

REFUTATION

“Do not be afraid of disagreement.”



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Introduction

What is essential for advanced refutation?

In everyday life we do not usually use only our own arguments and points of view. Normally we are confronted with outside statements. A reasonable refutation is nowadays more than required in society, since correct confrontation of different points of view opens doors for the most effective solutions and the best choices. Refutation is essential for every productive discussion and basic debate skill.

In order to make debate productive and meaningful we are supposed to present relevant opposition. A reasonable refutation requires several conditions to be fulfilled.

First of all, **careful listening** to your opponent is inevitable. Pay attention when the opposite part holds the speech. Sometimes it might be useful to **make notes**.

Try to **understand the ideas** coming from the other side of discussion. If whatever mentioned in speech seems unclear or unfamiliar to you, ask for clarification. It is better to ask twice than let misunderstandings ruin the flow of debate.

No matter what happens in your debate, do not forget to tolerate ideas of your opponents. Stay calm and on top of things.

Structure of refutation

Maintaining precise and clear structure of refutation ensure smooth understanding and acceptance of your statements. Follow those four steps and you will not forget any of its important parts: signposting, stating, supporting, and summarizing.

Step One: Signal or They say

Identify the argument you are answering.

In a single debate, there will be multiple arguments, pieces of evidence, and sometimes tangents that a debater must address. Identifying clearly which of your opponent's arguments you are responding to keep the flow of the debate progressing in a coherent manner.

Good note-taking skills or even the briefest of notes allow you to track your opponents' arguments and refutations, and can help organize your response.

Remember to **rephrase** rather than simply repeat your opponent's entire argument. If you repeat all of your opponent's arguments, you wouldn't have any speech time left to present your own arguments. Additionally, the more time you spend restating your opponent's argument, the more risk you run of reinforcing it!

Step Two: State or But - But I disagree - However - Actually - In fact

Make your **counter argument**.

After stating your opponent's position, you should make your response in a consistent, understandable manner. Make it brief, but well understandable. Stay in the relevant flow of the debate and **avoid off-topics**. Your reaction must refer exactly at what have been told before.

Step Three: Support or Because

Reference evidence or justification.

Many arguments will be supported by **evidence** that brings some justification for the claim being advanced. Reading or referring to evidence will support claims advanced by the debater. That is why a good factual preparation is important. Often, evidence is not needed, and the debater's own brilliant analysis can provide the justification for the claim. In this point, you can proceed exactly in the same manner as when composing an argument. Your argument will support your claim (e.g. deduction)

Step Four: Summarize or Therefore

Explain the importance of your argument.

For an audience to reach a final judgment on an issue, they must recognize the comparative importance of different arguments. Explaining the way in which your argument is more important than your opponent's position is a crucial way to leave an impression on audience members.

You need to draw a conclusion that affirms your position. Beginning your conclusion with "Therefore" is a clue to the judge (and you) that you are about to state your position and concluding your refutation.



Examples

1.

(Signaling) My opponent argued that the death penalty deters crime.

(State) In fact, the death penalty increases crime.

(Support) According to a nationwide study conducted by Professor Wiggins in 2002, violent crime has actually increased in states with the death penalty while crime has decreased in states without the death penalty.

(Summarize) If this study is true, and the methodology is certainly sound, then the central justification for the death penalty has no merit.

2.

(Signaling) Speaker 1: "School should be year round to avoid the 'summer learning loss' that occurs when students forget much of what they learn between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next school year."

Speaker 2: "They say that school should be year round to avoid summer learning loss..."

(State) Speaker 1: "School should be year round to avoid the 'summer learning loss' that occurs when students forget much of what they learn between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next school year."

Speaker 2: "They say that school should be year round to avoid summer learning loss... BUT school should last for only nine months..."

(Support) Speaker 1: "School should be year round to avoid the 'summer learning loss' that occurs when students forget much of what they learn between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next school year."

