

SOME ELEMENTS OF DEBATE

Index

1. **Acknowledgements**
2. **Introduction**
3. **Theory of the Case**
 - A. **Types of Resolution: (1) Fact; (2) Value; (3) Policy.**
 - B. **Affirmative Case in a Debate of Fact or Value**
 - C. **Affirmative Case in a Policy Debate**
 - D. **Negative Case in a Policy Debate**
4. **Analysis**
5. **Definitions**
 - Strategy
 1. **Which Terms Should be Defined?**
 2. **How Should Terms be Defined?**
 3. **Challenging Definitions**
6. **Material**
 - A. **Research**
 - B. **How to make your Arguments**
 - C. **Nature of Proof**
 - D. **Logical Errors**
 - E. **Sources**
 - F. **Invention**
7. **Strategy**
 - A. **Generally**
 - B. **Language**
 - C. **Your Style and Theirs**
8. **Organization**
 - A. **Introduction**
 - B. **Development of your Argument**
 - C. **Order of Arguments**
 - D. **Summary**
 - E. **Conclusion**
9. **Delivery**
 - A. **Language**
 - B. **Voice**
 - C. **Body**
 - D. **Personality**
10. **Rebuttal**
 - A. **Preparation**
 - B. **Selecting what to Attack**
 - C. **Answering Attacks**
 - D. **Structure**
 - E. **Courtesy**
11. **Afterword**

1. Acknowledgements

This paper owes a great deal to many people and organizations, including: David Bennett; Anne B. Clemens, *How to Organize Classroom Debate*; Scott H. Cooper; Debate and Speech Association of British Columbia, *A Guide to the Elements of Debate*; John Field; John Filliter (who corrected an earlier edition of this paper); Daphne Gray-Grant; Chris Harker; David Lavoie; William MacKenzie, *Debating Tips* (an unpublished monograph of the Nova Scotia Debating Society); Rosemary Penn; John Robinson and Cleve Wall.

2. Introduction

The aim of your debate is to convince, and if necessary persuade, your audience that your point of view is correct, and all aspects of your debate should be directed to that goal. The comments that follow assume that you are familiar with the rules and procedures of the Canadian Student Debating Federation.

Your debate will be judged as a whole and it is therefore important that you begin your preparation by giving thought to your debate as a whole. The most important preparation consists of thinking through your case: you should identify an issue or a number of issues on which you and the opposing team disagree; you should summarize your theory of the case; you should present your arguments in support of your case; and you should conclude.

3. Theory of the Case

What is the point of your speech? You may not decide the answer to this question until you have researched the topic, but you must know the answer before you begin to write.

A. Types of Resolution

A debate resolution may be assigned to one of three categories. It may be a proposition of:

1. **Fact** - that is, a debate about the correctness of an objectively verifiable statement. For example, "The United States now has an adequate number of nuclear weapons to deter the the Peoples' Republic of China from war"; "Adam was the first man"; "Vikings discovered America". Such subjects can be debatable as long the the evidence is not clear cut - if we lack the evidence, for example, to establish conclusively that the weapons are adequate. This is a factual debate and one should approach it with a view to marshalling evidence.

2. **Value** - that is, an expression of opinion. For example, "A programme of nuclear deterrence is more likely to create peace that a programme of nuclear disarmament", "Women are better than men". Evidence which makes the audience likely to accept your view can be presented but the statement is still simply an opinion and so it cannot be conclusively affirmed or disproved.

3. **Policy** - that is, a statement that a particular course of action should be pursued. For example, "The federal government refuse to allow the testing of Cruise missiles within its territorial boundaries", "The government limit the availability of medicare", "The government devote greater resources to the re-training of the unemployed". Every policy debate is implicitly a value debate: "the development of the Cruise missile will make nuclear war more rather than less likely in the future", "it is good to limit

medicare”, and “re-training the unemployed is good” are values implicit in the foregoing examples of the policy debate resolution. In debating a resolution of policy, however, the affirmative must not merely deal with the implicit value (“it is good to limit medicare”); it must also propose a specific plan for limiting medicare.

The first question you must determine in formulating your theory of the case, then, is “What sort of a debate is this?”

B. Affirmative Case in a Debate of Fact or Value

You will immediately note that a policy debate is more taxing; the affirmative must present a specific plan (except in impromptu debates). A debate on a question of fact simply requires that the negative and the affirmative present evidence tending to support or undermine the audience’s belief in the existence of that fact. A debate on a question of value simply requires that the negative and the affirmative examine the reasons for holding a particular opinion, and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of those reasons. The theory of the affirmative case then is normally just, “The resolution is true” in each of these two cases.

C. Affirmative Case in a Policy Debate

In a proposition of policy, the affirmative case has two parts, namely:

1. The value statement is desirable; and
2. The affirmative plan will substantially achieve that goal and will do so better than the alternatives.

In the examples already discussed, the value statement is that “limiting medicare would be good” (for whatever reason); the plan might be that it be limited to individuals whose family income is less than \$18,000.00 a year who are suffering from a chronic illness, with an annual per family deductible of \$200.00. Or, in the third example, “Re-training programmes are good” (for whatever reason) would be the value statement; the plan might be that the government establish fourteen centres, one in each of the following cities (list them) staffed by the following sorts of vocational counsellors (describe them) to be available to the chronically unemployed (define them) under the following conditions (identify them).

D. Negative Case in a Policy Debate

Unlike the affirmative, the negative in a policy debate has a clearly defined set of alternative arguments, namely:

1. The statement of value is wrong (so no change is desirable);
2. The statement of value is right, but this is a bad plan;
3. The statement of value is right, but repairing the present system is better than the plan;
4. The statement of value is right, but the negative has a better (Counter-) plan;
5. Regardless of whether the statement of value is right, the affirmative has not proved its case (straight refutation - general denial).

The first question you should ask yourself, then, is “What sort of debate is this?”

