

Debate Tips

Debates have three essential components: case construction, refutation, and case rebuilding. While distilling debate into three components is simple, being able to do each of those components well is challenging.

Tips for Debating

- Take notes!
- Be confident!
- Focus on going after your opponent's case, not your actual opponent.
- Have fun and take advantage of having an audience. Make (appropriate) jokes, be fun to watch, use effective body language. Try to win them (and the judges) over through both argumentative and non-argumentative means.

Making your case

- Begin with brainstorming reasons to support your position
- Group specific reasons into broad categories (economic, social, historical, political, case study, etc.)
- Prioritize arguments based on the topic and level of development; think about what this specific debate is really about
- Create "tag lines" (titles) for each point (aka, contention) and flesh out the individual elements of the overall argument
- Each contention should have a claim, evidence, and relate back to the topic
- Make sure to "impact out" each contention; in other words, each contention should be fully developed
- Also, each contention should be unique, contribute to the overall case, and not contradict the other contentions (known as "knifing")
- The rule of thumb in debate is that each case should have 3 contentions

Refutation of Opponent's Case

- First, listen to your opponent's argument and take notes
- Identify the claim, evidence, and relation to topic of each of your opponent's contention
- Examine where your case CLASHES with your opponent's case
- Use the "THEY SAY, I SAY BECAUSE" refutation format
- You can refute your opponent's claim, evidence, or its relation to topic
- The most persuasive refutation addresses all 3 parts of your opponent's contention
- If your opponent's contention is very similar to your contention, mention that, compare it to the contention in your case, and show why your case is stronger
- Don't straw man your opponent's argument; this makes your refutation look weak and unconvincing
- Remember to attack your opponent's IDEAS, not your actual opponent

-Also, you don't have to disagree with everything your opponent says. Be strategic and reasonable. For instance, it's better to say "While I agree with my opponent that acts of terrorism are horrific, the plan my opponent is advocating for won't effectively solve the problem" than "My opponent is totally wrong. Acts of terrorism aren't a problem so we don't need my opponent's solution."

Rebuilding Case after Refutation

- Unfortunately this is one of the hardest parts of the debate to prep for in advance.
- When you are prepping your case, try to think about how the other side will refute your contentions. Keeping this possibly objections in mind, try to build the strongest case before the debate.
- While it is always important to be aware of the limits of each of your contentions, during the debate, avoid saying things like "My opponents may say this about my point, but this is how I would respond." DON'T GIVE AWAY the refutations to your own case.
- When rebuilding your contentions, use the same formula for refutation (THEY SAY, I SAY BECAUSE)
- Try to incorporate new analysis, new evidence, and new examples when rebuilding your case.

Closing Remarks

- Rule of thumb: do not bring up new points in closing remarks, only new analysis of old points
- When prepping closing remarks, consider the points of clash during a debate. Did both sides have an economic point, social point, and political point? Pair these similar points together in your closing remarks and show why your side wins on each of these issues.