

Quality Rating of Issue Comments

The content of issue responses was evaluated to determine the quality of cognitive support that lay behind each expression of issue concern. Again a nine-point rating scheme was used.

An ill-informed, incoherent, inconsistent, very emotional or extremely simplistic discussion of an issue was ranked at the lowest level, Level 1. Responses placed in Levels 2 and 3 showed less emotionalism and more substance, but remained oversimplified, or were inaccurate or vague.

As clarity and specificity, informational support, realism, and differentiation (seeing various aspects of the problem) increased, higher scores were given. At the higher-rated levels (Levels 7, 8, and 9), respondents frequently comprehended the overall complexity of the issue problem and had a more detailed understanding of governmental processes that could be used to support their issue position. Special credit was given when important specific pieces of information were brought into the discussion (for example, mentioning that it would take a Constitutional amendment to change the Supreme Court's school prayer ruling, or that there was a Cuban government in exile, or that there was a Medicare Bill being considered in Congress).

The list of criteria that the author had before him and that he applied when "grading" issue comments into quality levels were: clarity and specificity, accuracy, coherence, differentiation, and degree of informational support.

The quality of any one individual's responses often varied from issue to issue. Therefore, separate scores were recorded for each of the issues mentioned (up to a maximum of three). These separate scores were then combined in a manner to be discussed later.

Representative examples of comments coded at various levels on this Quality Rating scale are attached.

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Problem Named</u>	<u>by Respondent</u>	<u>What the Respondent Would Like to See Done</u>
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Level 1

Religion in the schools -- Straighten the Supreme Court out so we can know their acts are being Constitutional.

Riots and demonstrations -- Jail about a million people - black and white - crack down and stay down that way.

Colored and white mixing -- Give colored their equal rights but have them separate.

Foreign aid -- Cut it right off.

Poverty -- Eliminate it.

Nuclear bombs -- Disarm the whole world.

Keep the Communists in their place -- Tell the goddamned Communists to keep their problems at home.

Editor's note: Another type of answer was also given a "1" rating. These respondents named an issue concern but readily admitted that they felt unable or unqualified to comment on how the problem might be handled.

Foreign problems - Communism -- Too deep for me to say - do away with Communism so they won't be quarreling and fighting all the time.

Cuba -- I'm not versed enough to say what should be done. I'm just glad I don't live close to them.

Stop the race riots and demonstrations -- I'm not qualified to answer that. I'll leave that to Mr. Johnson.

Level 2

Cuba -- The U.S. should have gotten into it earlier than they did.

Cold War -- Well, I'd like to see the Cold War ended in some way. The cost is tremendous to Americans.

Shouldn't have taken states' rights away from the people -- Make a change in that law, it wasn't right.

Supreme Court - Bible reading -- Cancel the Bill; let people and children pray where they want.

Civil rights -- Straighten it out and let everyone have his own rights.

Vietnam -- I don't know, but I hate to think of our boys getting killed when it isn't any of our business.

Berlin wall -- It's a standing monument to Communism. (See done?) It should be torn down!

Level 3

Foreign policy -- Well, I don't want them to push us into a war, but just maintain peace with a firm hand.

Aid to foreign countries -- Help the countries who want to keep themselves instead of blanket welfare to all countries like it is now; it's just a handout now.

Nuclear armistice -- Try to keep some of these other countries under control.

Vietnam -- Bring our men back home.

Race problem -- I think they should have stayed out of this nigger business and left it like it was. Here in this county they need to leave it like it is: separate schools, churches. It's the niggers that have good schools and churches so let them go to them.

Level 4

Castro -- They should back the exiled government of Cuba and wipe out Castro.

Government financing of schools -- Give aid to the schools that need it.

National debt -- Stop needless spending and try to balance the budget.

Vietnam -- Get in good and finish it or stay out. Don't lose our good young men a little at a time and not solve the situation.

Editor's note: Included in Level 4 are respondents who clearly identified a problem based on personal experience.

Medicare plan -- I really don't know, but we need some way that we can pay our hospital bills; they charge out of reason. [Seventy-year-old retired man.]

