



ARGUMENTATION AND DEBATE

AN INTRODUCTION

A textbook for use in introductory debate classes and for programs seeking open access materials on argumentation and academic debate

2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	2
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	17
Chapter 4.....	28
Chapter 5.....	36
Chapter 6.....	43
Chapter 7.....	49
Appendix A: Building a Basic Policy Case.....	55
Appendix B: More on Topicality.....	57
Appendix C: Sample Propositions.....	59
Glossary.....	60

INTRODUCTION

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” - Aristotle

This book is intended as an introduction to major concepts in argumentation, logic, and public advocacy. It is built around the framework of *academic debate*, an activity that is practiced in schools around the world. While this book focuses on academic debate for simplicity, it will also frequently make reference to how the skills covered in these pages can translate to the broader world.

For most people, debate is an all-encompassing term that includes informal arguments, yelling matches, and intellectual exchanges. To people in the world of forensics, debate means a formalized form of argument that follows set rules to encourage fair play. A great deal has been written about the philosophy and practice of debate (this is frequently called debate theory), the thinking behind these rules, and frankly most of it is just common sense restated with big words.

As you read this book and participate in the larger world of debate, keep in mind that by the very nature of the activity of debate, nearly everything can be argued. This means that even the rules themselves can be bent as debaters argue for or against particular interpretations of the rules. While this textbook is going to lay out generalities about debate, understand that some of the people who participate in this activity will disagree with some of the content here. That's okay. That is, in fact, ideal.

Debate, ultimately, involves listening to a multiplicity of ideas. There is no good reason why that should not apply to differing ideas about debate, itself, as well.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS DEBATE?

“Academic debate is designed to train students in argumentation and critical thinking, public advocacy, and research.” - Robert C. Rowland

Background
Modern Debate
Key Terms
The Benefits of Debate
Takeaways

Background

This book will primarily discuss academic debate. Before understanding academic debate, however, it is important to review some of the rich history of debate in general.

The practice of public argumentation, or debate, is built into the fabric of many societies, and it shows up in many forms. Athenian society incorporated debate as a fundamental part of its governance, and for this reason debate is frequently considered an essential component of democracy. The “Three Doctrines Discussions” were state-sponsored debates in China that had wide-reaching implications for the Tang dynasty. While the exact “first debate” is impossible to establish definitively--and fittingly enough attempts to do so cause constant disagreement and discussion--a few basic points are fairly clear.

As noted, the traditional Western concept of democracy relied heavily on debate as a form of allowing people a chance to think through different positions and to have their own opinions heard in the process of decision-making. The ability to give testimony in a public space and to sway the opinions of others was highly valued, but only within limits. Figures such as Protagoras were feared not because of the fact that they, themselves, were skilled at debate. Instead, the danger posed by Protagoras was that he taught others how to make weak arguments seem stronger and in turn he was seen as corrupting the youth of the city. Interestingly, this is the same complaint that was leveled against one of Protagoras’s rivals, Socrates.

This leads to the next point, and it is one of the central tensions in debate. Public debate allows individuals and societies to evaluate arguments and gives them a chance to listen to differing views. Practiced responsibly, debate is a way to arrive at a sound course of action. Debate preserves the merits of democracy. However, there is always the fear in the background that those with greater skill in debate might be able to use that skill to sway others inappropriately. Sometimes, the fear goes, debate opens up the public to misinformation.

Finally, ranging from the ancient debates in Athens to the presidential debates of modern U.S. democracy, those who participate in debate often experience the activity differently than the lay public. An experienced debater, one who is accustomed to looking for flaws in arguments and who has become accustomed to the challenges of constructing a sound case, will obviously have a different appreciation for argument than someone who lacks this background. Perhaps more importantly, someone with skill at debate is more capable of spotting the various tricks of misdirection and acts of deceit that are available to modern-day sophist. This, ultimately was the reason Aristotle believed the study of rhetoric was so valuable--not so that the students could use the tactics of rhetoric themselves, but rather so that they could defend themselves against them when they were its target.

Modern Debate

Debate means many things to many people. Many times, when people say that they like to debate, what they mean is that they like to list reasons why they believe they are right, and then that they like to try to argue over, through, or around people who disagree with them. While on the simplest possible level this sort of interaction is a debate, it is different than what we mean when we talk about *academic debate*. Academic debate is a formal activity that has agreed upon rules and--more importantly--agreed upon goals.

Normally, people practice academic debate for a range of reasons. It's fun. It's a great way to learn and to practice critical thinking ability. It sharpens logical skills. It provides a way to develop related skills like public speaking and research.

One key way that academic debate is different than other forms of debate is the existence of a third party, an observer to the debate. While I might have a 'debate' with a coworker or family member, that disagreement is usually private. Academic debate is by nature public. One side, generally termed the affirmative, argues in favor of something (more on this later). Another side, generally termed the negative, argues against that same something. However, while this is common to many forms of debate, what is different about academic debate is that a third 'side' exists. This side has different names: the critic, the judge, the panel, or the audience (to name only a few).

This means that while many personal debates go unsettled (both 'sides' end up thinking that they were right and that there is no actual resolution to the conflict), academic debate does declare a 'winner.' The third party--the judge--evaluates the arguments made in during the debate and comes to a conclusion as to which side did a better job during the debate during its arguments. It is important to note that this does not mean that the judge agrees with that side. On a personal level, the judge might actually disagree completely. However, during the debate *as it was held*, the judge agrees that one side did a better job.

When a judge votes on the round based on his or her beliefs or perspective, instead of what happened in the round, that is called *intervention*, and debates are supposed to be judged without such an intrusion. In order to avoid *intervening*, a judge is supposed to vote based on what the debaters argued in the round.

Confused, yet?

The Nature of Debate

Debate is both a learning activity that can be used to explore an issue and it is a competitive activity with winners and losers. Sometimes, students will find themselves caught between trying to "win" a competition and trying to practice skills they know they will need later in other classes or in a professional setting.

Key Terms

Already, then, we have some ideas that are essential to understand in order to learn academic debate. As an important step in understanding debate, we will begin by defining five key terms. We will begin with five terms:

The Proposition: this is also called the *resolution*. It is the topic to be debated. A good proposition will be a complete sentence that is readily understood, and it will allow for a relatively equal number of arguments in support of it and against it. Generally, debaters do not get to decide which stance they take on the proposition. Instead, academic debaters will be expected to argue in favor of the proposition and against it. For example, if the proposition states “Cats make better pets than dogs,” then debaters should be ready to argue in favor of cats or in favor of dogs.

The Affirmative: this is the side that must argue in support of the proposition. The affirmative is sometimes an individual or sometimes a group working together, but the affirmative must support the proposition. Typically, the affirmative will be allowed some freedom in defining any vague words in the proposition, but the affirmative does not get to change things. For example, if the proposition states “Cats make better pets than dogs,” it would be tough to imagine a scenario where “cats” could be defined as “all pets besides canines” without raising concerns.

The Negative: this is the side that must argue against the proposition. Normally, the negative has a bit of an advantage in that it all the negative really needs to do is tear down the affirmative, while the affirmative needs to go so far as to make arguments that withstand scrutiny. More on this later, though.

The Judge: this is the person who will decide the winner of the round. In academic debate, because teams “keep score”, this matters. For example, at a particular competition, there might be awards for teams or individuals that win more debates than they lose. Note that each judge will look at things differently, if for no other reason than because they are people, and people are different. However, most debate formats have two expectations for all judges. The first is the judge is expected to be *fair*; this term has a lot of nuance, but it is general enough to wait. The second expectation is the judge is supposed to be *tabula rasa*. This term merits a definition before going any deeper.

Tabula Rasa: literally a 'blank slate,' the idea behind a judge in academic debate being *tabula rasa* is that the judge is supposed to leave any personal biases and preconceived notions out of the debate. To continue the example of the proposition "Cats make better pets than dogs," a debate judge who was a loving guardian to eleven cats and who had been attacked by a family dog as a child would still be expected to decide the round on the basis of the speeches given in the round, not on the basis of anything from that admittedly rich personal history. A debate judge is judging the debate, not the topic or the issue.

So, putting it all together, an academic debate involves a predetermined topic (the proposition) that will be argued by two opposing sides (the affirmative and the negative). Each side of the debate is fixed into a set position that must be defended. As mentioned, the judge should decide a winner or a loser based on what is said during the debate, not the side that the judge feels is "correct."

Of course, it is actually far more complicated than that.

The Benefits of Debate

This all probably sounds very complicated and very hard. Why do it? This chapter opens with a quotation from Robert C. Rowland, an expert in argumentation and rhetoric who at one point was a national champion in debate, himself. While there are many reasons to study debate, Rowland does a good job of highlighting some of the best reasons.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a skill that is prized by employers and educators alike. It is also a skill is central to academic debate, and a reasonable amount of research exists suggests that students who actively participate in academic debate actually enhance their critical thinking skills through practice and competition. On a certain level, this makes sense. After all, if you are going to spend long periods of time studying arguments, pulling them apart, and then actively working at either improving or defeating those arguments, then the this practice would probably improve critical thinking almost by accident.

In fact, improving critical thinking skills is one of the most important reasons to study debate. Just as chemistry classes frequently have lab components wherein students have the chance to watch and study chemical reactions, debate is a chance to make arguments, see how others react, and then learn what went well and what went poorly. In this way, the debater is also an audience member, and that willingness to listen to other arguments and to learn from both successes and failures is a key part of what makes debate a worthwhile activity.

Advocacy

One of the most compelling reasons to study debate is to gain a voice. Whether there are issues that you already care about and want to learn how to do a better job of expressing

Being Judged

In most forms of debate outside of the world of academic competition, the presence or absence of a 'judge' is an important consideration. In some cases, there is no judge and two parties are arguing with each other hoping to convince one another.

However, in many cases there *is* a judge. If two different people have ideas for where a business should invest its time and energy, they might end up advocating their positions to a 'judge' in the form of a manager, executive board, or CEO. Likewise, friends trying to talk their peers into different evening plans have a 'judge' of sorts, as well.

yourself on them or if you are simply interested in learning more about the world and making a positive change, then the ability to research, form, and deliver an argument is fairly important.

Employers want graduates with better communication skills, and the ability to speak up for yourself and for those things you care about is valuable privately, as well. This leads to the concept of public advocacy.

Research

The ability to find more information about a subject is central to learning. However, it is often difficult to evaluate new information without context. If you read a news article or a post on social media, it might *seem* interesting or valid, but actually examining it critically can be difficult without a frame of reference.

Debate provides a frame of reference. By preparing for debates, you will develop research habits of avoiding questionable sources because being wrong has a direct, tangible consequence in the form of losing rounds. By contrast, digging for more information and discovering the most accurate information can provide a tangible benefit. This sort of positive feedback can help you to develop research habits that will stay with you well past any debate tournament.

Takeaways

While debate is an academic activity which tries to teach students a range of skills. However, it is also a competitive activity like a sports match, in which a winner and a loser are determined based upon a set of rules. Being able to participate in this form of competitive debate has been shown to teach valuable skills.

- Debate because it is fun
- Debate because it teaching you things
- Debate because it gives you confidence in advocating for yourself and for things you care about.