4. Analysis

Having decided what sort of debate the resolution dictates, you must then analyse the resolution. Think through what it means. I suggest that you ask yourself the following questions in preparing to write your debate:

1. What do you understand the resolution to mean?
2. What is the reason for the resolution (if it is a proposition of policy)?
3. What are the consequences of the resolution?
4. What are the alternatives to the resolution (the consequences of not adopting it)?

Having decided what the resolution itself means, what do you therefore understand the *affirmative* case to mean?

What do you therefore understand the *negative* case to mean?

More analysis will be necessary later, when you assemble your arguments. For now, the understanding you have will enable you to research the topic. Note that all you must prove is that your plan succeeds at what it was designed to do. You do **not** need to answer the following arguments:

1. “The plan is **illegal or unconstitutional**.” Every policy debate considers two states of affairs - normally the difference between present conditions and a particular change to present conditions. In debating a policy resolution it is always assumed that if the affirmative plan is illegal or unconstitutional, the necessary changes to the existing system will be made so that such a plan will be legal and constitutional. (CSDF Rule 11) Debaters should not contest this point, though they may refer to it under “feasibility”.
2. “The **should** argument ...” Many debate resolutions contain the word “should” (for example, “The Children’s Aid Society should be abolished.” This wording does **not** allow the affirmative to argue that abolition doesn’t necessarily have to happen and that it merely ought to be done. The affirmative must argue that abolition take place. It is improper for the affirmative to rely on the word “should” to dilute the debate.

5. Definitions

You now know what the resolution as a whole means; presently you must define any controversial terms.

Every word in a resolution may be of special significance and have an unusual meaning. For your preparation, you should consider the meaning of every word and whether there is a strategic advantage to be gained by an unusual definition. In the debate, however, only those words which you determine to be crucial to your argument or essential to the resolution should be defined in detail.

Rule 17 of the CSDF Rules provides that the judges will accept the definition that is “best supported by evidence and reasoning”. This means that if there is a disagreement about the meaning of certain words in the resolution, and if it makes a difference to the outcome of the debate, then the side whose definitions are best supported will win. Of course, those definitions which are “reasonable” require less

support than unusual or unexpected definitions. (While debates seldom turn on the issue of definitions, you should always be prepared to deal with a dispute over them.)

There are no limits on how you define the resolution, as long as you can persuade the judges to accept the definitions you offer. It is unfair, however, to give yourself an advantage which is not inherent in the resolution by:

(a) defining a tautology (defining the resolution so that it is logically true). For example, “All black ravens are black” is tautological because whatever “black ravens” means, the statement must necessarily be true. The same logical offence is committed if a debater otherwise defines what he is trying to prove. So, “Canada will benefit from a continental energy pact” is a tautology if the government defines “continental energy pact” to mean “any energy-sharing agreement inherently advantageous to Canada”. The resolution then becomes “Canada will benefit from an energy pact inherently advantageous to Canada”. It is appropriate to argue that in fact, any of the proposed energy-sharing agreements with the United States would be advantageous to Canada and therefore Canada should enter a continental energy pact. But you must reach this conclusion as a result of argument, not definition.

(b) Defining a truism (defining the resolution so that it is a statement of unarguable physical fact). For example, “No one lives forever” is true as a matter of fact. Similarly, it does get dark at night, people may be killed in war, and resolutions which do no more than argue the truth of these statements are unfairly defined. So it is unfair to define the resolution “Women are better than men” to mean “better able to bear children” because this is true as a matter of fact. Similarly it is unfair to define “Canadian TV is better than American TV” so that “better” means “has more Canadian content”. It is appropriate to argue that the more Canadian content, the better the TV programming, but one cannot achieve that result simply by definition.

(c) Defining away an absolute term of the resolution (defining the resolution so that a statement of certainty is reduced to a statement of probability). For example, “All men are stupid” cannot be defined to mean “There are a lot of stupid men”, nor can “The Insanity Defence be abolished” be defined to mean “The Insanity Defence should be limited.” If the resolution uses “all”, “always”, “none”, “never”, “abolished” or other absolute words, substituting “most”, “some”, “rarely”, “occasionally”, “usually” or “limited” for them is unfair.

On the other hand, the definition does not have to include anything more than is in the resolution. The resolution “The book, 1984, is wrong” does not have to mean that every single statement in the book is wrong; it is enough to prove the book as a whole to be wrong. Similarly, “All men are stupid” must mean “All men” but it doesn’t require that they behave stupidly all the time or in every respect. “Unemployment is the most serious problem facing Canada” must mean “more serious than every other problem” but it needn’t be “more serious in every province than every other problem”; it is enough if it is true for the country as a whole.

Strategy

Three strategic considerations arise, namely:

1. Which terms should be defined?

Define in detail only those terms that are crucial to the resolution as a whole or to the case that you are making. Do not define obvious or trivial words unless they are relevant to the argument you present as defined. So, for example, the resolution “A

woman's place is in the home" may be defined with special emphasis on the word "a". (If this is defined in the singular sense, the affirmative could argue that "one" woman's place is in the home; such a life is not for everyone, but it is right for some women; in other words, a woman who wants to remain at home should be allowed to do so.) Because this strategy turns on the word "a", that term should be defined; otherwise, no definition would be appropriate. Terms such as "Canada", "this province", "this House" and "the" are other examples of words which will only rarely be defined. Time spent on definition may be necessary for strategic reasons but otherwise it is wasted time.

Caveat: You should at least paraphrase the entire resolution if you do not define all of the terms in it. If the affirmative fails to define terms in the resolution "expressly or by clear implication", under CSDF Rule 17 the negative has the right to impose any reasonable definition it wants for terms not defined by the affirmative, and the affirmative then has to prove the resolution as re-defined.

