

Advanced Debating Notes

The notes that follow are designed as supplements to your basic debating skills and experience. Don't disregard what you know and do – review it in light of the advice that follows.

Analysis

The key difference between good debaters and world beating ones is their ability to analyse arguments and present their analysis clearly. The key skill to develop is the ability to quickly and accurately get to the bottom of arguments – whether they are your own or those of the opposition. All the material that follows assumes an ability to do just that. Naturally no one can provide perfect analysis every time. However, my experience has suggested that practice significantly improves any debaters ability to get to the point. Whenever you are reading something try and analyse it critically at the same time. Ask yourself what the author is really getting at. Even if you agree with the point, ask yourself what its flaws are. At the end of a piece of reading check that you can summarise it into its key points.

Speaker Roles

Generally

Every speaker has the same basic role;

- present the worst reasonable interpretation of their opposition's case,
- present the best reasonable interpretation of their team's case, and;
- add substantive material to their team's case.

Speaking in different places means that the focus on each of these elements of a good speech must differ slightly. However, rather than focussing on what any speaker would do speaking in your position, focus on what needs to be done for you team to win the debate.

A good way to start any speech is with a quick relevant point to get everyone's attention. Then "orientate" yourself to the debate. In the briefest terms identify the main issues, the clash(es) and common ground.

Always ask; *What do I need to say to make sure we win this debate?*

First Speakers

Firsts establish the team case and so must present formal material. A good format for a first is;

1. Introduction – really short (relevant) point to get everyone's attention.
2. Analysis – At 1 neg this will include analysis of opposition case, at 1 aff this is a chance to introduce the key issues of the debate.
3. Team line – this naturally emerges from your analysis.
4. Team split – this shows how each speaker will present different material in keeping with the issues, and the line on the issues you.
5. Now present your substantive material, conclude and sit down.

Second Speakers

Second is where things really happen substantively. You must identify the key issues, address them, and deliver the weight of your team's substantive material. Focus on making sure you present all your material, pre-prepared or otherwise, in such a way that it is clearly relevant to the key issues you have identified in the debate.

Third Speakers

Third is the time to go to town on rebuttal. However, don't just negate the other team on a point by point basis. Try and analyse things to show how the whole idea behind opposition points is wrong. Also, be sure to take time to stick up for the your own team's case. A really good third makes their opposition's case look fundamentally crap and also makes their own case look like gold.

Reasonable Interpretations

When you present points in a debate you are not aiming to save the world. The audience do not want to know the "right" answer, or the "truth." What they're after is the best argument. The best argument is the most convincing one. While you certainly shouldn't lie to the audience, you shouldn't accept anything at face value either.

Aim to present a reasonable sounding argument that will win the debate.

Worst Reasonable Explanation

Whenever you talk about the opposition case, use the worst reasonable explanation (WRE). A good opposition will always sound as though they're on the right track. If you sit around waiting for them to blunder you could be waiting all debate. Instead, try and make them look as bad as is reasonably possible.

Always ask;

- What *could be* wrong with this fact?
- How can I make that sound awful? (Without sounding like I'm insane)
- What haven't they said that would make this look bad for them?
- How can I present this so that it looks flawed?

Good WRE's will do things like;

- characterise the opposition material as being like a model or principle that has already been used and failed,
- show how the ideas behind what the opposition is suggesting are flawed (a good way to do this is to apply them to a hypothetical not considered by the opposition),
- make it sound as though no reasonable person could accept the opposition case; i.e. make them look like dreamers, like people ignorant of the true situation, like people ignoring vital facts.

Best Reasonable Explanation

Whenever you present your own team's case you should do so in the best reasonable way. If you are speaking after a team mate you should do your best to defend the points they have made by providing the best reasonable interpretation of them. Try and make it look like the opposition haven't dealt adequately with your team's case – like they've missed the point.

Making stuff stick ...

In every speech you should ensure you are “**making stuff stick**” – making sure that what you say is applied to the debate.

This is a shift from simply saying things to actually explaining *why* you have said them. When you make this shift you show the audience that you **understand** what is happening and that what you are saying is **relevant**.

The key practical step we identified that will help you make stuff stick was “**stealing the language of the debate**” – taking phrases and concepts used in the debate and applying them to your material.

The easiest way to demonstrate the concept of making stuff stick and the use of language stealing is through an example. Therefore we bring you...

“That Paul Holmes should be banned from TV”

So, at the most basic level (no weaselling), this will be a debate weighing up reasons for and against banning Holmes from the box.

The aff's job is to provide us with the boundaries of the debate (what sort of reasons we should talk about, what the really important reasons are, what sort of ban we are talking about etc.) They then provide material which they believe fits into these boundaries and supports their case. The neg's job is to negate this material.

Let's say the aff's line is that banning Holmes will broaden the scope of current affairs programming in NZ. A speaker makes the following point:

“By removing Paul Holmes we make room for Sheryl Holmes, his lesser known but better educated half sister. Sheryl has a PhD. in Political Science and has been working for TV news in France for the last 20 years. She has tried to get a slot on NZ TV but has been turned down because broadcasters claim they have too many Holmes. If Paul was banned Sheryl could get a spot and bring to current affairs a knowledgeable and experienced broadcaster.”

A negative speaker has in front of them the following rebuttal point *against* banning Holmes:

“Sheryl Holmes is only 1 year younger than Paul and shared so much with him when they were growing up that she has the same opinions and interests as him. She even sounds the same. She's no different from Paul!”

Simply saying this does negate the aff point but why? If you just say this then it leaves the question of how it affects the aff case up to the adjudicator. This is weak as they cannot be sure you know how relevant this point is or how well it deals with the aff case. You have to **make the point stick**. One thing that will help you ensure you do this is **stealing language**.

This means you may phrase your rebuttal point something like...

“The affirmative have talked a lot about *broadening the scope of current affairs programming in NZ*. The last affirmative speaker pointed out that, because Paul Holmes was on air, the well educated and experienced Sheryl Holmes was not getting to our screens. It should be noted that Sheryl is only a year younger than Paul and that the two of them were raised together. Sheryl shares Paul's interests, opinions and even sounds like him. We would suggest that having a female version of Paul Holmes, albeit a female version with a degree, will not help *broaden the scope of current affairs programming*.”

Suddenly you're not just making a point against banning Paul Holmes, you've making a point against banning Paul Holmes that relates to the debate unfolding before you. Of course there's some more to the above arguments than this, but you're well on the way to carving up any debate.

[The NZ Schools' Debating Council thanks the Coaches of the Canterbury Speaking Union Team 2000 for making this document available.]