Suggested Exercise

Try practicing the concept of *Tabula Rasa* by looking at contentious issues and setting aside your own beliefs and opinions for a moment. Instead of thinking about your own feelings, read a pair of opinions on a topic and try to evaluate which one does a better job of making its case independent of what, exactly, is being advocated.

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CHAPTER 2

FUNDAMENTALS OF ARGUMENT

“A mature society understands that at the heart of democracy is argument” -
Salman Rushdie

Background

Toulmin Model

Argument in Academic Debate

Argument in Public Advocacy

Key Terms

Takeaways

Background

If debate involved having two different sides engage each other on arguments, then it is important for debaters to know what an argument is, in the first place. Argument is another term with a broad range of possible meanings. However, most definitions of argument include a couple of key ideas. The first is that argument usually includes an exchange of ideas. An argument is not simply one person stating an opinion. Instead, the viewpoint of the person engaging in argument must interact with something or someone. Second, argument involves explaining the reasons to support the viewpoint that is being expressed.

Taken together, an effective argument needs to express reasons to support a viewpoint, and those reasons must either respond to the ideas of someone else or they must invite others to understand and to discuss those reasons. This means that an informal argument that proves something is slightly different than a traditional 'proof' in the same sense as a logical or geometric proof. In fact, an argument actually very closely resembles the scientific method.

In the scientific method, a question is asked, resulting in a suggested answer to that question--the hypothesis. On the basis of the hypothesis, predictions are made. For example, when scientists hypothesized that DNA had a helical structure, they then predicted that it would have an 'X' shape on X-rays. Then, those predictions are tested, and the results of the tests are analyzed. At each step, a responsible scientist is supposed to consider other explanations. What other hypotheses answer the question? Can I predict results that would make me doubt the hypothesis? Do my test results support another answer better than my hypothesis?

In argument, as in the scientific method, it is responsible to invite other opinions and ideas into the discussion. If I want to argue that a particular law should or should not be adopted, I might ask why someone would disagree with the law, or why someone would want it. I might ask what predictions I can make about unintended consequences of the law, for better or for worse. While each of these 'what if' and 'what about' scenarios can teach me something, it is very easy to get lost. Therefore, it is helpful to have some sort of framework in place to understand an argument.

Debate and STEM

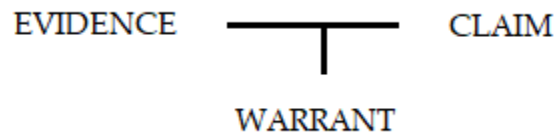
At the time that this textbook is being written, there is a major push in educational institutions toward the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, collectively called the STEM fields. While that push is certainly understandable given the way those studies have come to dominate the job market, that emphasis forces a strange disconnect between those subjects and the arts. Debate, for example, teaches the underlying skills needed for science and engineering in a way that some students will find more accessible than the chemistry lab.

Moreover, engineers frequently find themselves needing to communicate their ideas' validity. Debate as an activity helps show that STEM is actually STEAM, and that the arts are inseparable from their academic counterparts.

The Toulmin Model

One of the most widespread models of argument around is the one proposed by Stephen A. Toulmin, and so it will be given here as a frame for argument. However, there are other models, and a number of those models are preferred by some debaters, coaches, and judges. Understand this what matters most is that an argument is treated as a complete event, not simply an assertion.

Toulmin explains that an argument consists of a claim supported by evidence or 'grounds' of some kind. The evidence is connected to the claim by a warrant, and that warrant can often be strengthened by having its own backing. In fact, each step can expand and get more complicated. The important thing to note, here, is that simply making an assertion is not enough. Instead, each claim should be supported by evidence and by an explanation of how that evidence supports the claim.



Components of the Toulmin Model

What does the Toulmin model of argument look like in application to debate?

The Claim: this is not necessarily the proposition. Instead, it could be a reason to support or reject the proposition (sometimes called a *contention*). In countering the claim that "Cats make better pets than dogs," it is possible to make the claim that "dogs are friendlier than cats." However, this is also up for discussion and debate. As much as you might or might not agree with that statement, the way that argument includes the exchange of ideas means that you must provide more than just the opinion.

Evidence: this is the 'grounds' or 'support' given to elevate the claim from opinion to argument. Not all evidence is equal, but for the purposes of understanding the term, each of the following is kind of evidence:

- My neighbor's cat was mean
- Dogs are derived from pack animals whereas cats are solitary hunters
- Dogs release greater levels of the 'love' hormone oxytocin after playing with humans than cats do, demonstrating a stronger emotional and chemical reaction.

Different forms of debate have differing expectations for evidence. Some forms of debate will expect that any claim is backed by research, and that research itself can be called into question. Other forms of debate are less formal. What matters for the student participating in debate is that the level of evidence given is appropriate for the setting.

The Warrant: this is the assumption or reasoning that connects the evidence to the claim. In informal argument, the warrant sometimes goes unstated. However, in debate it is frequently important to spell out any connection explicitly. Note that not all warrants will be accepted, and sometimes a weak work will undermine an entire argument.

- “My neighbor’s cat was mean” might depend on the assumption that the neighbor’s cat is representative of all cats, which is problematic in terms of evidence or proof.
- “Dogs are derived from pack animals whereas cats are solitary hunters” seems to assume that dogs have retained some sort of friendliness from their pack days while simultaneously assuming that cats have not had a chance to develop any friendliness because they are solitary hunters.
- The oxytocin study generalizes a specific hormone associated with love in humans to friendliness in different mammal species.

It’s important to note that in debate terms, the *warrant* sometimes refers to the evidence and the warrant working together.

Argument in Academic Debate

From the perspective of debate, this means that an argument needs to have at least three components in place to be complete, and each of those components represents a place that other debaters can try to find weakness. A poorly-worded claim could be refuted by showing that it does not apply to the debate. An affirmative claim that supports the proposition could be called into question by a negative who is able to demonstrate a flaw in the evidence that is being used (or vice versa). Either side could call into question the warrants used to connect the evidence to the claims.

It should be obvious by now that in most debate (both in formal academic debate and in general public advocacy), it is important to go into detail and to support arguments thoroughly. However, even though a debater will want to include as much detail as possible, there are two major limits on the ability to provide this detail, and the first of those is *time*.

Debate rounds are not endless, and each speech in a given round is typically limited to a very specific amount of time. This need to fit complex arguments into small amounts of time creates one of the central tensions in debate, and it frequently forces debaters to be concise and clear in their arguments. There are also other, less positive, impacts as well, but understanding these impacts requires understanding a second issue that is central to academic debate.

The second component is the concept of the *drop*. In debate, in order for everything to be fair, each side is expected to respond to the arguments the other side makes, and if a debater does not respond to an argument in the next possible speech, then that argument is said to have been ‘dropped.’ An overwhelming majority of the debaters, coaches, and experienced judges out there will tell you that dropped arguments are considered to have been conceded. In other words, if one side makes an argument that the other side does not respond to, then the side making the argument is considered to have won that point. Why? Ultimately, it’s a matter of fairness. If you know you have the last speech in the round, for example, you could save all of your really good responses until the end, when the other side has no chance to respond.

Audience Awareness

One important aspect of the Toulmin model of argument is that it reminds us that while we might believe that some evidence is conclusive, not everyone is going to agree. This is because different audiences make different assumptions about what is important and what level of proof is needed to back certain claims.

Anyone arguing for an audience (in a public domain, a classroom, or a debate round) needs to be aware that evidence is not supposed to convince the person *making* the argument. Instead, the real goal is convince someone else. That requires being sensitive to other ideas and positions.

All of this means that debaters have to be able to make complete arguments in very short amounts of time, and that they need to be able to respond to all of the arguments their opponents make while still defending their own.

Ultimately, each debate consists of a specific number of speeches, and those speeches represent the entire chance each side has to develop its arguments. Collectively, those speeches add up into a “debate round” or “round.” By the end of a round, the affirmative must provide enough reasons to support the proposition that the judge feels comfortable awarding the win to the affirmative side.

On the other hand, in most forms of debate, in order for the negative to win, the judge must believe that the negative has either invalidated the proposition or has at least prevented the affirmative from validating it. Both sides will begin this process by building their cases, which is the next chapter.

The Need for Speed?

The obvious problem that results from the need to offer complete arguments on both your points and your opponent’s points within a limited time frame is that it is possible for a team to lose an argument just because they didn’t have time to address it. As a result, debaters are sometimes compelled to speak more quickly than they otherwise would. This then forces their opponents to speed up to cover all of *their* arguments. And so on.

Eventually, it gets to the point where debaters are expected to speak at a rate that is far from conversational. While a conventional “discussion” speed is around 120-150 words per minute, it is not uncommon for some forms of debate to see speakers reaching a rate of 350 words per minute at a ‘minimum’. Whether this is a problem or a skill is in the eyes and ears of the beholders.

Argument in Public Advocacy

Not every debate takes place in a competitive round, but debates taking place in a public sphere still have very tangible, very real limitations. Some of these limitations are identical to those found within academic debate. For example, it is often essential that an advocate explains not just the position being advocated, but also the reasons that position is important to the audience. In this way, the advocate is providing a claim, a warrant, and data.

Likewise, even without formal time limits, there are very real limits to the attention spans of most audience members. Some estimates of college student attention spans generally hover around 10 minutes before focus begins to drift, and while there are studies showing that students *can* focus longer, even the most ambitious educator has found that there is an upper limit of around 30 minutes to hold someone's attention. That is a real-world limit on how long a would-be advocate has to make an effective point.

Key Terms

Contention: a claim made in support of or in opposition to the proposition. Well-structured contentions will be supported by both evidence and reasoning, and most judges prefer it if the contention also includes an *impact* step, making it clear how the claim affirms or negates the proposition.

Drop: an argument (in part or whole) that one side fails to address. Dropping an argument usually means conceding it to the other side, giving one's opponent a significant advantage in the debate.

Flow: the written record of the debate is called the *flow*, and being able to keep a good flow is an essential skill. It is basically a rigorous form of note-taking. The term is also used to refer to the events of the debate that the record represents. Something is *dropped* from the flow if it is ignored after being brought up (see above).

Round: the complete set of speeches given by the affirmative and negative in a particular debate competition. It is the basic unit of debate, much like a game or match. Wins and losses are awarded on the basis of rounds, and rounds are usually handled independently of one another. Thus, an argument given in Round 1 is part of the debate for all of the speeches in that round, but Round 2 starts over again.

Warrant: in the Toulmin model, the reasoning and assumptions that justify using evidence in support of a claim. In debate terms, a warrant sometimes refers both to the reasoning and to the evidence.

Takeaways

Argument requires more than an opinion. It requires interaction with other ideas and viewpoints.

- Each claim is supported by evidence
- Evidence needs to be connected to claims by use of warrants
- Debaters need to find a balance between detail and concision.

Suggested Exercise

Think of a topic you are knowledgeable about. Make several claims about that topic, providing evidence for each claim and trying to explain why and how that evidence supports the claims involved.