2. How should terms be defined?

a. If there has not yet been a definition, you should first identify the key words in the resolution, define them, and then conclude with a paraphrase of the definition which is short and clear. There are several different means of defining key words:

i. Substitute a synonym or formal meaning for a resolution term (either one of your own or from a dictionary or other source). Remember that words have specific meanings depending on how they are used and if you are debating a legal subject, for example, the meaning given in the Criminal Code may be more relevant than that used in an ordinary dictionary. Similarly, medical terms may require resort to medical dictionaries and so forth.

ii. Exclude what you don't mean. For example, "When we speak of retraining the unemployed, we don't include those who are unemployed for fewer than three weeks."

iii. Use an analogy, example or comparison. For example, "Coal mining is no longer in much demand and if an unemployed coal miner is to get work, he may have to learn new skills."

You may employ different means for defining different terms of the resolution, or you may use the same means of definition. The important thing is to produce a paraphrase of the resolution which is immediately understandable by your audience and can be easily referred to throughout the debate. "Canada should enter a continental energy-sharing arrangement" is not as clear as "Canada and the United States should share their energy."

b. If the immediately preceding debater has defined the resolution, you should then begin your remarks with either of the following:

i. "We agree that the resolution means ..." (and paraphrase it shortly in your own words). This prevents the other team from sneaking in an unusual definition, the significance of which is not made clear until the final speech. If the other team later tries to attach significance to a word defined in that way, your team can always rely upon its re-definition by paraphrase.

ii. "We reject the definition given by the debater who last spoke. We think that the resolution means ..." (It may be sufficient to simply re-define by paraphrase or it may be necessary to direct your attention to re-defining those key words that are in

dispute. Except to the extent that a resolution is re-defined by paraphrase, never re-define individual words the definitions of which you accept.)

3. Challenging Definitions

Although you should always substitute your own paraphrase of the resolution to protect yourself, you should challenge opponents' definitions only if, because of their unfairness, they prevent you from making an argument you wished to make. If the definition is unfair (but so far as you are aware does not preclude you from making your arguments), content yourself with a comment such as, "We think that the definition is unfair, but we're not here to quibble over terms. For our purposes the resolution simply means ... (re-defining it by paraphrase)."

If the definition is unreasonable and does prevent you from making your argument, challenge it firmly. The judges must not be left wondering whether you accepted or rejected the definitions. Say "The affirmative definitions are wrong (or unfair, or unreasonable). The negative defines the word "continental" to mean ... (give your definition and source)." Provide some reasoning to support it, such as "If the word 'continental' simply meant 'all-Canadian', it would be unnecessary. Canada already has an energy policy that deals with domestic energy-sharing."

The purpose of defining the resolution is to provide a common limit to the arguments presented and to explain to the judges what ground the debate will cover and what the resolution means. The judges must not be in doubt as to what you are discussing.

You should therefore arrive at the debate prepared to define every key word (in case this proves necessary) and to paraphrase the resolution as a whole.

6. Material

You are now beginning to assemble your debate. You must answer two questions:

1. What are you trying to prove?
2. How are you going to prove it?

You should have an answer to the first question as a result of your analysis of the resolution. The second question may require further research.

A. Research

Two different sorts of debate research will from time to time be necessary:

1. Research to discover what arguments support your side of the resolution; and
2. Research to substantiate an argument you have already decided to make.

Topics of a general nature which require only knowledge you already have will not require the first type of research. Every debate in which you make a factual argument will require research of the second sort, although it may involve nothing more than finding a source, quotation or statistic to support an argument you already know to be sound.

When the purpose of your research is to find out about your topic, a wide number of sources may be consulted. Remember that your purpose is limited: you wish to find out generally about the topic, so that you can discuss it intelligently, and you wish to discover what the arguments for and against the resolution are, and what the strengths and weaknesses of each are.

Try to find a short magazine article that discusses the whole subject, or a lengthy newspaper article. Many libraries maintain clipping files which will solve your research problem. Books are normally too long; newspaper articles alone are normally too short. The fastest way to round out your knowledge once you have done some research will frequently be to speak to someone who knows your subject. If the resolution requires you to talk to an “expert”, try to find someone who can come to a meeting with your team and speak knowledgeably on the subject. Any more detailed research strategy must depend on the particular topic you are researching.

B. How to make your Arguments

You now know enough about the topic to list all of the arguments for and against and to select your strongest arguments. The effect of the argument you make must be that you will win the debate if your arguments are accepted.

Proof is whatever tends to create belief. An argument is a way of structuring your proof to maximize your ability to create belief. Every argument takes this form:

- I. Statement
- II. Proof
- III. Conclusion.

Take the example earlier given, “That Canada enter a continental energy pact.” The affirmative case is that as an accident of nature, energy resources are unevenly divided between countries - Canada has more oil than it needs while the United States has more hydro-electric power than it needs. It would be a benefit to both countries (or at least Canada) if Canada entered a continental energy pact in which we shared those energy resources that we have an excess of and the U.S. did the same. The first part of the affirmative case might be structured as an argument in the following form:

Statement: “Canada has more petroleum energy than it needs.”

- Proof:
- a. Canada has known reserves of 10.7 trillion barrels of oil.
(Cite source.)
 - b. Canada will require less than 6 trillion barrels of oil in the next sixty years. (Cite authority.)
 - c. Because of the development of alternate energy, no significant amount of oil will be needed in fifty years’ time.
(Cite authority.)

Conclusion: “Canada has more oil than it needs.”

A similar approach might be used to show a shortage of hydro-electric power and a consequent benefit to Canadians if this resolution were passed.