Speaker 2: "They say that school should be year round to avoid summer learning loss, BUT school should last for only nine months... BECAUSE research shows that it's not the quantity of time spent in the classroom that matters, but the quality of the education students receive during the school day that matters..."

(Summarize) Speaker 1: "School should be year round to avoid the 'summer learning loss' that occurs when students forget much of what they learn between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next school year."

Speaker 2: "They say that school should be year round to avoid summer learning loss, BUT school should last for only nine months BECAUSE research shows that it's not the quantity of time spent in the classroom that matters, but the quality of the education students receive during the school day that matters.... THEREFORE, school should NOT be year-round."

Exercise

The best way to train and develop your refutation skills is – of course- practice. It is recommended to realize one simple exercise. There is a list of several easy topics offered. Work in pairs; one person composes an argument in favour of the topic and the other one tries to propose a relevant 4 step refutation. At the beginning, your refutation might be easier, however, you should progressively sophisticate your speech, using more and more of analysis and explications.

All students should have an after school job.

Partial birth abortion should be illegal.

Every student should be required to take a performing arts course.

Homework should be banned.

School uniforms should be required.

Year round education is not a good idea for student learning.

The legal drinking age should be lowered to 18.

PE should be required of all students throughout high school.

All students should be required to perform one year of community service.



Types of refutation – self study

When replying to an argument against your opinion, you have more options or ways to make a refutation. You might have already used more of them in your life without knowing. It depends on your argumentation line and it is up to you to consider which type of refutation would suit the best in each particular case, for each argument. It is recommended to practice and try at least once each of them to be prepared for every kind of debate situation.

I. **Find a fallacy** in the opposing argument—some way in which it is not logical or incoherent with the issue.

II. **Concede** the argument: “Yes, that’s true, but it’s not really relevant to the point I was making, or not as important as other arguments, because. . . .”

III. **Conciliate** your opponent: “Yes, I see what you are concerned about, and it’s real, but I think there’s another way to take care of that. . . .”

IV. **Counter the evidence** by

- A. showing that the alleged facts may not be solid fact;
- B. pointing out the small quantity of the alleged evidence;
- C. pointing out other evidence that points the other way;
- D. casting doubt on the authorities relied upon, especially for scientific or statistical evidence;
- E. pointing out the dubious context from which quotations or other authoritative evidence is taken.

V. **Find a weakness in the warrant.** Consider what kinds of arguments are being made, and proceed accordingly.

- A. If it’s a *definition* argument (“What is X?”),
 - 1. show the definition being used is not applicable in this issue; or
 - 2. propose a better definition and show why it is better.
- B. If it’s an *evaluation* argument (“What is the value of X?”),
 - 1. show that X has not been evaluated in terms of what it really is or what it is for; or
 - 2. propose a better criterion for evaluating it; or
 - 3. point out other values or kinds of value that are relevant.
- C. If it’s an *analogy* argument (“What is X like? What does X work like?”),
 - 1. show where the analogy breaks down (all analogies break down somewhere); or

2. produce a closer, more convincing analogy and show why it's better.
- D. If it's a *causal* argument ("What are the causes of X? What are the consequences of X?"),
1. point out the weak link(s) in the proposed chain of causes and effects; or
 2. propose a more likely chain of causes and effects; or
 3. question the scientific evidence (experiments, statistics, accepted laws of nature) used to support the alleged causation.
- E. If it's a *proposal* argument ("What should we do about X?"), analyse it into its component claims of fact and value and examine questionable parts of each of them. There will be another page on this matter, which can get complicated.



Sources for further research

Here are some useful links for those who want to deepen their refutation skills. Feel free to continue with your own studies and do not hesitate to use even debate literature if there is any available. Good luck with being a constructive opposition in every discussion!

<http://idebate.org/training/teaching-tools/refutation-and-impact-back>

<http://idebate.org/news-articles/coaches-judges-track-session-refutation>

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~goodwin/spcom322/refute.pdf>

<https://sites.google.com/site/anintroductiontodebate/lectures/2-more-advanced-material/1-refutation-strategies>