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CHAPTER 3

BUILDING A CASE

“The practice of narrative and argument does not lead to invention, but it compels a certain coherence of thought.” – Jean Piaget

Background
Resolution Analysis
The Prima Facie Burden
Common Negative Case Strategies
Additional Key Terms
Takeaways

Background

Structurally, a debate consists of a set number of opposing speeches. For example, a debate might begin with the affirmative side making arguments in favor of the Proposition. After this, the negative will like make arguments against the Proposition. These speeches will have strict time limits, and they will have specific responsibilities. These are both called *constructive* speeches, meaning that they set up the arguments that will be discussed for the rest of the round. After a certain number of constructive speeches (it varies by format, or type, of debate), there are rebuttals. In rebuttals, the affirmative and negative try to make arguments about things that have already been said. However, they also are usually not supposed to introduce any new arguments.

Because the first speeches are responsible for setting up the rest of the debate, understanding these speeches is a good place to begin. The constructive speeches are responsible for laying out the “cases”, or central arguments, of each side. Cases begin with the Proposition. The affirmative has the burden of constructing an argument that supports the proposition while the negative has the burden of (at least) neutralizing the affirmative if not explicitly countering the proposition. For obvious reasons, then, building a case starts with the Proposition.

For students familiar with essay writing, the proposition serves as a sort of *thesis* while the case represents the actual content of the essay itself. Viewed another way, the affirmative case is where initial arguments are laid out in support of the proposition. The negative case is where initial arguments are provided opposing the proposition. These cases will serve to set up the future speeches in a debate.

Resolution Analysis

Any case should begin with defining the terms of the Proposition and then explaining how those terms frame the debate. In many forms of debate, such as Parliamentary Debate, this step should also include an indication of whether or not the resolution is viewed as a metaphor, what type of debate the resolution calls for (fact, value, or policy), and what sorts of arguments might or might not be made by each side. In other forms of debate, the type of resolution is a given (for example, some forms of debate only consider policy resolutions).

A Sample Format (Parliamentary Debate)

1st Affirmative Constructive = 7 minutes
1st Negative Constructive = 8 minutes
2nd Affirmative Constructive = 8 minutes
2nd Negative Constructive = 8 minutes
Negative Rebuttal = 4 minutes
Affirmative Rebuttal = 5 minutes

*After 40 minutes and 6 speeches, the
“round” is over.*

Types of Resolutions

Metaphorical debate occurs when the proposition is taken to mean something indirectly. For example, a Proposition might read “In this case, a stitch in time saves nine.” It is highly unlikely that a 40-minute debate about sewing shut a tear in a pair of jeans is about to take place. Instead, the affirmative is likely to frame this proposition as a debate about timely action, and is therefore likely to define a particular case (e.g. dealing with inflation in the economy or with military conflict somewhere in the world) where timely action might prevent the need for greater action.

Metaphorical propositions ask for an interpretation based on “common understanding” or “intent.” They are the most open to interpretation, but interpretations should still be predictable. In the prior example: “A stitch in time saves nine” is a call for preventative action, so the affirmative might argue that a national database of terrorist sympathizers is worth the lost liberty and privacy because of the resulting safety. Alternately, the same metaphor could lead to an urge for increased vaccination of children. Metaphorical debates can still fall into the same three categories as other debates. Those categories are fact, value, and policy.

Fact: a fact debate states a proposition *is*. It requires that the teams provide concrete examples that prove the resolution to be valid or not. Typically, debaters will argue that the proposition is “more true than false” or that “a preponderance of evidence” supports the resolution. Fact resolutions will often come down to who has the best range of examples at their disposal, and who can turn the other side’s examples to their favor. In many circles, fact debate is avoided because it can be difficult to manage a fair and balanced proposition--if something is purely about evidence with little interpretation, there is less room for disagreement. In debate terms, this means one side will have more “ground” available to make arguments.

Outside of academic debate, however, debates over issues of fact are widespread. Many times these debates come down to conflicts over evidence and matters of definition, but establishing the facts of a particular subject is an important part of many professions (e.g. Does a particular chemical harm the environment? Is a specific type of demonstration illegal?).

Value: a value debate suggests a preference, or urges priority to be given to a particular thing or concept. No plan is required, as action is not being advocated. Typically, the idea is that one thing should be valued over another thing because of their impacts on an outside factor. For example, perhaps privacy should be valued over security (or vice versa) because one of these two things is argued to provide for a greater overall quality of life.

Value debates are oftentimes philosophical in nature, in that instead of being permeable to evidence, they require certain axiomatic assertions (such as the idea that all life is equally precious) in order to make broader inferences.

Policy: a policy debate requires that the affirmative advocates an action. A policy case must demonstrate that there are harms within the status quo and it usually must also suggest that some barrier inhibits these harms from being overcome. Then, the team must state a clear plan to be enacted by a specific agency. They must demonstrate that the plan solves the harms that they claim exist. Ideally, they will offer additional advantages, as well.

Note that because policy cases are very similar to issue advocacy in the world outside of academic debate (arguing for laws to be passed or repealed, for example), policy cases are frequently the easiest to find in written form outside of the world of debate. A quick look at advocacy websites for major issues will frequently include harms in the status quo, an explanation of an agent that can make those harms better, and a proposed course of action with a clear explanation of how that action solves the problem at hand. Any effort at advocacy that fails to offer at least those steps is probably a little suspect (see Prima Facie burden, below).

Policy Cases

Policy debate is by far the most common form of debate that students will encounter. Not only is there an entire format of debate dedicated just to the debate of policy topics, other forms of debate tend to discuss policy steps as well. For example, legislative debate involves debating specific laws--or policies--and parliamentary debate frequently tends to have propositions that are policy-oriented.

For more on Policy Cases, see Appendix A

Definitions

One of the affirmative's greatest advantages is that it gets to set up the initial terms of the debate. Because the affirmative speaks first, and because the affirmative sets up the initial case, it is the affirmative who provides the initial understanding of what the topic means. In each of the examples given so far, there are words that most people understand, but those words have some wiggle room.

Think back to the introduction and the proposition that "Cats make better pets than dogs." If the affirmative defines cats as house cats, the debate will go in one direction. If the affirmative instead defines cats as all felines (includes lions and tigers), then the debate will be very different. There are limitations to the affirmative's freedom to define terms, but ultimately, those limitations are not enough to keep this from being a major advantage.

When the affirmative is providing definitions, the definitions should be both *fair* and *predictable*. This means that while one dictionary's definition might be favored over another, or while there is a certain amount of latitude in how loosely or tightly key terms are used in a way that matches common definitions, a debater should avoid getting unnecessarily clever. The author recalls judging a debate performance where one debater was overly inventive on a debate about "school funding," claiming that the proposition referred to groups of fish.

Weighing Mechanism

One of the important things to remember is that debate is a competitive activity, meaning that there has to be a way to “win” each round. Because each side will typically make a number of good arguments (and, honestly, a number of bad arguments) in any given round of debate, the judge is going to need some way of sorting through these arguments and *weighing* them. A few of these were mentioned in the prior section. For example, an affirmative debating a claim of fact might suggest the weighing mechanism of “more true than false.” This means that the affirmative is asking the judge to evaluate whether or not the proposition was proven to be (generally) valid more often than not. This is obviously a more reachable goal than proving the resolution to be absolutely true, all of the time.

Some debaters prefer to include the weighing mechanism within their resolution analysis. This makes sense, because often times the weighing mechanism is connected to the type of proposition being argued. Others, however, offer a weighing mechanism as a separate point. In any case, debaters should always offer a clear weighing mechanism. Sample weighing mechanisms include:

A Preponderance of Evidence: this weighing mechanism asks the judge to evaluate the round on the basis of which side has the strongest evidence. Strength of evidence can include the amount of evidence, the quality of the research, and how well-connected that evidence is to the arguments it is used to support.

Net Benefits: common to policy debates, this asks the judge to consider whether or not the benefits of enacting the policy in question are greater than any potential costs or harms. For those familiar with philosophy, this suggests a form of utilitarian judgment, in which the judge is asked to consider which side (the affirmative or the negative) presents the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals. For example, a policy might hurt a handful of people but save millions of lives—the standard offered here is that the ‘moral math’ favors the millions.

Quality of Life: this weighing mechanism is similar in some ways to ‘net benefits,’ but it is often paired with another value, such as ‘the side which best upholds the quality of life viewed through the lens of justice.’ In this case, the judge would basically be asked to evaluate the round on the basis of which side does a better job of arguing to justice as applied in peoples’ lives.

Each of these weighing mechanisms is nothing more than an abbreviated way of asking the judge to use a particular mental framework when deciding who won or lost the round. In fact, these weighing mechanisms are themselves open for debate within the round, and *framework debates*, disagreements over which weighing mechanism should hold sway in the round, are commonplace.

The glossary includes other terms connected to *Weighing Mechanism* and *Framework*, including *Criterion* and *Value Premise*. However, for most forms of debate, the differences among these different labels is less important than making sure that some sort of guideline is in place that serves this general function for the debate round.

The Prima Facie Burden

Literally “at first appearance,” this simply means that an affirmative in debate has an obligation to demonstrate that the issue is worth debating. Fundamentally, anyone upholding the Proposition must show in the first speech that a) the topic is worth debating, b) that the debate has legitimate ground available to all sides, c) and that for policy cases, any ‘stock issues’ are met. Meeting a prima facie burden is not sufficient cause to win the round, but it is an essential component in the eyes of most judges.

First Impressions

In the world outside of academic debate, having the ability to define terms and frame the debate is also key. An overwhelming majority of people tend to accept the ‘first version’ of events that they are offered, and future accounts are evaluated based on that first version. This is sometimes called the primacy bias, and it provides at least some validation for the idea that first impressions matter.

Merit

In order for the topic to merit debate, the affirmative must establish that it is significant in some way. The topic must be justified. In policy debates, this is worked into the harms/status quo stock issue. In other debates, it functions more like a justifying statement that might be used in another form of speech, like an oratory.

Ground

In order to be fair, the affirmative team must leave ground for the negative to debate. The affirmative team should not argue a tautology, and they also have to provide clear limits for the debate. Otherwise, a Topicality argument might appear. Frequently, the affirmative will be asked to pass the *bright-line* test. A “bright-line” is a point of distinction between two arguments. Generally, it is used to indicate a division of *ground*. In practical terms, this means that the affirmative generally must provide a clear distinction between its case and the ground left to the opposition.

Stock Issues

In policy cases, there are certain issues that all cases are usually expected to address. These stock issues are *harms* (something is wrong), *significance* (the thing that is wrong matters enough to be worthy of a debate), *inherency* (the situation is not going to fix itself), and *solvency* (the affirmative team actually fixes the problem and addresses the harms). Some also consider topicality to be a stock issue, but that is addressed in the next chapter on its own.

Generally, the affirmative is considered to have lost if it does not meet their prima facie burden. This is especially true of stock issues. It is not enough to simply show that harms exist—the affirmative must show that they solve those harms at an acceptable cost. A common mistake is to ‘give in’ to the prima facie case and to hold the negative team to an unreasonable burden.

Common Negative Case Strategies

So far, this chapter has focused on how a case is built by an affirmative side, and that is more or less because the affirmative will start the debate. However, there are common arguments available to the negative, as well.

Counter Contentions

The negative side in debate will typically have a pretty strong understanding of the topic being debated. This understanding could be the result of researching the topic in advance, it could be the result of on-the-spot research, or it could be a byproduct of the debater in question being generally well-versed and well-educated.