C. Nature of Proof

If it is possible, your speech should contain arguments which are supported in different ways - some by the opinions of experts, some by objective facts. Every

argument depends on its reasoning for its strength: the opinion or fact must logically lead to the conclusion you ask the audience to draw. It is not true that some arguments depend on reasoning and some on facts - an argument whose reasoning is unsound has no relevant content. (It is correct, however, that an argument will often be made simply by logically assembling the admitted facts. And in this case much of your debate will be spent showing the logical conclusion to be drawn from those assembled facts. We may call this an argument of “pure reasoning”.) An example of an argument that depends on admitted facts might be “Any sharing of energy will either benefit Canada or it will not. If it doesn’t benefit Canada, we should oppose it. If it does benefit Canada, the U.S. will oppose it. So the proposal is either detrimental or not feasible.”

An argument may be factually correct but logically wrong if the conclusion drawn cannot be deduced from the proof offered. (Another logical error occurs when your conclusion, even if true, is not relevant to the debate.) It is impossible to catalogue all the logical errors made in past debates; however, to help you avoid common errors, here are some examples. In each case, the conclusion drawn may be correct - the only objection is that the conclusion does not follow from the proof.

D. Logical Errors

1. Errors of Argument

- a. Conclusions unsupported by facts:
 - i. Unsupported generalization
 - ii. Unsupported deduction
 - iii. Concealed qualification.

Examples of the foregoing errors occur when a generalization is drawn upon examining too few cases to justify it; when a deduction is drawn from looking at selective, biased or unrepresentative facts; when a statement is offered as being true when it is not true without an important qualification. We all engage from time to time in these errors: “Police officers are in favour of capital punishment”; “We have enough food for three years (assuming the population remains constant).”

- b. Conclusions supported by faulty analysis:
 - i. Relying on false (or unsupported) premises
 - ii. Relying on oversimplification
 - iii. Relying on an inapt analogy.

Examples of the foregoing errors occur when a debater bases his argument on an assumption which is unproven; when a debater assumes that a question is either “black or white”; when a debater draws an analogy to a circumstance which is not properly analogous. “Man is obviously a superior race, because he has survived and outlasted other species.” (This assumes that superior species survive and it is circular because it also assumes that species which survive are superior.) “Sharing of energy resources either benefits Canada or it benefits the United States.” (It could benefit both, or it could benefit neither.)

- c. Conclusions which assume an unproven cause and effect relationship:
 - i. Assuming (incorrectly) that a conclusion follows from a statement
 - ii. Assuming that because one event occurred first, it caused the Second event.

Examples of the foregoing: “I cannot understand why I do badly in English; it’s my favourite subject.” “After capital punishment was abolished in Canada, the number of murders declined by 9%.”

- d. Conclusions which depend on the assumption that the whole is the same as the parts:
 - i. Opposing a course of conduct because of what might follow from it
 - ii. Assuming that what is true of the whole is true of the part
 - iii. Assuming that what is true of the part is true of the whole.

Examples of the foregoing: “If we legalize marijuana, more people will go on to hard drugs; therefore we should not legalize possession of marijuana.” (Two errors here: first, it assumes without support that more people will use hard drugs [and it assumes that this will be caused by legalizing possession of marijuana]; second, it opposes one course of conduct because of consequences which are incidental to it and have not been shown to flow directly from it. The proper response (assuming the statement to be true) is to legalize marijuana but to take steps to prevent the use of hard drugs [assuming that to be shown to be unwise] or to show that no effective steps can be taken to prevent the use of hard drugs if marijuana is legalized and therefore drawing the conclusion that legalization must be opposed for the ulterior reason. Similarly, “He must be a good drummer - he plays for a very good group” and “This committee will be very effective - everyone on it is a good worker” are obvious examples of the other errors.

2. Errors of Misdirection

Relying on irrelevant factors to influence your audience:

- a. The background of the person making the statement
- b. Irrelevant credentials
- c. Popularity of the opinion
- d. Plea for mercy.

Examples of the foregoing: “You cannot believe his opinion on nuclear armament: he’s been to prison.” “Mr. Robinson, President of the National Shakespearean Society, opposed the use of herbicides.” “When I was at show and tell in kindergarten, we couldn’t decide if my cat was a boy or a girl, so we took a vote on it.” (Opinion polls are relevant to show that people have a particular opinion; they cannot prove the fact that the opinion is correct.) “How can you convict someone with a wife and a family to support?”

E. Sources

After you have determined which arguments you will make, you may need to do specific research to support the argument. You will be looking for a fact or opinion that supports an argument you already believe to be true. (You may already have found some while doing your primary research.)

Where you should look will depend on the support your argument requires. I recommend that you turn to Canadian News Facts for public affairs topics. CNF is an index of Canadian news stories and is therefore a quick way to reach relevant material. Dictionaries of quotations and magazine articles are also useful, depending on the nature of the support your argument requires.

F. Invention

Invention has an important part to play in a debate - and an imaginative debater who has a creative or original approach to a resolution will do well. Such a debater is also able to craft examples that precisely illustrate the argument. Inventing facts, however, is always improper and is grounds for disqualification. Some debaters use invention as a substitute for research and that is always wrong.

CSDF Rule 16 states “... all assertions of fact by debaters must be accurate and debaters must be prepared to cite specific authority (publication, page, author, date, etc.) for all such assertions immediately upon being challenged to do so. ... Judges will penalize debaters severely for using inaccurate evidence and, if a judge is certain that a debater has deliberately fabricated or falsified evidence, he or she should report this to the Director as quickly as possible. The penalty for fabrication or falsification of evidence is disqualification from eligibility to win any prize or distinction ...”

If you have not done sufficient research (for whatever reason), you must rely on only generally accepted facts - you cannot invent an authority to support your argument, nor can you invent an apt statistic. This rule is fair: a debater who has done his research normally cannot disprove what you say. As the debate turns partly on the evidence presented, the debate would merely come down to which debater had the greatest powers of imagination, if falsified or fabricated information were permitted.

One exception to this rule is that debaters are allowed reasonable latitude in role-playing. (For example, a Prime Minister may brag about his party’s overwhelming success in “the recent election”.) As well, hypothetical examples are permitted.