Poverty -- Something needs to be done about the poor man. He needs a way out. He can't hardly live. [Poor Black from the South.]

Unemployment -- Devise some way of creating jobs for people. [Unemployed worker.]

Space program -- Spend less money on this program and use it for more necessary things.

Vietnam -- Try to find out how we can help them; give the help and get out. The place isn't worth the lives of our boys.

Arms race -- Cut it out. Ban the bomb tests. Try to live in peace.

Population explosion -- Promote birth control.

Medicare -- The Medicare Bill should be passed for the elderly.

Negro problem -- Well, I think if they don't want them to mix with the white people then they should make them schools and the government should see to it that they have schools just as they did with the Indians.

Level 6

Taxes -- I think they should have another cut in taxes.
[Note that the respondent knew that there had been a tax cut during the Kennedy administration.]

Prayer in schools -- I don't know if they can do anything because the Supreme Court put it across; they are old men and ought to know better. States should have their own right to do what they want to.

Cuba -- Enforce a strict blockade.

Berlin wall -- I'd like to see them work out some compromise so the wall could be taken down.

Vietnam -- Get out of it. Because in the first place they took up something that France threw aside. [Note historical knowledge.]

Level 7

Job equalization -- If I am qualified for a job, I think laws should be passed to allow me to get the job. If I can hold a government job or a bank job, let me have it. [Black man from Montgomery, Alabama.]

Medicare -- Pass a bill to provide medical services for the old. Anyone who can pay should be excluded.

Poverty in the U.S. -- Find the causes of poverty and have active programs to eliminate it.

Farm supports -- If possible, I would like to see them lifted. Go back to a free enterprise system.

Foreign aid -- I would like to see the whole program reviewed and assessed. It should be cut now and eventually eliminated.

Civil rights -- Take it gradually and see to it that everyone has the same rights. If it is done gradually, people will accept it.

Vietnam -- I'd like to see an end to the fighting even if it meant pulling out. Some feel that's losing face, but I don't think we are accomplishing anything with the position we now have.

Level 8

School prayer -- If necessary, I think there should be a Constitutional amendment.

Cuba -- The U.S. is trying to restrict trade. I'm against war with them. As the years go by it might work itself out.

Nuclear disarmament -- Try again and again to come to a meeting with all nations concerned. They should be able to devise some method of checking each country.

Test ban treaty -- Since the Chinese Communists have come up with the bomb, I would like to see all countries with the bomb sign a treaty and stick to it.

Foreign aid -- I'd like to see them abolish it. I'm in favor of more church, Peace Corps, etc. in helping these people rather than money.

Civil rights -- Change the law that says Negroes can eat anywhere - you know that interstate thing - I can't go along with that. Also, I don't think companies should be made to hire Negroes if they don't want to.

Level 9

School prayer -- I didn't like the idea of the Supreme Court making prayers in school illegal. I think they should pass an amendment to the Constitution that prayers should not be forced on children, but can be said in school.

Medicare -- I'm in favor of Medicare; people are living longer. I think the present legislation, Kerr-Mills, is not the best solution. I think working in conjunction with Social Security would be best.

National medical plan -- Take the first step to help provide medical care for retired people. I think we need a nationalized medical plan such as New Zealand and Australia have, but it will have to come gradually - Medicare would be the first step.

Unemployment -- Efforts should be made at public works to train people in trade and jobs that they have no training and skills for now. Also, might try tax measures that might stimulate more investment.

Cuba -- Use more economic sanctions against them. Other South American countries should cut off Diplomatic relations with them.

Nuclear disarmament -- I would like to see them work out a meaningful nuclear disarmament with an adequate inspection system. We shouldn't trust China or Russia without inspection.

Vietnam -- Our handling of Vietnam was wrong but not necessarily that we should have stayed out. I really don't know - we're not well enough informed - I've heard mainly conflicting reports. If it could be ended by air attack, I wouldn't be against it, but it's my understanding that the problems are indigenous to the South. I don't necessarily believe we will lose all of Southeast Asia if South Vietnam goes.