CHAPTER 8

Clash with Impact: Mastering the Art of the Attack

Coming Up!

Once you've built a solid case, the next step is figuring out how to challenge your opponent's case. In this chapter, you'll learn about the multiple ways to clash with the other team's points during constructive speeches, and how to complete an overall attack in the rebuttal.

TAKING THE LEAP: THE CHALLENGE OF REFUTATION

Without clash between the two teams, a debate would simply be a collection of speeches. Competitors would be able to plan and practice the entire debate beforehand, and there wouldn't be any back and forth flow of arguments. The focus would be on making a great *speech*, rather than contributing to a great *debate*. Remember, though, that debate isn't only about proving that you're right. It's also about proving that the other team is wrong.

Clash, or refutation, is the process of countering point by point the arguments brought forth by the other team. Your purpose is to be critical and to raise doubts in the minds of the judges. Effective clash will force your opponent to go on the defensive and to rebuild its case.

Many debaters, especially beginners, find refutation particularly difficult. Why? Quite simply, it's the part of a debate that you can't plan in advance. But what if you make mistakes? Isn't it more effective to use prepared, practiced text and to deliver it flawlessly? The reality is actually the opposite. You'll be in a superior position if you devote significant effort to clash, even if your clash has mistakes and weaknesses. Since you're unable to plan your refutation, you're not expected to be as fluent as when you present your own team's case.

Even though you can't plan your clash precisely, you can make yourself familiar with the general tools of refutation. That is, you can learn about the variety of angles from which to clash with an opponent's case. This will prepare you to spot such opportunities quickly when they come up in a round. You can also anticipate some of the ideas that the other team may bring up and consider how you would go about challenging them.

TO REFUTE OR NOT TO REFUTE?

Before diving into *how* to refute, it's important to know *what* to refute. The short explanation is that you should refute any part of your opponent's case that's important in proving its side of the resolution. While this advice may seem self-evident, much of any team's case is extra information that 'pads' the most important elements. You won't be

Success Tip!

Clash with every relevant point made by your opponent.

able to refute everything, so knowing what's essential and what isn't can make your clash significantly stronger.

Usually, you should stick to the core of each of your opponent's points—the single sentence that outlines the argument—and the logical analysis and explanation that follows. It's important to do this for every argument, as you don't want to leave any important points untouched. However, there are some areas that you should generally aim to avoid in your clash:

Process and technique. Refutation should focus exclusively on substantive matter. For instance, if a speaker goes over time, don't take up any of your time telling the judges about it. You may also come across debaters who present poorly structured speeches, but you shouldn't try to convince the judges of this weakness. Finally, you should avoid comments on how effectively the other team debated, such as saying, "The first Negative speaker showed poor skill in explaining her second point." It's up to the judges to decide how well each person debated.

Case theme. Surely, the purpose of your speech is to show why your opponent's theme is incorrect. But you shouldn't try to do so by debating that the theme itself is wrong, as it's too broad to be refuted directly. A theme is a grouping and summary of a series of arguments, each of which addresses a specific issue. Your goal in refutation is to weaken the theme by targeting the individual arguments. It may also be useful to explain how your critique of a particular point has damaged your opponent's case theme.

Sources and statistics. Addressing the usefulness of your opponent's evidence or pointing out a factual inaccuracy can add some value to your clash. That being said, a common mistake is trying to argue against sources and statistics directly, rather than the points themselves. "Our source is better than your source" or "We have better statistics" types of counter-arguments do little to refute the arguments that form the basis of the other team's case. Evidence *illustrates* an argument but doesn't make or break an argument.

THE TOOLS OF TERRIFIC CLASH

There are countless angles from which to clash with your opponent's case. This section presents a few of the more common ones, which

will give you a general idea of how to approach the attack. You can certainly delve into the many books and articles devoted to more technical refutation concepts. Such concepts go by names like "post hoc fallacy" and "non sequitur." If you don't have any clue what these phrases mean, don't worry. Most debaters don't. While it may be useful to know about them as you become an advanced debater, you can get quite far by understanding the tools discussed in this section.

Issue Challenges

Said correctly, a challenge will double as clash by implying what's wrong with the argument. It takes less time to issue a challenge that to counter a point directly. By spending a few seconds telling the other team what specifically it has to prove, you're forcing it to spend valuable time responding to the challenge. It's efficient for you and inefficient for your opponent.

Success Tip!

When issuing a challenge, explain why it's important.

When making a challenge, be confident and decisive in how you present it. For example, start with, "The Affirmative must prove …" or "A fundamental assumption that the Opposition has to explain is …" In doing so, you'll simultaneously signal to your judges that a particular issue must be addressed and to your opponents that they have to deal with it. These are some examples of how to issue a challenge:

• **Media influence**: "There's a fundamental question that the Affirmative must answer in order to justify its case that the news media has a negative influence on society. How else would we receive vital information about emergencies, such as hurricanes and earthquakes?"