7. Strategy

A. Generally

Everyone has personal likes and dislikes. Your aim in a debate is to persuade an audience and this requires that you ask yourself “What approach will be most persuasive for this audience?” This entails two questions: “Which of the available arguments are most persuasive?” and “What is the most persuasive way to present those arguments?” To take an obvious example, if you are complaining of waste in the civil service, using the example of your own teachers (“who work only five hours a day, eight months of the year”) is not going to persuade many teachers in the audience and will probably alienate them. They do not consider themselves civil servants and they do not think (rightly or wrongly) that they work only five hours a day, eight months a year. The same teachers might be more easily convinced by an argument that complains that the Ministry of Education has one bureaucrat for every four teachers - and your suggestion that axing the bureaucrats and adding more teachers would provide better quality education, save dollars and eliminate waste.

You try to convince the opposition as well as the audience - and the arguments that the opposition finds most persuasive they will find most difficult to rebut. In attacking the quality of education today, don’t point to them as examples of the bad system (they won’t believe that) - rather flatter them and point out that they are exceptions and ask how many of the students at their school have the ability they have demonstrated. This is good manners; it is also good debate. Similarly, if you can paint yourself and your partner(s) as examples of where the system has failed - that accords with what the opposition wants to believe anyway.

B. Language

One key ingredient in a persuasive speech is the language used. The English language is rich with synonyms. Choose the one that most advances your case. If you are defending government payments to the public, speak of “social security” and “family support programmes” - not “welfare” and “unemployment insurance”. Your team’s plan is a “case”, the opposition’s a “theory” or a “scheme”. You live in a “mixed economy”; they are products of the “welfare state”.

Similarly, in analysing the resolution and defining it, be conscious of the interpretation you can use which will be the most persuasive to the opposition.

C. Your Style and Theirs

Few debaters give much attention to the combination the judges see: the combined effect of the two (or three) affirmative speakers and the combined effect of the two (or three) negative speakers. It is elemental that your argument and your partner’s (or partners’) interlock, not overlap. But his (her or their) style(s) should do so also. If you are the voice of reason, let him (or her or them) be the voice(s) of passion, morality, or idealism.

“Have people on your team that you can work with but who are different from you in the way they argue, talk, or reason. Remember, debating is a team effort. If the members of one team all talk, look, and reason alike, you might as well have one person giving all the speeches and let the rest of the team sit in the audience to watch. If you are the slow, patient, methodical type who writes out every word of a fine, closely reasoned argument, have a partner who never uses notes and rips into issues with concentrated, aimed fire. If you have a flashy wit that can shred an enemy proposition down to the essential absurdity it is, have a tall, dry companion who can stand aloof from petty bickerings and pronounce statements with an Olympian air of disdain and discernment. Remember that if Oliver and Hardy had both been fat or both been thin, no one would ever have paid five cents to watch their movies.”

MacKenzie, Debating Tips, page 1

It is correspondingly important to divide the points your team will cover logically and in a way that furthers your strategy. Those points which are to be factually presented should be given to someone who excels at this, while those which call for examples should be given to someone who tells good stories.

But this obvious injunction applies as well to the presentation of your case. If the opposition is flamboyant, excited or loud, try to be restrained, calm and quiet. If they are calm, bring life to the debate. Help the audience to see differences between you and the opposition in style as well as in content.

Similarly, do not overlook the advantages of your own organization. If your team has three arguments, and the opposition has replied to each, deal with your points when re-establishing them in your order of preference. Use your organization and force the opposition to use yours too. Keep the debate organized on your terms.

8. Organization

A reader who does not understand an argument in writing has the opportunity to re-read it until he does. Your listener does not have that chance. He either understands your point or he does not. That makes it essential that your argument be clear and well

organized. Your listener should be able to answer the following questions after your speech:

- a. What was your central thesis?
- b. On what points do you and the opposition disagree?
- c. What did you present in support of your view?
- d. Did you answer all opposition arguments?

It is therefore essential that your remarks be organized in the following four respects:

- a. Your team's proof must be logically divided among the team members.
- b. Each argument you make must be identified and it must be made clear where it fits in the debate.
- c. Each opposition argument must be identified and separately answered.
- e. You must summarize the result of the foregoing, both within each speech and as a team.

A. Introduction

Although good organization is essential if your arguments are to be understood and sound convincing, it is no substitute for content. The introduction and conclusion should therefore be as brief as possible. The first speaker must introduce his team's arguments (maximum: 30% of his speech); the last speaker must conclude for the team.

In presenting your introduction, you should aim to win favourable attention, unify the audience's thoughts, and set the tone for the debate. The introduction should always make provision for the following parts:

- a. a definition of terms;
- b. a statement of the origin and history of the case;
- c. a statement of irrelevant matter;
- d. a statement of admitted or waived matter;
- e. a statement of the issues; and
- f. a division of the issues amongst team members.

Clemens, Classroom Debates

Your introduction should be tailored to your debate. You might consider including some of the following in your introduction:

- a. Asking (dramatically) a question or series of questions that arouse an interest in your topic;
- b. Telling a short anecdote that demonstrates your case in simple Emotional terms;
- c. Making a historical, personal or timely reference. The historical Reference adds authority; the personal and timely references add sincerity and an appreciation in the audience that you are genuine. For example, "In 1867, such and such happened ..." or "I read in the paper

- this morning ...”;
- d. Quoting something relevant to your debate;
 - e. Using an analogy or theme that continues through the debate until the conclusion. This can be effective and unify the speech.

D.S.A.B.C., A Guide to the
Elements of Debate, page 1

A sample might look like this:

“Last week’s newspaper contained the headline ‘John Hinckley Acquitted of the Attempted Assassination of President Reagan’. This travesty of the criminal law has focused attention on the need for the Insanity Defence to be abolished.”