In any event, a negative will frequently know enough to construct good reasons to oppose the Proposition before the affirmative ever starts speaking in the round. A negative case will typically involve contentions that are “ready to go” depending on what the affirmative says. Sometimes, these counter contentions will directly oppose arguments by the affirmative. Sometimes, they will be independent of arguments that the affirmative brings up (and this will vary from round to round, because each affirmative case is likely to be at least a little different). Having well-thought-out counter contentions ready is important for any debater, but especially for a new debater who might otherwise struggle to find things to say.

Inherency

The issue of inherency has come and gone from debate, and while some members of the debate community insist that it is important, others are equally insistent that inherency is outdated. In the simplest possible terms, inherency insists that the affirmative proves that there is a need to have the debate, and that the situation is not going to fix itself.

Having this step requires the affirmative to provide a lot of complex argumentation on how and why the status quo is so bad—in essence, the affirmative must explain the full cause of the problem. That can detract from a meaningful debate. On the other hand, if an affirmative is not required to explain inherent barriers to the plan, then the affirmative can sometimes make very small changes to the status quo and not risk negative consequences.

Disadvantages in Policy Debate

Because a policy debate forces the affirmative to advocate for a course of action (i.e. the affirmative must advocate for a policy), the negative has the opportunity to argue the disadvantages of such a policy. While many policies have specific disadvantages, certain disadvantages are fairly typical whenever someone tries to do something new. Debaters should not be too reliant on a single disadvantage, and they should make sure that the disadvantage in question actually is a consequence of the advocated policy. However, the negative should try to offer disadvantages when possible.

Presumption

Simply put, the judge and the competitors were all doing just fine before they were given the Proposition. In the world outside of academic debate, people tend toward accepting 'what is.' In academic debate, the status quo (the way things stand) is presumed to be fine until the affirmative proves otherwise. Therefore, in many forms of debate, the negative is presumed to have won the round until the affirmative proves the need for the Proposition.

Big Government/Paternalism: the affirmative plan is bad because it increases the role of government. This increased role of government limits individual liberty and increases dependence on the government. As a consequence, society becomes more totalitarian. Likewise, people who are dependent on the government tend to be less productive and they tend to make more mistakes, expecting others to bail them out.

Consumerism: the affirmative plan is bad because it encourages consumerism. By increasing the rate of consumption, and by encouraging others to do the same, the plan depletes natural resources that a) could be better used elsewhere and b) might be irreplaceable. Increasing consumerism has the added disadvantage of causing people to set poor priorities.

Hegemony: the affirmative plan is bad because it increases the power of the United States (or the Western World, or whatever). This is bad because it reduces the diversity of society, it centralizes power and deprives developing countries of human rights, and it creates power blocks of the kind that tend to bring about large-scale armed conflicts. Blind increase in U.S. hegemony is bad even for the U.S., because it increases the resentment others have for the U.S. and this resentment encourages others to boycott U.S. products, to seek trade with others, or to retaliate with military and terrorist attacks.

Opportunity Cost: the plan is bad because it uses resources or political capital best spent elsewhere. For example, if a plan calls for the distribution of condoms in schools, the negative might argue that this will aggravate conservative parents. Those same parents will now resist the school board on perfectly rational ideas because they are aggravated. Alternately, the 'cost' could be in actual dollars, and the negative might argue that those dollars are best spent elsewhere.

Backlash: similar to opportunity cost, this disadvantage claims that the plan is bad because it will create a backlash among a particular group. That backlash will have negative side effects (in the earlier example, perhaps parents will pull their children out of schools). This side effect should in some way negate the advantages of the plan and should also create distinct harms.

Note that these disadvantages can also apply in non-policy debate in other forms. For example, a value debate over the role of government might find itself covering the same sorts of arguments that are necessary to explain the "paternalism" disadvantage.

Additional Key Terms

Harms: also called the disadvantages or costs. Harms are problems caused by following or not following a given side. For example, the affirmative might argue that harms exist in the status quo (in the way things are, see below), while the negative might argue that greater harms or costs would result from changing the status quo.

Most public advocacy begins with a *harm* that is being addressed by the issue being advocated. In fact, being able to clearly explain a *harm* is an essential skill to motivate change in most contexts.

Link Story: the link story is the chain of reasoning that connects an observation made in the debate to a larger issue, such as the weighing mechanism or the Proposition itself. One specific kind of link story is the *impact*, when a debater explains exactly how something said by one side or the other applies to the weighing mechanism for the round. Generally, a debater is better off explaining the entire *link story* instead of hoping that a judge intuitively connects the observation and the rest of the round.

Status Quo: how things stand before the round begins is considered the *status quo*. Most of the time, when the status quo matters, the affirmative is responsible for challenging the status quo while the negative is responsible for defending it (or, at least, for going against the challenge).

Debate and the Legal System

A fan of crime drama procedurals might notice a lot of similarity between the construction of academic debate cases and legal cases. That's because at the end of the day, a case is a case.

Meeting a prima facie burden is something that prosecutors have to do when they seek to charge someone with a crime, and presenting clear charges—and showing how a crime meets or fails to meet the definitions of those charges—is familiar to those who know the legal system. The individual labels change, but building a case remains a vital skill in all modes of argument.

Takeaways

A debate case is more than a collection of arguments. A debate case much involve multiple arguments working together either in support of the Proposition or in opposition to it. Because cases tend to provide the structure for the rest of the debate, it is important to offer as much clarity as possible while creating a case..

- Cases should involve some level of resolitional analysis
- Cases should attempt to set up what is generally a fair debate that is predictable by all parties
- The exact requirements of a case will vary based on the type of Proposition that is being debated, but all cases will need well-supported arguments.

Suggested Exercise: Look in the back at the list of sample Propositions that have been provided. Try to construct a case (a complete set of arguments) in support of a Proposition and in opposition to it.

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CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO TOPICALITY AND BASIC DEBATE THEORY

“Most theory debates come down to whether something is fair or unfair.”
- Jon Bruscke

Background
Topicality
Some Elements of Debate Theory
Additional Key Terms
Takeaways

Background

Over time, as academic debates have continued, a number of people have spent a lot of time thinking critically about central issues that arise. Because most of these people were debaters, themselves, they spent a lot of time looking at the benefits and drawbacks of particular viewpoints, and they tended to settle--very loosely--on a number of similar positions. Some of these areas of consensus have already been mentioned in this textbook, even though they have not been labeled as such.

For example, the idea that the affirmative's definitions of key terms should be *fair* and *predictable* is a reasonable outgrowth of the realization that without such a limit in place, academic debate ceases to be a practical exercise. Without those limitations, then the affirmative can simply make up any argument desired and surprise the negative with an argument about cats and dogs when the proposition called for a debate about space exploration.

Topicality

The importance of fairness in debate, especially in the construction of the affirmative's initial case, has led to the concept of "topicality." One of the most important aspects of an affirmative case is that its arguments are about the proposition as it is likely to be understood by the debaters in the round and by the judge. Because this is a complex subject, it is worth developing here, during the discussion over case construction.

Topicality is usually encountered as a negative argument *against* the case that the affirmative presents, and so that is how it will be handled in this chapter. Frequently called simple a 'T' argument, an argument of topicality claims that the affirmative has made arguments off the topic of the proposition. Its most frequent form is when affirmative offers a case that does not relate closely enough to the proposition, or else defines the terms of the debate so narrowly as to steal all *ground* (or room for debate) from the negative.

While many issues have come and gone from debate over the years, few occupy the special place that is held by topicality. As one debate author put it:

Topicality has survived in all theories and will probably always. It is the single most important check on aff advocacy to ensure predictability and ground, and to ensure that the topic is in fact debated. As such, it is largely unnecessary to explain its value absent a rule status. The importance of topicality derives not from arbitrary rule but from its logical status as necessary to determine the limits of affirmative ground.
(Kerpen)

To put it another way, topicality is both essential to debate and a perfect illustration of the weaknesses of debate. If someone cheats, they should not win. For example, a runner should not be able to win a marathon by only completing half of the course. If a runner is discovered to have done this, then the runner is supposed to be disqualified from the race. In debate terms, if the affirmative 'cheats' by gaining an unfair advantage in defining the terms of the debate, then the affirmative should not be able to win. This means that most forms of debate consider topicality an *a priori* voting issue, or an issue that takes precedence over all others, in essence disqualifying the affirmative from the round. The affirmative can win every other argument it makes, but if negative proves that the affirmative cheated to do so, it no longer matters.

It is important that affirmatives are held to this burden, but this burden also creates a very strong temptation for negatives. Many times, negatives that do not know what else to do might just try to argue topicality because it is a chance at victory. Some competitors and coaches emphasize topicality so heavily that negatives end up making topicality arguments that are not justified, and so some judges prefer not to vote on topicality arguments at all. This, in turn, makes it easier for affirmatives to construct abusive cases. Those abusive cases call for negatives to run more topicalities, and so on.

In order for a topicality argument to stand, it should have a few key components. These components are typically referred to as the “Topicality Shell” (i.e. the framework or skeleton that individual variations fit inside).

The Basic Shell

Definition: First, the topicality argument must explain an interpretation of the topic that the affirmative fails to meet; this frequently involves providing a competing definition. Typically, it helps to explain why the negative’s definition or interpretation is preferable to that of the affirmative.

Violation: Second, the topicality argument must demonstrate that the affirmative violates this interpretation or definition.

Standard: Third, the topicality argument must suggest a standard of debate that is being harmed by the violation. For example, the affirmative’s case could fail to meet the standard of predictability, or of fair ground, or even of grammar! A more comprehensive list of standards is provided later in this book.

Issue: Finally, the topicality argument has to explain why this means that the affirmative should lose the round. This is often times referred to as the “voting issue” step, explaining why the affirmative’s violation of the negative’s definition means that the affirmative should lose the round.

These four components together serve as a framework for making and for answering topicality arguments. If the negative proves the topicality argument, most judges will award the win to the negative. Therefore, the affirmative often has to “answer” this framework by disproving as many of the steps of the process as possible.

For example, an affirmative could argue that they do not violate the definition offered by the negative. This sort of answer is frequently explained as a “we meet” argument, saying that the affirmative meets the burdens laid out by the topicality, preventing the need for the argument. Another approach would be to explain that the standard is not harmed. For example, the affirmative could claim that their definitions are every bit as predictable as those offered by the negative, instead.

Variations on Topicality

While variations are almost endless, two specific forms of topicality arguments might help to illustrate exactly how complex this issue can get.

Moving Target: When the affirmative offers one case in the first speech and then another case in the second, that team is said to have ‘moved the target.’ A common form this takes is that the affirmative outlines a plan of action that requires Component X. The negative, being well-informed, explains why Component X would not actually be available for the plan. Suddenly, in

the second affirmative speech, a new plan of action is called for that is like the original plan, but this one no longer needs Component X. This is pretty unfair to the negative, since they were actually winning the argument by proving that the affirmative's plan would not work. Therefore, it makes sense for the negative to call a moving target topicality (the definitions of the topic have changed or moved during the speech). As with other T arguments, this T-argument should be clearly announced, and it should be clearly structured.

Tautology: When the affirmative team runs a case that is self-evidently true (e.g. water is wet), or when they provide the negative with too narrow a range of ground. Tautological arguments deal with the standard of ground and the voting issue of fairness. Many times, the real danger from a tautology happens when inexperienced debaters on the affirmative accidentally create a tautology, thus forcing the negative to run a topicality argument.

