adds a request.	☐ Explains each cut in terms of time, privacy and purpose.

One change I made after the timed reading

[illegible]

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question, then complete the sentence frames. About 10 minutes.

- 1** The parks committee cannot fix the bus problem. Who should get that question instead?

- 2** How could Gia's comment respond to the resident's concern about noise?

- 3** What does Gia get from speaking, even if the committee recommends turning off the lights?

- 4** Court users who work late may miss a 6 p.m. meeting. How could their views reach the committee?

My take

My claim: ____.

My take, continued

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

The limit of the evidence is ____.

I would change my mind if ____.

Notes

Talk about this case at home

Case 19: What should Gia say in her two-minute comment?

In this case, Gia gets two minutes at a parks committee meeting to speak about a plan to turn off the court lights. Your student helped cut her three-page draft into a short comment with one clear request.

Questions to talk about

- 1 Who makes decisions about parks and other public spaces in a town or city?
- 2 What makes a short request easy for a listener to remember?
- 3 Why might someone leave a friend's story out of a public comment?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.