By this we mean that the accused in a criminal trial no longer have the right to be acquitted because he was insane at the time of the alleged offence. [Definition by paraphrase.] The key term is “Insanity Defence” by which we mean the defence given by section 16 of the Criminal Code, which provides for an acquittal in certain circumstances. [Definition of particular terms.]

Society is no longer accepting - if it ever did - that an accused should be spared from criminal punishment merely because he convinces a psychiatrist he is crazy. [Essence of the government case.] Even Edward Mortimer, the seventh person to make an attempt on the life of Queen Victoria, said from his insane asylum (when hearing of the thirteenth attempt on her life), ‘it is a pity they did not hang me, for then our dear Queen would not have to fear attempts on her life.’ [Example.]

I make perfectly clear that we are not discussing fitness to stand trial, or the appropriate treatment for the insane on their release - but only whether people who commit crimes while insane should be held responsible on grounds similar to those which face the rest of society. [A statement of irrelevant matter.]

We admit that the basis of the defence is the principle that only those responsible for their acts should be punished. We suggest, Mr. Speaker, that there is good reason to depart from this general principle here. [Admitted matter, limiting of the issue.]

The issue’s in today’s debate are:

1. The seriousness of the abuse of the defence;
2. The need for a flexible approach to remedy these abuses;
3. The government plan to commit such people and provide appropriate treatment for all who suffer from insanity or serious psychological disorder while in prison. [Organization of the argument.]

I shall deal with the first two issues while my partner will deal with the third.”
[Division of the issues among team members.]
(Speaking time elapsed: about two minutes.)

B. Development of Your Argument

In organizing the body of your argument, you must reduce your points to snappy headlines for easy reference. In the above example, you might summarize the issues as “Abuse, Flexibility and Treatment”. Similarly, in developing your argument, make it obvious which heading you are discussing and whether the argument you are making is in response to a particular opposition argument.

At page 2 in *A Guide to the Elements of Debate*, the Debate and Speech Association of British Columbia offers the following tips on developing your debate speech [re-lettered]:

- a. Make certain that your points are relevant to the resolution;
- b. Support your argument with examples: “History is clear; ...”
- d. Rely on quotation as an effective, persuasive means of documenting your point;
- d. Use statistics when they are available. (But do not bore the audience through overuse, and do not use questionable sources.) Give your source;
- e. Prefer to make a few, well supported points rather than a plethora of unsupported assertions. Do not exaggerate a weak point;
- f. Use rhetorical questions;
- g. Add humour to your debate (remembering that your purpose is to persuade, not to entertain);
- h. Reinforce, but do not repeat, your partner’s arguments;
- i. Describe your points vividly and concretely. Be concise;
- j. Explain exactly what you are trying to say; (assume that the audience is intelligent but ignorant of your subject;)
- k. Express yourself simply (never a fault unless it interrupts coherence).

C. Order of Arguments

It is good strategy to choose an effective order for your arguments, rather than simply presenting them in the order they occur to you. If each builds on the preceding argument, choose the most basic argument and work from there. If each argument is independent, start and finish with a strong argument. The order of your arguments must depend on the speech you are making. At least settle on a deliberate reason for the order you adopt.

To enable your audience to understand better the argument you pose, make it clear when you move from one point to the next. Leave points distinctly and announce your next argument or wrap up a point by suggesting it leads to your next argument.

D. Summary

There is an important difference between a summary and a conclusion. A debate should have both. A summary reviews the important arguments and the answers that were made to them and identifies which opposition arguments were answered and which were not; a conclusion is an inference drawn from the summary. Your summary should be short - if your speech is well organized, it may not always be necessary, although a conclusion must always be present. In the example already given, the summary might look like this:

“Mr. Speaker, society has lost faith in the criminal justice system in part because of the abuse of the Insanity Defence. What is needed is a flexible response that recognizes that human beings with human problems do not fit the neat compartments of the Criminal Code’s Insanity Defence. This means that those who are tried but found insane at the time of the commission of the offence should be convicted, but the treatment adjusted to correspond with each person’s needs. The only opposition challenge to this was, as I’ve already shown, that this is different from the general principles of the criminal law and that the abuse of the Insanity Defence is trivial. Society does not think that the abuse is trivial and this is a unique problem which will not suffer from an original solution.”

E. Conclusion

Your conclusion is a one paragraph burst that by quotation or other appropriate turn of phrase leaves your audience on your side. It is logically an ending to the argument. Conclude strongly and leave a positive impression with your audience. Many debaters like to use a quotation and, in appropriate circumstances, something similar to “I expect that you too, Mr. Speaker, have come to the inescapable conclusion that this resolution should be defeated.” Some merely say “Thank you.” Whatever tack you take, you should not merely fade away, slowly inching towards your chair and only stop speaking completely as you seat yourself. Instead conclude powerfully, pause, and sit down purposefully. Try to use your full speaking time but do not run overtime.

9. Delivery

Each debater has an individual speaking style. It is in this area that general comments are least useful. There are at least four elements that combine to affect the presentation of your remarks; your delivery should be critically assessed in respect of the language you use, your use of your voice and body, and the personality you project.

A. Language

The language you use should be clear and simple. You are speaking for an audience that cannot re-read the portions of your argument that it does not understand.

“Combine abstract notions with concrete examples. Your audience will not follow you if you always speak in First Principles and do not get into actual cases. Likewise, they will become restless if you always talk in specifics and do not take the long view from time to time on central issues.” (MacKenzie, *Debating Tips*, page 2.)

Your language should be concrete. Use single words, not long expressions. Use short words when they are available. Vary your language, but aim for simplicity. Oratory requires the right word, not the long word.

Ensure that your speech is grammatically sound. Each sentence must be correct and each word must be used correctly. “Continually” does not mean “continuously”; “enormity” means “immense wickedness”; it does not mean “large”. The careful speaker should refer to H. W. Fowler’s *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (Oxford University Press) or some similar work when a question of usage arises.