Sample Topicality arguments are offered in Appendix B.

Some Elements of Theory

When a large group of intelligent, well-educated individuals spend decades arguing about arguing, it's inevitable that they will come to a loose consensus on certain ideas (like Topicality) and that they will have heated disagreements about others. What is important for a beginning debater to understand is that the traditions of debate and the rules of debate are themselves open for discussion.

This is typical of most forms of competition, actually. At the time that this textbook is being written, American tackle football is undergoing a considerably intense discussion over what forms of contact should and should not be allowed, and competitive figure skating is still trying to figure out how to reward both athletic accomplishment and artistic dance in the same event.

When it comes to debate, then, it's not too surprising that debaters will sometimes find themselves arguing not about the Proposition itself, but rather about the rules of debate surrounding the discussion of the Proposition. Using Topicality as a framework, it's worth looking at some forms of theory debate.

Fiat

Fiat is a concept that is central to policy-oriented debate. Essentially, in order to be able to argue whether or not a policy *should* be adopted, the affirmative has to be able to ask those in the round (debaters, judges, and audience members) to imagine a world where the policy takes place. Thus, the *fiat*, from the Latin meaning ‘let it be done,’ asks everyone to set aside the reasons the policy *will not* happen and instead focus on reasons why it should or should not happen.

For example, it’s possible that the reason a new tax has not been adopted is because Republicans and Democrats both oppose it, politically. It won’t happen. However, with the power of fiat, the affirmative can argue the advantages of the tax and the negative can argue the disadvantages of the tax.

The affirmative has the right to claim something happens, but not that it will work. For example, if the affirmative claims that a law should be passed, the affirmative can argue that the law is not a good idea, but not that congress would block the law. One way this is expressed is by saying that the affirmative can decide what the government does, but not how effective that action is.

However, such a powerful tool is open to abuse. Most debate theorists agree that there should be limits to fiat power, even if not everyone agrees on what those limits should be. For example, most in the debate community agree that an affirmative should be able to argue that a new bill passes into law due to fiat power, but that there is no guarantee that the people being governed will like the law. This means that the affirmative can argue the benefits of the law but the negative can argue that there will be backlash against the law.

It’s not that simple, though. Does this mean, then, that negative can argue the law will be quickly repealed after the next election cycle (in other words, how durable is the power to fiat?). For that matter, if the affirmative can fiat action by the United Nations, does that mean it’s fair to fiat multiple, tiered actions by countries within the United Nations?

The Burden of Rejoinder

One aspect of debate theory that has already been introduced is the *burden of rejoinder*. This is the phrase used for the concept introduced in Chapter 2—the idea that any arguments put forward by one side must be addressed by other side or else be considered “*dropped*,” and therefore conceded. In the world outside of academic debate, this would seem very strange.

However, it is an idea that helps to preserve the fairness of debate by requiring that opponents do not simply get to pick and choose which arguments they respond to (or, at least, that there are consequences if they do pick and choose).

Kritiks

This term, pronounced like “critiques”, is a specific form of theoretical debate that is widespread in some forms of debate and virtually absent from others. Essentially, a kritik is a type of argument that makes two assumptions about debate. The first is that it puts the idea that debate is an educational activity at the center of the debate round. The second is that language itself has a powerful ability to shape thoughts and ideas.

Thus, when an affirmative uses discriminatory language (for example, the affirmative argues in favor of ‘mankind’ instead of ‘people’), a negative might offer a kritik saying that this sort of sexist language has no place in an educational activity, and that therefore the affirmative should not be allowed to win the round--that the judge should prevent sexism from being rewarded. This means that those who use kritik typically argue that they are *a priori* voting issues, just like Topicality arguments.

Kritiks often times involve very complicated elements of philosophy, and they frequently force debaters and judges to consider the underlying assumptions that are made about language, communication, and even society. For some, this is an engaging and rewarding intellectual exercise. For others, it is a frustrating distraction from “real” debate.

Additional Key Terms

Brink: This concept refers to the point at which definitions change, or a threshold where a new term is imagined to take hold. For example, if the negative claims that the affirmative’s plan will take “too long,” they usually must provide a brink—what’s too long, and what’s short enough.

Clash: direct debate over key issues of the Proposition is called *clash*. Most debaters and debate judges express a preference for clash over other aspects of debate, like argument over debate theory.

Ground: this term refers to the potential each side has to make good arguments--it is the “room” available for debate. Most often, the term is used with respect to *stealing ground*, the act of the affirmative offering such narrow definitions that the negative is left without equal access to reasonable arguments.

Predictability: this is a term used to refer to the fairness of a line of argumentation. Essentially, an affirmative should use predictable definitions of the terms of the proposition, such that the “person on the street” or the “informed citizen” would be able to predict the likely definitions.

Debate as Advocacy

Debate as an activity is supposed to prepare students for the challenges of communicating in the broader world. However, frequently the students who are drawn to debate are those who have strong feelings on issues of social responsibility and politics, among other things.

Kritiks are, at their best, a chance for students to express personal advocacy for social issues. Sometimes they are *not* this, but it is important to remember that within the game of debate is a chance for students to learn and to practice advocacy.

Takeaways

The affirmative has tremendous power in setting up the terms of a debate, but that power is limited by the need to create a fair and educational debate. Most of the various 'tricks' someone can think of to try to win a debate have been thought about, mapped out, and explored in the history of academic debate.

- A debate should be fair.
- The exact limits of fairness, like almost everything else, are open to debate within the debate itself.
- When in doubt, debaters should try to focus on the issues of the proposition.

Suggested Exercise: Look in the back at the list of sample Propositions that have been provided and think through ways to define terms that might provide one side or another with an advantage. Ask yourself at what point, if you were on the other side, you believe the advantage is worth complaining about.

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CHAPTER 5

DEBATE STRATEGY

“Don’t raise your voice, improve your argument.”
- Desmond Tutu

Overview

Cover

Uniqueness

Conflicting Worldviews

When Things Go Badly

Takeaways

Overview

Already, basic principles of debate strategy have been presented. For example, a negative team might seek to undermine the affirmative's plan to solve a problem by saying that the solution will cause more harm than it eliminates. However, there are other elements of strategy open to consideration in debate. One of the most important strategies, of course, is simple organization. When a typical debate round begins, each student is about to participate in at least twenty minutes of argumentation, and in most cases it is going to be considerably more. Debaters will need to do more than have a plan and take careful notes. They will need to have an overarching sense of where they want the round to go and what they will do if it goes somewhere else.

Cover

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the side effect of the *burden of rejoinder* and the *drop* is that a team can choose to make a large number of arguments and hope some of them get through unanswered. Note that *spread* is sometimes used synonymously with 'bad arguments,' but that's not always the case. Skilled debaters can oftentimes present multiple, complete arguments in a very short period of time. This then forces the other side to respond to each of those arguments, and so control of the round often goes to the debater who can present the greatest number of arguments the most efficiently.

Spreading

Proper spreading is not simply firing off a bunch of ideas. Instead, a debater skilled at spreading will frequently make very efficient word choices (e.g. instead of saying "it is our contention that increases taxes inevitably decrease freedom," the spreader might say "higher taxes will lower freedoms"). Additionally, those seeking to spread need to make sure that they do not speak any faster than they can clearly enunciate.

Many judges have strongly held opinions on spreading, and at least two major forms of debate have explicit rules dealing with making sure that delivery is pleasant or oratorical. Despite this, because debate is a relatively closed community, judges and coaches who favor spread also populate the forms of debate that seek to avoid spread, and so there is always overlap in expectations over what is and what is not 'okay.' It's almost always a good idea to check with judges in advance--when possible--on their stances regarding speed and delivery.

Hidden Arguments

One tactic that can be used in conjunction with spreading is the concept of the hidden argument, sometimes called a buried argument. In essence, a debater lays out an argument that undermines the other position and buries inside of it a point that will help later on.

For example, I might argue that taxes lower freedom, especially when they are unconstitutional like the one presented by the affirmative. The affirmative might respond to the freedom argument and miss the constitutionality argument. One problem with hiding an argument is that sometimes the judge misses it, too!

Grouping

One answer to the spread is to group arguments together. If one side makes several related arguments, the other side might seek to connect these arguments and to apply a single answer. This had the benefit of saving time, but it has disadvantages as well. First, if the judge misses that the arguments are being grouped, some of the other side's points might be considered *dropped* and therefore the side attempting to group has conceded them. Second, if the side grouping the arguments has misunderstood the arguments, it is possible that grouping them is a mistake because one answer *will not* address the arguments adequately. Third, depending on how long it takes to address the grouped argument, all the grouping side might accomplish is to clear the way for more arguments from an opponent. For example, if the negative runs three counter contentions that the affirmative groups and answers with Reason X, then when the negative speaks again, if Reason X is addressed quickly, then there is time left for brand new counter contentions!

Multiple Answers

Just like it's sometimes a good idea to provide a single response to multiple arguments, debaters should also consider providing multiple counterarguments to a single point, especially if that point is vital to the other side's case.

Cross-applying

Related to grouping, the concept of cross-applying is simply a time-saving convention wherein one side points out that everything mentioned at an earlier point in the argument still applies. For example, if the affirmative offers a plan that proposes to have four fringe benefits, all based on a flawed understanding of economics, then the negative might explain the reasons the first benefit will not happen and then for each of the following ask the judge to "cross-apply" the responses given to the first benefit.

Uniqueness

One thing that a number of debaters struggle with is the concept of uniqueness in arguments. For example, in a debate over the merits of cats versus dogs as pets, simply mentioning that cats provide emotional comfort is a very limited argument. Why? Because the other side can simply say "so do dogs." The shed hair is not a disadvantage unique to one side or another.

A contention that claims either an advantage or a disadvantage needs to demonstrate that the good or bad trait is unique to the side in question. If affirmative's policy will take time to go into effect, negative might argue that lives will be lost in the interim. Affirmative can then readily point out that those lives are being lost both under the status quo and in the world with the plan taking place. Those lost lives are a non-unique harm.

One of the most important elements of debate strategy, then, is to focus on the aspects of the topic that are specific to the ground that the opponent must defend.

Conflicting Worldviews

One of the most important steps in motivating someone to take action is to ask them to “visualize” or imagine what the world looks like with or without their action. Often times, in debate, the judge is asked to imagine what the world looks like when a particular value is preferred or when a particular action is taken. This imagination step works, but only up to a point.

One common problem with many ‘imagine’ scenarios is that they lack tension or conflict. For example, if someone were to ask the judge “do you want a good night’s sleep or a healthy breakfast?”, the judge might reasonably answer “I want both.” Likewise, in a conflict between cats and dogs, a judge might end up liking both as pets.

This is one of the reasons why strong cases and argumentation actually demonstrate that there is a conflict between affirmative and negative, and it’s a reason for both sides of the debate to illustrate not just that their side is “good,” or even “better,” but that their side is better *on its own* that it would be with the other side, as well.

Permutations

One of the most common negative strategies while debating policy propositions is to explain that whatever the affirmative is advocating is not the best use of resources (this is more effective if the negative can demonstrate that a different use of those resources is more advantageous). Back in Chapter 3, this was labeled as an Opportunity Cost.