• **Environmental standards**: "The 'black hole' in the Affirmative's plan must be addressed in the second speaker's speech. How will the government convince people to practice the proposed environmental standards, if there's no reasonable way to monitor violations?"

Attack Assumptions

Most arguments rest on one or more assumptions. Often, these assumptions appear normal, so it's unlikely a team will spend significant time

justifying them. One way of clashing is to attack these assumptions, weakening the foundation for the point. It's also important that you explain why the assumption in question is central to the rest of the team's case. Here are two examples of targeting a team's assumptions:

Success Tip!

Explain how a false assumption damages the entire case.

• **ID cards**: "The Affirmative's suggestion that we should ask everyone for ID to prove they're over age 18 assumes that the ID presented is genuine. It's easy for young people to get a fake ID, which damages the viability of its plan."

• **Post-secondary funding**: "The Negative's argument that we need to pay for more of students' post-secondary education assumes that some student debt is necessarily a bad thing. It actually forces students to budget and spend carefully, and it makes them work hard after graduation to establish a solid financial base."

Break Links

Imagine a friend said to you, "Inexpensive air travel means more time spent outside cities, which means less smog affecting cities, which means lower health care costs, which means lower taxes, which means a stronger economy, which means less property crime. So, if the government was serious about making us feel safer, it would subsidize airline tickets." You can probably think of a handful of places where your friend made weak links to arrive at this ridiculous conclusion.

Granted, you probably won't see a chain this fragile in a debate. But you may see a team present a series of two or three arguments that are closely related or that depend on each other. Sometimes this strategy creates a cause and effect link. One point is the reason, and another point is the implication. You can clash with linked arguments together by attacking the stated or implied connection between points, claiming that it's weak or that it doesn't exist. Here are two examples of clashing with arguments by breaking links:

• **Student performance**: "Our opponent's second point claimed that lower performance in our district's schools is a result of the first point, namely students spending too much time on video games and Inter-

net chat. In reality, a variety of factors impact student performance, such as economic trends, political decisions, and school management. More time spent on these non-academic distractions may actually be a symptom of these other influences."

• **Income taxes**: "The Affirmative started by arguing that eliminating patents for medicines would allow more firms to manufacture drugs. In its second point, it falsely implied that this would increase drug discovery. If we reduce the profit motive by disallowing patents, then in fact fewer firms would take part in drug discovery."

Indicate Irrelevance

It may not be necessary to spend significant time saying why a point is wrong if you can show why it doesn't matter even if it's right. In some cases, an argument may hit at an issue that's well outside the scope of the definition, and at other times, it may be insignificant to your opponent's case theme. Your goal is to 'take the point out of the round' by making it seem like your opponent was wasting its time by even bringing up the argument. Here are some examples:

• **Standardized tests**: "The Negative's third constructive point argued that too much testing *in general* adversely impacts young students. The point is irrelevant, as the issue here is whether the *standardization* of the tests across schools is harmful. For most students, the absence of a standardized test would simply mean having to write a school-developed exam in its place."

• **Media funding**: "In making its case that our publicly-funded broadcaster should be privatized, the Affirmative's second argument was that maximum choice is in the public interest. This is an irrelevant point, because privatization would only change the structure and nature of this one organization, not the *number* of broadcasters."

Unfortunately, many debaters misuse this tool of refutation. In each of the cases below, the guise of claiming irrelevance is being used in order to avoid hitting the issue directly:

"It's simply unrelated." Supporting an argument with information from another time period or another place is a common and poten-

tially useful tactic. Of course, it may very well be the case that the analogy is a poor one. Unfortunately, rather than claiming irrelevance only for weak comparisons, some debaters will try to exclude a point simply because it's from a situation outside the core debate. Suppose the Affirmative says, "The success of the Swedish model of public health care shows why we should adopt it in this country." One could think of many reasons why this analogy doesn't really prove the point of the debate. A weak response, though, would be to say, "Well, that's just Sweden, and we're not talking about Sweden."

"It's just an exception." Simply saying that an argument or example is "an exception to the usual circumstance" or that "it's really just an isolated point" doesn't get to the heart of *why* it isn't relevant to the round. Say that on a debate about the entertainment media's influence, the Affirmative argues that "foul language on many television shows leads to more swearing at school." The Negative can't just say that "the Affirmative's point is an exception, because not all children's shows are like that." The Affirmative isn't trying to prove that all entertainment media has a negative influence, but only that *on balance* a negative influence *exists*.

Catch Contradictions

Since a sound case is consistent, demonstrating inconsistencies either within a speech or between partners can do serious damage to your opponent's arguments. You'll usually notice a contradiction fairly quickly, and the inconsistency will be apparent to everyone concerned. So while it's a good idea to point it out, don't take up too much time dwelling on it. You can actually force the other team to take up some of its time in the next speech by asking that it explain what its 'real' position is. Below are two examples of catching contradictions:

• **School locker searches**: "The Affirmative's first speaker said that searches by school officials or police officers are justified because school lockers are school property, but the second speaker said that searches are a reasonable intrusion into an area that she clearly stated was a student's private property. Which one is it, public or private?"