B. Voice

The second element of your delivery is your voice.

The single most important requirement, of course, is that you be heard. If your audience cannot hear you, they will not be persuaded by you. Your voice has two other chief functions - it must sustain the audience’s interest (often through variety) and it must be easily understood. You must not only be loud enough; your articulation and enunciation must be clear.

Beyond these obvious comments, much remains. Your voice takes on variety when you change the rate at which you speak or the tone, volume or inflexion of your voice. A pregnant pause or a rhetorical question can serve to punctuate your speech.

Your voice is your single most important performing instrument. Use it well. There is no substitute for practise. You need not rehearse a particular speech ad nauseum - reading anything aloud with appropriate emphasis will accomplish your purpose. But rehearse you must, unless you are fortunate enough to have a voice which is naturally clear, audible and interesting.

C. Body

Your body is also an important debating instrument. A few rules of thumb, although subject to exceptions, may be stated:

Stand erect. It is all right to appear at ease and relaxed, but never slouch. Similarly, never stoop to use a microphone - adjust it so you can use it standing upright. You may rest your notes or both hands on a table, chair or podium if you can do so without bending over. If you cannot do so, then change the height of the table, chair or podium, or don't use it. Do not put your hands into your pockets.

Gesture naturally and without exaggeration. You may wish to make a hand or arm gesture to emphasize a point - or use your entire body. If most of your speech is delivered from behind a podium, it may be helpful to emphasize a point by moving forward, becoming closer and more confiding to your audience. However, you should not cross the floor or otherwise appear to menace your opponents.

You should generally avoid repeated movements. A routine gesture (or swaying, or walking back and forth) distracts the audience. Likewise you should try to avoid nervous mannerisms, such as repeatedly clicking your pen or playing with a paper clip.

Look your audience in the eye. Walter Cronkite was a superb newscaster - few of us are as convincing reading a script as he was, looking up only occasionally. A speech in which the debater is always engaging the audience - by gesture, or eye contact - is a winning and persuasive speech. Far better that you maintain eye contact, even if you have to stop and find your next point periodically, than that you read your remarks without interruption or glancing up.

Try to interpret your judges' reactions. One of the benefits of eye contact is that you can often gauge how well your audience understands the point you are making and whether they are favourably disposed to you. If your audience appears to be confused, explain at greater length; if you think they have grasped your point, move on to your next argument. If they seem set against you, try another tack. The most persuasive speaker is he who best reads his audience.

Smile when it is appropriate to do so. Smiling and taking a deep breath before you begin speaking can often reassure your audience as well as relax yourself.

D. Personality

Every debater by the combination of his language, voice and body conveys a message to his audience about his personality. If he is good, he will seem warm, enthusiastic, but not biased. He will be comfortable, but not arrogant; gracious, but not condescending. He will be concerned, occasionally troubled, always collected and sometimes agitated. He will be a person speaking normally to an audience he respects.

Consider what personality you display. Your debate is more than a written argument; it is a persuasive exchange.

10. Rebuttal

The time available for rebuttal is precious. It is crucial to the success of your argument that you make efficient use of it. It is unlikely that you can in three minutes rebut what your opponents have said in ten. The structure and effect of your rebuttal is therefore important: if you appear to demolish the opposition, your rebuttal will be a success, even if some questions remain unanswered.

A. Preparation

In preparation for your rebuttal, you must learn your topic well enough to discuss it intelligently. You should also:

Before the debate, prepare rebuttal points for arguments you expect to be raised. (Do not rebut arguments that your opponents do not make, however.)

During the debate,

- i. Select the important opposition arguments and label or identify them;
- ii. Determine which you will answer and in what order;
- iii. Decide how you will answer them.

B. Selecting what to Attack

Your first task is to listen to the opposition speeches and carefully and accurately summarize the arguments made. If you misunderstand an argument, you cannot rebut it effectively. Once your summary is constructed, decide how you will rebut the arguments. There are four ways:

- i. The facts relied on are wrong.
- ii. The facts relied on are right (or may be right) but
 - (1) they do not support the argument they are intended to support;
 - (2) they do support the argument, but that does not prove the resolution;
 - (3) they do go to prove the resolution, but the facts and arguments as a whole are against it.

You must therefore determine which of these means (or combination of means) you are going to adopt. Unless the opposition's facts are clearly wrong, or you have extra time, prefer to rebut arguments rather than facts. If you have time, answer every opposition argument that is unrefuted. (Do not waste time refuting arguments your partner has already destroyed unless the arguments have been re-established.) If you do not have time to answer all arguments, select the most important arguments. In your rebuttal, make it clear why you are answering only some arguments, such as:

- i. Because your colleagues have already answered the other arguments;
- ii. Because the other arguments are trivial;
- iii. Because the other arguments are irrelevant; (Show why they are. For example, they rebut an argument you did not make, or misrepresent your argument.)
- iv. Because the weight of the evidence presented in the debate is already against the other arguments;
- v. Because you can answer all the arguments as a whole.

If your opponents have raised a lot of trivial arguments, you can sometimes illustrate that by a technique similar to the following. “My opponents raised a long list of questions about the affirmative plan. The answers are ‘Yes’, ‘Yes’, ‘No’, ‘Thursdays’, ‘No’, ‘No’, ‘Yes’ and ‘People over thirty-four’.”

In any event, begin your rebuttal by characterizing or summarizing the opposition case. A useful technique is to characterize the whole opposition argument as essentially one point: “What the opposition case amounts to is basically that we shouldn’t trust western governments with nuclear weapons.” If your characterization is accurate, and you answer that point, there is no need to answer each of the arguments later. It may be more effective to deal with the argument as a whole rather than with each part.

If you don’t have enough time to answer all of the arguments, you must choose which to answer. You must reply to all of the important arguments. Reply as well to the less important arguments according to which you can most effectively answer. For the sake of clarity, it is normally easier to answer the major arguments in the order in which they were made. But if the arguments are clear, it may be possible to answer them in the order you presented your case - with the weakest rebuttal in the middle and the strongest at the beginning and end.