If I only have two dollars and is that I miss out on the candy bar. Let’s imagine that I have an unspecified amount of money--or perhaps a credit card that will let me accumulate some debt in exchange for being able to buy more now. I want to buy a bottle of soda and a candy bar, and each costs \$1.50. If a friend encourages me to buy the bottle of soda and another friend asks me if I’m sure--because the candy bar is the better idea--I might just say “I want to buy both.” This, then, is a “win” for the friend advocating that I buy the bottle of soda, because it is one permutation of the plan wherein I buy a bottle of soda.

However, if I only have \$2, and no ready access to more money (perhaps I’m at a vending machine that doesn’t take credit cards), now there is conflict. I have to pick one course of action or the other.

No Preference

The affirmative also needs to create conflict, though. If a proposition asks me to prefer freedom of expression over safe spaces, then the negative might very well ask “why can’t we have safe spaces and allow freedom of expression at the same time?” It is up to the affirmative to show that conflict will exist between these values, and that when that conflict happens, the affirmative’s preferred value is more important.

Ultimately, in most forms of debate, each side is going to be required to propose not just individual arguments, but also a complete worldview that is at conflict with the worldview proposed by the other side. This has the advantage of giving the judge a clear sense of what “reality” is being given the win.

When Things Go Badly

Somebody loses every debate round. This means that every round gets a little out of control for at least one-half of the competitors in the round, even if they do not always realize it or want to admit it. Therefore, it helps to have some ideas about what to do when an argument goes awry.

Impact and Magnitude

One approach in a debate is to accept that certain arguments are lost and to focus instead on the severity and significance of the arguments that are being won (in contrast to those that are being lost). By focusing on impact and magnitude, a debater can minimize the damage an opponent has done to a case or position.

For example, in a value debate over the merits of security over privacy, a negative might have managed to make a number of very good points about the real-world consequences of the loss of privacy (perhaps pointing out that people can suffer psychological damage when privacy is violated). However, the affirmative could try to argue that because a loss of security can more readily lead to a loss of life, the impact of losing security is in fact of greater magnitude than the impact of losing privacy.

One thing about arguing over magnitude and impact is that it helps each debater remember to keep the *weighing mechanism* or framework in mind. The disadvantage is that weighing differing magnitudes and the scope of different impacts is difficult, and often open for debate. Perhaps more importantly, both sides should always argue about the impact of their contentions, so this strategy is less a way to fix a problem as it is a way to keep a problem from getting out of hand.

The Null Ballot

As was mentioned in Chapter 3, many forms of debate begin with the idea that the Proposition is not necessary until the affirmative proves it is necessary. Therefore, one negative strategy is to deliberately aim for the “null” ballot, or the ballot where neither side proves its point. This is an especially common tactic when the debaters on negative do not know a great deal about the Proposition or when they encounter a poorly structured affirmative that they have failed to respond to well.

A great many judges dislike this approach, because instead of trying to win through superior argumentation, going for the null ballot typically involves trying to muddy the waters as completely as possible and then arguing that because neither side has a *clear* advantage, the negative should win by default.

Note that there are times and places where the negative is justified in going for a null ballot. There are debates where neither side *has* proven its own contentions very well, and the negative is justified in pointing out that by the conventions of debate, that means that they should win the round. However, as a strategy for victory at the start of the debate, it is usually not ideal.

The Risk of Good

Sometimes also referred to as a *risk of solvency*, one common affirmative tactic in policy debates is to argue that the harms of the status quo are so terrible that it is worth any disadvantages if there is even the chance that the plan will solve for some of those harms. This is obviously a difficult argument to make, and it is actually a specific version of the “magnitude/impact” argument mentioned above.

However, there is a specific circumstance wherein *risk of good* arguments apply, and that is when the negative has failed to lay out adequate disadvantages to the plan. If the plan is simply not perfect, but there are no special or unique costs to trying the plan, then the affirmative might very well argue that it is worth those costs (i.e. nothing) to try to solve the harms.

Obviously, this is a good reason to provide some sort of disadvantage to nearly any plan on negative, because otherwise the affirmative has an “impact” advantage from the start of the debate.

Takeaways

Strategy in debate involves trying to do a better job of arguing to a judge’s expectations and framework than the opponent. Frequently, this will involve controlling the number, type, and scope of arguments that are made. Ultimately, given that debate involves a limited number of speeches in a specific amount of time, each side must consider how the debate will play out in those speeches, not in an unlimited world of endless discussion.

- Arguments should be connected to a worldview, with specific impacts.
- General observations are less satisfying than arguments with unique application to the proposition and to the side of the debate being attacked or defended.
- Even when a debate is being lost, it is possible to try to win the debate by staying focused and looking for extra opportunities.

Suggested Exercise

Students should examine a debate proposition and imagine how they would debate the proposition on affirmative and negative alike. What strategies would you use, and how would that change based on the side you found yourself on?

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CHAPTER 6

DURING A DEBATE

“Only the prepared speaker deserves to be confident.”
- Dale Carnegie

Overview

What Makes a Good Debater?

Remember the Basics

Cross-Examination and Questioning

Takeaways

Overview

No matter the format of debate or whether the discussion is in a hallway outside of a classroom or inside of a competition round at a tournament, human beings have certain automatic responses to conflict, and it's important to keep those in mind when preparing for a round. One very pronounced natural response is to exaggerate what someone else is doing. Thus, if I am in a heated discussion and the other people raise their voices, I will raise my voice even more. If I become aggressive, the others around me will become more aggressive by reaction.

At the same time, there is a tendency on the parts of other individuals to disengage from conflict completely. Sometimes, people will be caught between the two extremes and will try to remain involved by duplicating the modeled behavior while still seeking to detach themselves from really engaging in the experience.

All of these responses are natural, but they are obviously disadvantageous to an intelligent, careful conversation or debate. It is important, then, to moderate any emotional response during a debate round and to remember that the conflict is not, really, personal. Even though an opponent is disagreeing with you, that disagreement is structural (you are supposed to be having a debate after all) and the tension is not real.

Remember the Flow

A typical debate includes thirty minutes to an hour of speaking. Obviously, keeping track of what was said is difficult, even for someone experienced with building a *flow*. It helps everyone in the round if speeches are organized in the same way, following the same original pattern as the affirmative's first constructive. Typically, the first negative speech will begin with a vague outline ("first I will address the affirmative's case and then I will introduce my own issues"). Handling topics and points in the order that they have already been introduced is called "going down the flow," and it is usually a good place to start.

A lot of differing opinions exist on whether or not it is better for negative speakers to bring up their own case before addressing the affirmative's case or vice versa, but what is widely true is that if the affirmative lacks structure in the initial speech, the best hope for the debate to be enjoyable is for the negative to provide that structure by "cleaning up" the flow.

Partnered Debate

Many forms of debate involve partners, and this creates both opportunities and obstacles. On the one hand, it's nice to have another person there to help out. However, it's also very tempting to pay more attention to a partner than to the debate round. A common mistake early debaters make is to spend more time interacting with their partners by passing notes and sharing strategy ideas than they spend listening to an opponent's case. Not only is this rude, it can be dangerous--slipped attention can lead to drops, and drops can lose rounds.

Always remember to be courteous. Different communities have different thresholds for how much partner-to-partner interaction is acceptable, but if at any point the debate is more a conversation between partners than it is an interaction of different teams, then there is probably a need to trust each other more and to talk with each other less.

What makes a good debater?

The ideal debater is well-informed, quick-witted, logical, charming, and funny. In truth, very few debaters exhibit all of these traits. By far the easiest aspect to control is the knowledge base. Not every debater has a natural talent for humor (for example), but nearly anyone can learn about world issues and political theories. Because debate *is* a competitive activity, however, many coaches will tend to emphasize the aspects of debate that *they* have control over. This means that most forms of debate eventually come to prioritize research and technically sophisticated strategies.

Consider the following example: Pretend that Sidney attends School A and is a clever, funny, and reasonably well-informed youth who truly wants to discuss issues. Now imagine that Taylor is an average kid with a good work ethic attending School B. School B's coach will prepare Taylor for the challenge of debating Sidney by helping all of the students understand issues, arguments, and strategies. This is the best chance for Taylor (and by extension, B's team) to win. It's not that Taylor can't learn wit and humor along the way, it's just that it is a much more sporadic thing. Preparing Taylor in the "controllable" aspects of debate is a more efficient use of time than spending long evenings working on Taylor's joke-telling ability.

The hypothetical situation above is very real. Obviously, there are teams that only work with students who have amazing levels of talent in delivery already, but most academic debate is coached by teachers, and teachers typically want all of their students to get something out of the experience, not just the most talented.

Outside of academic debate, the broader skill of oratory is slightly more permeable to 'prepared delivery,' in that it's possible to rehearse certain jokes or witticisms ahead of time. Still, learning how to make sound arguments and researching issues is usually a better use of time, at least once the basics of delivery are managed.

Remember the Basics

The central skill of debate is clash--the ability to take another argument and to engage it, finding the weaknesses in the reasoning it presents while answering with a different argument that avoids those mistakes. Rounds can be won and lost on technical points, but most of the people who participate in debate as competitors, judges, and coaches are the types of people who enjoy good, reasoned argument.

Even if it feels like a round is lost, there is still value in practicing clash, and there is still the chance to find the opportunity to win. More importantly, it's more fun to keep trying than it is to give up. Therefore, during a debate round, it's always worth refocusing on the basics--clash, structure, and reasoning.

The Puppeteer

The archetypal debate coach is a successful former debater. It is sometimes difficult for such a person to 'give up' the enjoyment of debate. Sometimes, coaches end up debating *through* their students by feeding them everything from cases to responses. Most of the time, students in this scenario are also taught *why* they are running the arguments that they run. However, sometimes they aren't. They're just told to do it. This approach can work because for a vast majority of time, the coaches are capable of predicting exactly how a round will unfold, at least at the beginning levels.

In all honesty, this approach is less common than many people claim. The reality is that most of those "successful former debaters" also want their students to enjoy the activity, and that does not involve being a puppet for a coach.

Cross-Examination and Questioning

Most forms of debate include some sort of question-and-answer period. Sometimes there periods are built into the constructive speeches and sometimes they are handled during separate blocks of time. When preparing for cross-examination, it's important to go back up and read the material providing on minimizing emotional reactions.

It is very easy for cross-examination to become heated and personal. This should be avoided. One wonderful summary comes from *The Debate Bible*:

At all times attack the arguments of the opponents, not their personality flaws. Attack arguments as being abusive, not people as being abusive. If they are running abusive arguments, DON'T GET PERSONALLY OFFENDED THAT YOUR OPPONENT RAN AN ABUSIVE ARGUMENT. Just beat it. (Bruschke)

Adopting a hostile attitude is likely to make an opponent even more hostile, and that will keep you from being able to get a reasonable answer. More than that, judges will often read tension on one person's part as a sign of nervousness. The more calm and in control a debater seems, especially during cross-examination, the more that debater is signaling confidence to everyone in the room.

Questions in cross-examination operate on four levels, and usually they are mixed to some degree--even if some forms of questioning are more common at higher levels.

