10 “Moves” to Find Meaningful Tension

1. The truth about an issue (or text if a response paper) is not what one would expect or what it would appear to be on first reading
   • It is easy to assume (or to read the text) as…
   • It is tempting to understand (this issue) as…
   • At first glance (or read), (the topic) seems to be centered around…

2. The standard view or a published view about a text, issue, or topic needs challenging or qualifying.
   • While most believe X to be the case about this issue, a review of the research on X reveals Y with Z implication.
   • While the popular view is X, a careful consideration of Y leads to Z interpretation.

3. The text, issue, or topic has an interesting wrinkle or complexity that requires an explanation; an inconsistency or contradiction that requires a resolution; a gap or mystery that requires a solution; an ambiguity or obscurity—something that has two or more possible meanings—that needs an interpretation.
   • (The text or research on the issue) seems to contradict…
   • The complexity of X can only be explained by a consideration of Y.

4. A simple, common, or apparently obvious approach to a text, issue, or topic has more complex, unexpected, or unobvious implications—and perhaps explains more—than it may initially seem.
   • Though a common argument about the text is X, an unexplored implication of this interpretation is Y.

5. A critical debate exists on this text, issue, or topic, about which scholars hold conflicting views.
   • Although many prominent scholars have asserted X, others have argued that Y.
   • Though debate has raged on about this topic without major consensus…

6. The analysis of this smaller text, issue, or topic explains something of significance about a larger text, issue, or topic.
   • Taking a close look at X gives us a clearer understanding of the overall importance of Y.

7. A seemingly tangential or insignificant matter is actually central or essential.
   • X might appear to be an unimportant aspect of the text, but upon closer examination it offers important insights about Y.
   • Although this aspect of the work has been somewhat overlooked by critics, it is indispensable to understanding the text/theory/work/etc.
8. The critical knowledge thus far accumulated about a text, issue, or idea remains limited or blinded in some significant way.
   • Critical readings about X have failed to account for Y…

9. A feature or element of a text, issue, or topic that everyone accepts as unproblematic actually has significant problems.
   • [An aspect of this text] that contemporary theorists have not examined is actually worthy of close critical analysis because...
   • Examining X through critical lens Y reveals a number of issues that have previously gone unnoticed.

10. The standard ways a text or issue has been examined are limited or problematic. Other methods or approaches are necessary to fully understand the implications of this issue or text.
    • Established interpretations and readings of X remain inadequate; Y approach allows for a more complete picture of X.

Adapted from P. Kain’s “Problem, Motive, and Generating an Argument”