C. Answering Attacks

What answer you give to each argument depends on choosing one of the four forms of reply noted above. The most effective is to employ several answers. For example, “My friend the Prime Minister told us that the system worked well in the United States. We have three answers to this claim:

1. There is no evidence it has worked in the U.S. as it has only been in place for eighteen months and the consumer price index was declining over that period in any event;
2. The Canadian economy is different from the American because the Canadian dollar is weaker and because foreign trade is much more important to Canada than to the U.S., so even if the statistics were accurate, they would not prove that the same result would occur here.
3. Finally, even if the affirmative plan would work here, it still does nothing to provide for the 110,000 unemployable that the federal government admits exist but would not benefit from this plan.”

D. Structure

Every rebuttal consists of exactly two steps: you identify an opposition argument and then you answer it. This is true whether you are denying an opposition argument or rebuilding your own. If time permits, you may introduce and summarize what you are saying, but every rebuttal should consist of at least identification and answer. Merely answering opposition arguments without identifying them is not enough.

The most effective place for your rebuttal, if you have a choice, is normally at the beginning of your speech so that you may negate opposition ideas and follow with a positive substitution of your own. This allows you the flexibility to get through your entire rebuttal - if it takes a little more than three minutes, some of your main speech may be omitted; if you have time left, your constructive remarks can be stretched out. This also avoids the choppy appearance of doing a prepared speech for five minutes followed by a rebuttal which is often not well connected up.

E. Courtesy

A debater can never be too courteous. Although debating has always been characterized by witty personal jibes, such comments if pointed are out of place in competitive debate. Debaters who are on the receiving end of such comments frequently think they are intended in earnest. Judges will penalize debaters for such remarks. Debaters who utter them look petty and mean spirited.

There is no harm in levity, however. To make it clear that the remarks are only in fun, lampoon yourself and your partner(s), if you wish. (“The Opposition may have been well served by a public school education, Mr. Speaker, but the system has also produced unfortunates such as my partner, who can barely write his own name.”)

You should never argue with the judges or the moderator, especially if they are clearly wrong. You may know far more about debating than these officials - but telling them so is unlikely to convince them. Bite your tongue and say nothing at the time, reporting the matter to the tournament co-ordinator later if it is serious enough. You should not publicly complain about judging: this is in poor taste and demonstrates bad sportsmanship. Debate judges are volunteers who usually do their best to be impartial and to render a fair and objective decision. Accord them and other officials the respect that they deserve.

You should normally introduce yourself to the other team before the debate and congratulate them afterwards. It is a common practice for debaters to walk over to their opponents’ table and shake hands with them at the conclusion of the contest.

While they are speaking, pay attention to your partners. If you spend your time looking out the window, several other spectators probably will follow suit. On the other hand, if you keep looking at him or her, it will be harder for other observers to let their attention wander. If you wish to stare out the window, wait until your opponents are speaking. Remember, however, that the judges may conclude that you are not paying attention to the debate and penalize you. It is wiser to appear to be attentive and involved right to the end of the debate by carefully observing and taking notes of your opponents’ remarks, and you should always be alert to the possibility of heckling, raising points or complaining about rule violations by your opponents (depending on the style of debate). For advice on such skills for the specific styles of debating, you should refer to publications on Academic, Cross-Examination and Parliamentary style debating.

11. Afterword

Each debater has an individual style and there are certain to be comments in these notes that other debaters will disagree with. Treat these comments as one view that may be taken - not as the only correct view.

Finally, remember that debating is both an art form (at which you may try to excel), a social activity (in which you meet others), and a recreation (in which you relax). Enjoy it and find satisfaction in it. It is supposed to be fun.

Brian P. Casey
January 1983
Revised October 1984

Revised by
John Filliter in
February 2005

Appendix: A Summary of Steps in Preparing a Debate Case
(For more detailed information, refer to Some Elements of Debate.)

1. Type of Resolution
Is it a resolution of fact, value (opinion), or policy (requiring a plan)?
2. Analysis
 - A. Do you know enough about the topic generally, or do you need to do research first? (Do your general research now.)
 - B. Of the arguments:
 - i. What are the arguments in favour of the resolution?
 - ii. What are the arguments against the resolution?
 - iii. What are the key issues in the debate?
3. Definitions
 - A. Which terms need to be defined?
 - B. How should they be defined (dictionary definition, specialized definition referring to an authority, giving your own personal definition)?
 - C. What short summary of the resolution will you use?
4. Plan (if a policy debate) (Even if you are on the Opposition, prepare a skeleton plan; this will aid your criticism of the Government plan.)
Details of the plan, such as:
 - A. Cost
 - B. Timing
 - C. Personnel
 - D. Mechanism
 - D. Consequences and Alternatives
5. Material (You should already have done your general research; this is the time to organize your material and identify areas that need further research.)
 - A. What additional facts do you want information on or evidence of?
 - B. Where should you look? (Library clipping files, Canadian News Facts [an index to news stories], newspaper indexes, magazines, specialized books, dictionaries of quotations, Hansard, asking an expert)
6. Preparing Your Speech
 - A. Meet with your partner and divide up your points
 - B. Organize your arguments:
 - i. What needs to be said in your introduction?
 - ii. What order should you make your points in?
 - iii. How will you summarize your speech?
 - iii. What will be your conclusion?
7. Writing Your Speech
 - A. Write your speech, either word for word or merely using point form
 - B. Edit it, so that no time is wasted.
 - C. Reduce it to point form and put it on index cards.
 - C. Rehearse, by yourself, in front of others, and with your partner(s).
8. Prepare Rebuttal Points
Identify the answers and the supporting facts to reply to the probable arguments that you identified in Step 2 above.