Clarification Questions: sometimes, it's necessary to ask a question simply to understand a point better. Maybe one debater didn't hear an argument when it was given, or maybe an explanation did not make sense and the other side wants to be sure that they understand the point. A good clarification question is direct enough that it gets the information that is needed without giving the other side extra time to plead its case.

Targeted Questions: also thought of as tactical questions, targeted questions draw attention to specific flaws in an opponent's arguments and try to force an opponent into being exposed as uninformed or incorrect. Sometimes they are phrased as clarification questions, but the real purpose is to break some part of an opponent's argument.

Global Questions: questions over major issues for the debate round are perhaps the most important use of cross-examination time, even if it is difficult to develop these questions at first. However, skilled debaters will ask clarification questions or make observations in order to set up a larger point. For example, if the negative knows that a law banning "Item X" has recently been passed, the negative might ask a question over whether or not the presence of "Item X" is important to the status quo. The goal is to trap the affirmative against its own words.

Game Questions: while the first three types of questions predominate, it's not uncommon for some debaters to ask questions in order to play a game. There is oratorical merit in asking opponents how they are doing, and sometimes a question can be used to distract an opponent or to derail a line of reasoning.

Takeaways

During a debate round, competitors should focus on the basics until they grow comfortable with the more advanced aspects of debate.

- Most judges like clash, so it's usually a good idea to focus on arguments instead of technicalities.
- There is no one path to being a good debater, and someone might be talented in one area without being talented in others.

Suggested Exercise

Go Debate.

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CHAPTER 7

ENGAGING ARGUMENTS

“It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle it without debate.” –Joseph Joubert

Background
Rhetoric and Dialectic
Cutting the Knot
Perspective
Takeaways

Background

Both in and out of debate rounds, changing someone's mind is not as simple as being factually correct. Large numbers of people continue to believe things contrary to what *the preponderance of evidence* happens to show, to a point that makes satire difficult. For example, according to some research, perhaps 4% of young people believe the earth is flat. A number of people continue to believe in a thoroughly discredited link between autism and vaccination. The list could carry on at length.

Changing someone's mind outside of the realm of *fact debate* is frequently even harder, because issues are less permeable to fact. If I believe in a particular policy and you prove that it has less of a benefit than I thought it did, I don't have to change my mind. I just have to change the reasons I support it. This mindset is not odd, it is actually a default way of looking at things. This is more than simple Confirmation Bias at work, even though that is a powerful force. No, the real issue is something called the Backfire Effect.

Put in simple terms, most people who are confronted with evidence that an opinion they hold is wrong do not change their opinion. Instead, they reject the contrary evidence and hold to their opinion even more strongly. This means that in order to engage arguments, it is necessary to do more than to simply throw facts at each other. Instead, we must engage in critical, thoughtful discussions. Some research even shows that having those discussion--having the reflex to analyze new information *before* it enters into our memory--is one of the most effective tools available at preventing erroneous information from becoming locked into our worldviews.

In debate terms, no matter how *tabula rasa* a judge wishes to be, that judge will still have preconceived notions and opinions, and it will be very hard for the judge to even realize that those opinions are influencing a decision--to say nothing of how hard it would be for a judge to set those opinions aside. However, being willing to engage issues will help us protect ourselves from closing our minds.

Rhetoric and Dialectic

Aristotle famously proclaimed that rhetoric was the counterpart to dialectic. In essence, he suggested that while logical discourse could certainly help someone arrive at valid conclusions, that getting others to accept those conclusions required a certain amount of skill or technique in persuasion. Most students in college will already be familiar with the three modes or appeals of rhetoric (logos, ethos, and pathos), but it might be difficult to place them in the broader context of debate. They might be sterile concepts--fine for the classroom but without much other value. The reality is, however, that these three modes are important to any effort at advocacy, and they are much more vital than we tend to believe.

Logos

This is the emphasis for most debaters, for reasons discussed in the previous chapters. Suffice it to say, however, that in order to engage in an argument, it is useful to be familiar with logic, to be able to identify and counter common logical fallacies, and to be ready to set aside personal involvement in favor of analysis.

Ethos

Whether it's a job interview, a debate round, or an attempt to change the minds of many people on an issue of personal importance, *ethos* has a greater impact than most people consider, and it is shaped in any number of ways.

Consider clothing. While many debate circuits eschew the idea of students dressing in 'professional' clothing, many more--especially those interlinked with the broader world of public speaking events--embrace the idea that personal appearance is part of public presentation. It is. As much as we might like to live in a society that is immune to the impact of appearance, we do not. In fact, study after study has confirmed the idea that dress and attractiveness influence everything ranging from how likely someone is to be hired, how much someone will be made, and how trustworthy that person is considered.

Now consider reputation. Competitors in the world of debate develop a reputation. Most debate circuits are closed, meaning that the same judges and students see each other at tournament after tournament. If you stretch the truth at one tournament, there is a very good chance that a judge or competitor will remember you at the next competition for that act. If you do it too often, you will develop a reputation as someone who lies.

Outside of the debate world, one of the most important concepts is identification. This refers to the tendency of people to hold positive views those they see as like themselves. That does not mean that the person in question is seen as "honest" or "credible" in a traditional sense. Instead, it simply means that if I see something of myself in you, I am more likely to respond favorably to you; likewise, if you see something of yourself in someone else, you are more likely to forgive missteps on their part (especially missteps you personally find relatable).

A Word on Logos

College-level textbooks on speech, writing, and philosophy are filled with information about logical fallacy. In fact, identifying logical fallacies is an important skill for most college students.

However, a list of mistakes doesn't help unless the student works on putting that list into context. If you want to understand logic, use it in practice instead of thinking about it as an abstract concept.

One of the best ways to do this is to look at our own arguments and to evaluate them looking for the same sorts of mistakes that are so easy to spot in others' ideas.

Pathos

It's hard to ignore the fact that people aren't rational. People make decisions on emotional bases all the time, and so it is important to be able to reach others emotionally. It is even more important to be able to show others how an emotional goal is *not* met by a course of action.

In debate terms, people confronted with a problem will frequently want to do something--anything--to resolve the problem. However, if that action does not actually have any solvency, then the emotional impulse to act will be misguided and have unintended consequences. Consider the example of post-9/11 airport security. The pressure to increase screening was so great that the U.S. added a number of measures that cost money and time. However, those measures have been found, repeatedly, to be ineffective.

Were there problems before 9/11? Obviously. Were those problems actually made better by the government's action? That would be really tough to prove to a reasonable audience.

This, then, is important for an advocate to keep in mind, whether it is someone advocating for a proposition in a debate round or someone arguing an issue to a broader public.

Cutting the Knot

Alexander the Great supposedly found himself confronted with an unsolvable knot, and his response was to cut it rather than to untie it. Instead of trying to unravel every cord, he cut the whole thing apart with a sword. This "out of the box" solution has a lesson for all would-be debaters.

A number of issues are based on Gordian knots, and a skilled debater knows how to get to the core of an issue. If asked "is it worth violating civil liberties to use torture to gain information about terror acts?", one knot-cutting question is "will torture even gain useful information about terror acts?" If it won't, then there is no ethical quandary, because instead you're just arguing about wanting to torture people. A specific logical fallacy comes to play time and again when it's time to cut knots, and that's the fallacy of the complex question.

Should I spend more money to buy myself a more reliable car? Well, maybe. However, if (within my price range) there is no difference in the reliability of the cars available, then there is no need to spend the extra money to gain a (nonexistent) increase in reliability. When considering the Toulmin model, people often assume warrants that should not be granted, and a skilled debater should be willing to and able to draw attention to this laxness in reasoning.

Perspective

Many times, debaters lose rounds that they should win because they focus on the argument they want to win, instead of focusing on the arguments that they are not losing. Imagine that I am in a debate round over whether or not the U.S. government should resort to using torture on terror suspects. My opponent has made arguments on saving lives, on preventing disasters, and on the Geneva conventions. That same opponent has also claimed--without impact--that the U.S. used torture in prior wars, but I'm pretty sure that the facts as presented were wrong.

The important arguments for me to stop are on lives, disasters, and international law. Correcting my opponent's mistake is important if that mistake links to an impact for the weighing mechanism for the round, and it might even help me win a credibility argument. However, I only have so much time in the round. Still, debater after debater will treat all four arguments equally, even though only three are likely to have an impact.

Think back to the initial chapter and the reasons given for why debate is a worthwhile activity. Engaging arguments is an essential life skill, and the practice of debate is exactly that--practice for daily, rigorous analysis of the larger world.

Takeaways

Engaging arguments directly is the essential skill of a debater, and being able to trace arguments from their origins to their points of impact is one of the best reasons to study debate in the first place.

- When engaging arguments, it's important to remember that simply being correct is not enough.
- In order to fully engage arguments, it's necessary to understand the emotional reasons people have for their beliefs.
- While we might prefer it if people only responded to arguments on merit, packaging arguments carefully (in a way that protects our own credibility) can have a huge impact.

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Appendix A: Building a Basic Policy Case

Advocating for a change in policy is perhaps the most complicated of case structures. This appendix provides a simple step-by-step process to go through in order to set up a such case. Note that there are many possible “orders” to use to construct a policy case, but the most typical is to embrace the advocacy of the proposition and then to define terms. Remember that a strong policy case must support a worldview, and that vagueness is a limitation. Therefore, it helps to be as specific as possible within the time constraints allowed.

1. Proposition/Resolution Analysis:
 - A. Define each phrase or term in the proposition. When the proposition uses a term, what does it mean according to your case?
 - B. Provide a standard of judgment (e.g. cost-benefit analysis) for the round, asking the judge to use this as the weighing mechanism or framework for the round.
2. Identify the underlying problem. What are the harms that exist in the status quo that would be made better by adopting the proposition?
 - A. Explain how things stand right now.
 - B. Explain who is being hurt right now and how these harms are the result of a specific, tangible problem.
 - C. Explain the way these harms impact to the framework mentioned in Step 1.
3. Explain the cause of the problem. What barriers are keeping things from being made better in the status quo (what is inherently wrong).
 - A. Why are the harms happening in the status quo?
 - B. Why is nobody fixing the status quo? / Why is it unlikely that someone *will* fix the status quo?
 - C. Why is it necessary to take the dramatic action of passing your plan?

Delivery Rate

Know your delivery rate. If you typically speak at a “conversational” rate of 140 words per minute, then a 7-minute opening speech will include just under 1,000 words of content. If you typically speak at a faster rate (say 200 words per minute), then you might need 1400 words of content.

One common mistake early debaters make is to write out ideas without any sense of how long it will take to present those ideas. The result can be a speech that is either over way too quickly or that is only half-finished when time expires.

4. Detail your solution to the problem (the Plan):
 - A. Explain, word for word, what will happen in the plan and detail any limits placed on the plan. Make sure that this plan actually follows the mandate of the Proposition as you defined it.
 - B. Identify who will act (e.g. what federal agency, what organization, etc.) in a manner that fulfills the proposition's mandate.
 - C. How will this be paid for? Where will those funds come from?

5. Explain solvency (show how the Plan fixes the status quo):
 - A. Outline Harm 1
 - i. Restate Harm 1
 - ii. Apply Plan to Harm 1
 - iii. Show how Harm 1 is solved by plan
 - B. Outline Harm 2 (etc., as above)

6. Advantages (show what *fringe benefits* happen due to Plan):
 - A. Outline Advantage A.
 - i. State an advantage
 - ii. Explain how the plan or the solution of harms leads to that advantage
 - iii. Explain why said advantage is worth the costs
 - B. Outline Advantage B (etc., as above)
 - C. Outline Advantage C (etc. as above)

Appendix B: More on Topicality

A topicality argument should be clearly announced, and it should be clearly structured. There are four components to any topicality argument: definition, violation, standard, and voting.

Standards: The standards provide the reason why the negative's interpretation and/or definition is better:

- Bright Line Test: the definition provided by negative creates a clearer distinction between sides and therefore provides for a better debate.
- Field Context: in the context of the rest of the proposition, the most likely definition for the term in question is the one provided by negative.
- Ground: the definition provided by negative more fairly divides the potential for good arguments.
- Person-on-the-street: the definition provided by the negative is what a typical person would *predict* the term to mean.

Answering Topicality

A topicality argument should be countered by inverting this structure. The government team should go down through the same points, explaining why the affirmative's definitions are fair, predictable, and that the round was not harmed. Sometimes, affirmatives choose to demonstrate available round that the negative ignored, but this is less common than it once was.

Voting Issues: These explain why the judge should vote against the affirmative for running a non-topical case:

- Fairness: this issue argues that to allow the affirmative to win (especially after being unpredictable or stealing ground) would be unfair to the negative.
- Framer's Intent: this issue argues that it is possible to know what the person who wrote the resolution wanted the competitors to debate, and therefore there is an obligation to debate things in that manner.
- Jurisdiction: this issue argues that the judge only has the authority to vote for the affirmative on certain topics, and that the affirmative's definition is outside of that range of topics.

On the next page is affirmative interpretation followed by a negative topicality: "This house would just do it."

Affirmative	Negative
<p data-bbox="224 275 607 617">“Part 1, Resolution Analysis. We have chosen to define ‘this house’ as the players of the New England Patriots. We have chosen to define ‘would’ as a call to action, indicating that this is a policy case. Finally, ‘just do it’ resembles the NIKE slogan, urging consumers to play sports.</p> <p data-bbox="224 657 607 1142">Therefore, our resolution reads “The New England Patriots would play sports.” As this is a policy case, we will use the standard of Net Benefits to weigh the round. Whoever provides greater benefits for the New England Patriots should win the round. We will try to prove to you that it is Net Beneficial for the players on the New England Patriots to enact the plan, which is to play sports.”</p> <p data-bbox="224 1220 607 1457"><i>Note that the resolution analysis is only about a third of the length of the T-argument. A well-structured T is probably going to take 1-2 minutes. of speaking at a conversational rate.</i></p> <p data-bbox="224 1497 607 1734"><i>Also note that there are labels and sub-points. A good procedural has these sub-points in it. In all honesty, the T-argument on the right could still use some meat on its bones.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="630 275 1369 394"><i>“We need to begin with a topicality argument. While the government team does have the right to refine definitions for the sake of good debate, the government team has chosen to use definitions that are clearly abusive. The violation is their definition of ‘this house.’</i></p> <p data-bbox="630 434 1380 672"><i>Sub-point A: the definition. Now, normally in parl, ‘this house’ indicates not a single body of individuals but rather serves as placeholder for ‘rational people.’ In other words, we debate what rational people would or would not do. Sub-point B: the violation. The violation occurs when the government team chooses to define this house as a particular group of people. Specifically, they choose a professional sports team. There is no way that the Opposition could have reasonably predicted this.</i></p> <p data-bbox="630 682 1369 898"><i>That leads to Sub-point C, the Standard. While the Government team has the right to refine resolutions, they must do so in a way that provides equal ground for both sides and they must do so in a way that allows for predictability. By choosing to argue that a particular group of professional athletes would benefit from playing sports, they have taken most of the ground for themselves. All we can argue is injury, maybe, and even then they have still violated predictability.</i></p> <p data-bbox="630 938 1380 1308"><i>This leads to Sub-point D: why this is a voting issue. This is a voting issue because it is unfair to allow the government team complete latitude in their definitions. They have to demonstrate equal ground, and they have not done so. Additionally, though, this is a voting issue on fairness in another way. It sets a bad precedent to allow Gov. teams unlimited scope in defining ‘this house.’ If they have that scope, then the government team can <u>always</u> steal ground and hurt predictability by choosing any of the literally millions of organizations that exist. ‘This house’ could be the Yankton, South Dakota Kiwanis chapter. They have had fifteen minutes to prepare their case, and we should have at least some access to using those fifteen minutes, as well.</i></p>

Appendix C:

Sample Resolutions

1. Death stops for no one.
2. The funerary business should be substantially reformed.
3. Federal mandate should prevent coroner from being an elected position.
4. Justice is blind.
5. The privacy of data is less important than the security of society.
6. The public need for safety is more important than the personal need for liberty.
7. We are no longer in the cave.
8. Nietzsche is more relevant than Machiavelli.
9. Kant is more applicable than Thoreau.
10. Society should facilitate self-actualization.
11. You can't trust a doctor whose office plants have died.
12. Private health insurance is better than national health care.
13. HPV vaccination should be mandatory for school entry.
14. Medical marijuana should be legal in all states.
15. Wind power is preferable to hydroelectric power.
16. Water scarcity is a more pressing concern than species loss.
17. The U.S. should adopt more aggressive recycling mandates.
18. The I.M.F. should prioritize green programs.
19. It takes a child to raise a village.
20. A good weapon finds a cause to defend.
21. A company may be judged by the person it keeps.
22. The N.C.A.A. should punish coaches and not students for transgressions.
23. The I.O.C. should take drastic action for the safety of athletes.
24. The N.F.L. should change its schedule.
25. The U.S.F.G. should reform physician recertification.
26. The U.S.F.G. should nationalize the power grid.
27. The U.S.F.G. should eliminate non-profit status for religious organizations.
28. Violent revolution is better than a smooth transition of power.
29. Continued secrecy is better than agenda-driven "transparency".
30. Metaphorically, William F. Buckley, Jr. is rolling in his grave.
31. Baseball is a superior game to either type of football.
32. Metaphorically, Chicago really is the Windy City.
33. Ms. Valerie Frizzle should be president.
34. Capt. Jack Sparrow should be president.
35. Scooby-Doo is better than Clifford.
36. D.C. movies are preferable to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.
37. The Affordable Care Act should be replaced by socialized medicine.
38. International free trade is better than individual job security.
39. The tenth amendment is more important than the fourth amendment.
40. Metaphorically, the wall has already been built.

Glossary

Abuse: when 'fair play' is violated. For example, if Gov provides an argument that *steals ground*, or changes definitions mid-debate, an unfair situation is created (this is *abuse*).

Adjudicator: another name for *judge*.

Affirmative: this is the side that must argue in support of the proposition. In some forms of debate this is called the *Government* side or the *Proposition* side.

A Priori: an issue that should be voted on by the judge before any other issue is considered.

Burden of Proof: The obligation to prove an argument instead of being able to assume it. In conventional debate, an affirmative must demonstrate that the issue is worth debating, for example, and cannot simply assume relevance.

Contention: a claim made in support of or in opposition to the proposition. Well-structured contentions will be supported by both evidence and reasoning, and most judges prefer it if the contention also includes an *impact* step, making it clear how the claim affirms or negates the proposition.

Counterplan: a particular opportunity-cost argument wherein the negative says that instead of following the plan laid out by the affirmative, the better idea is to follow an alternative plan as explained by the negative.

Criterion: the lens through which a judge is expected to weigh a round, the criterion often functions alongside a value premise to create a framework or weighing mechanism.

Critic: another name for *judge*.

Drop: an argument (in part or whole) that one side fails to address. Dropping an argument usually means conceding it to the other side, giving one's opponent a significant advantage in the debate.

Framework: the mindset that the debaters ask the judge to adopt when weighing the round. See *tabula rasa* and *weighing mechanism*.

Harms: the downside or negative aspects of a situation. Frequently, *harms* are present in the status quo of a debate (the way things stand at the start of the round), but *harms* can also refer to any generic downside to a plan or counterplan, as well.

Judge: this is the person who will decide the winner of the round.

Negative: this is the side that must argue against the proposition. In some forms of debate, this is called the *Opposition* side.

Opportunity Cost: a specific disadvantage to following a plan is an opportunity cost--the thing or things that can no longer be done because the plan was implemented.

Plank: a contention.

Resolution: another term for the Proposition, this is the topic to be debated. A good resolution is usually a complete sentence that is readily understood, and it will allow for a relatively equal number of arguments in support of it and against it.

Tabula Rasa: literally a 'blank slate,' the concept that the judge is supposed to leave any personal biases and preconceived notions out of the debate.

Round: the complete set of speeches given by the affirmative and negative in a particular debate competition. It is the basic unit of debate, much like a game or match. Wins and losses are awarded on the basis of rounds, and rounds are usually handled independently of one another. Thus, an argument given in Round 1 is part of the debate for all of the speeches in that round, but Round 2 starts over again.

Value Premise: an assertion of judgement common in some forms of debate, a value premise creates a 'goal' for debaters to argue toward, like 'justice.' Working with a criterion, the value premise suggests how a round should be judged (see *framework* and *weighing mechanism*).

Voter: a voter is an issue that should help to decide the round. If one side has *dropped* the harms or benefits offered by the other side, this might be a *voter*. *Topicality* is also frequently a voter. In most rounds, the *weighing mechanism* determines voters. For example, if the *weighing mechanism* was net benefits, a key voting issue will be which side helped the most people with the fewest *harms*.

Warrant: in the Toulmin model, the reasoning and assumptions that justify using evidence in support of a claim. In debate terms, a warrant sometimes refers both to the reasoning and to the evidence.

Weighing Mechanism: the framework a judge is being asked to use to decide who wins and loses the round. This is often a philosophical concept applied to the world of debate, such as utilitarianism.

Select Index

Advantages: **20**, 25, 30, 32, 34, 38, 40, 41, 56
Agency: **20**, 56
Appeals: **50**
Audience: 4, 7, **12**, 14, 32, 52
Burden: 17, 18, 20, **22**, **23**, 25, 30-**32**, 37, 60
Claim: **11**, **12**, 14, 15, 20, 21, 25, 29, 31-33, 38, 45
Contention: 11, **14**, **23**, 37, 38, 40, 41
Delivery: 37, 45, 55
Disadvantage: **24**, **25**, 32, 38, 40, 41, 44
Drop: **13**, **14**, 32, 37, 38, 44
Evidence: **11**, **12**, 14, 15, 19, **21**
Fair (Fairness): 1, **5**, 13, 19, **20**, 22, 26, **29-34**
Fallacy: 51, 52
Fiat: **32**
Flow: **14**, **44**
Framework, see Weighing Mechanism
Inherency: **23**
Judge: **4**, **5**, 6, 11, 13, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37-41, 46, 47
Proposition: **5**, **6**, 11-14, 18-26, 29, 32-34, 39-41, 52, 55-56, 57
Solvency: **23**, **41**, 52, 56
Stock Issues: 22, **23**
Topicality: 22, 23, **29-31**, 32, 33, **57-58**
Warrant: **11**, **12**, **14**, 15, 52
Weighing Mechanism: **21-22**, 25, 40, 53, 55, **57**