• **Health care privatization**: "My opponent's first point was that a publicly-funded system allows equal, timely access to every member of

society. Then, in her second point, she argued that only in a system that's publicly-funded could patients receive quicker treatment or be asked to wait on medical grounds alone. If this is the case, then it's clearly not 'equal' and 'timely' for everyone, but just for those people the authorities decide should go first."

Counter Correlations

The fact that two circumstances happened together or in sequence doesn't necessarily mean that one *caused* the other. Debaters sometimes use correlation claims to suggest incorrectly the impact of a particular action or circumstance. If clashing on the grounds that one item didn't create the result mentioned, it may be helpful to state what other factors may have caused the outcome. Here are some examples of challenges to correlations:

• **Free trade**: "The first Negative speaker claimed that the slowdown in economic growth is evidence that free trade agreements have been harmful to our country. This statement is clearly unfounded, as we don't know that free trade has caused these tough times. Government policies, oil prices, currency volatility, and a variety of other factors also shape economic performance. In fact, the downturn could have been worse if not for the expansion of trade agreements."

• **School dropout rate**: "We want to challenge the Affirmative's argument that decreased funding for public schools moved lock-step with increased high school dropout rates. The reality is that there are many social and economic factors at play here. The hardship faced by low income families may actually be what's encouraging students to find full-time employment early. It's not necessarily a funding problem."

Make Careful Concessions

Sometimes a point is very clearly true and it makes little sense to refute it. Generally, the fact that it's widely seen as correct makes it a fairly unsophisticated point. Be careful, though, with how you use concessions. Only use them when you're absolutely sure that the point doesn't strengthen your opponent's case. They should never be used because you don't have time to explain your counter-argument more fully or want to focus on other issues. If you concede a point that may

not seem vital at the time, your opponent could try to make it more important as the debate goes on. You'll have shut yourself out on any point that you've already conceded. Below is analysis of two instances of making concessions, one effective and one ineffective:

• **School uniforms**: Say a team argues that uniforms "eliminate choice regarding how students express themselves through fashion." Well, of course a *standard* uniform eliminates choice. But is that really the essence of a debate on whether the overall outcome is good or bad? Concede the point and indicate that you want to move on to more important and contentious issues. Don't try to explain the intricacies of how "there are different types of uniforms" or that "the way someone 'wears' the clothes is itself a form of expression."

• **Political term limits**: Say your opponent contends that term limits would guarantee "more constant change in our political leadership and in our legislative system." You concede, "Of course there would be more change if you impose term limits, so let's move on to the points that are actually in dispute." This may allow your opponent to make a theme of fostering "fresh, innovate policies" a central part of its case. Your team may have been better off arguing why rotating the people in charge doesn't necessarily result in different decisions, or that change isn't always desirable.

Face the Facts

You've read previously that it's normally not effective to clash with the evidence itself. What can be effective is clashing against the *use* of the evidence. A common way to attack evidence is arguing that it doesn't prove the claim. A team may have overstretched an isolated example to represent a wider trend, or cited a statistic with a weak connection to the claim it was meant to support. The following examples illustrate this type of refutation:

• **Arts funding**: "The first Negative speaker cited the bankruptcy and closing of *one* theatre as proof that government subsidies are needed to keep such institutions afloat. This certainly doesn't show a broader problem. It could actually have been either mismanagement or unappealing plays that forced this failure."

• **Private schools**: "Citing their higher placement in school rankings was a weak way for the Affirmative team to show why private schools deserve public funding. The first speaker was trying to make a point relating to worthy *principles* by bringing up a poorly connected example concerning practical *results*."

Attach an (Ugly) Label

Your opponent has obviously tried to make each point seem as brilliant as possible, and your task is to suggest the opposite. If your rival labeled a point in one way to help the judges remember it, why not call it by another name so that they see it how you want them to see it? Labeling a point unfavorably is effective and acceptable, but doing so offensively makes you look unreasonable. For example, you could label part of the other team's case as the "government knows best" point if you're trying to criticize how deeply the bureaucracy would be involved in a family decision. However, calling it the "we think that ordinary people are unintelligent, uninformed, and incapable" point is probably pushing it too far. Here are some complete examples of labeling an opponent's point unfavorably as a useful refutation tool:

Success Tip!

Be concise when labeling an opponent's argument.

• **Genetic engineering**: "After the first Affirmative speaker talked about his rationale for limits on genetically-modified farm seed, she went on to describe an elaborate process of consultation after consultation with stakeholders to decide what the regulations should actually be. This was essentially the 'strike a committee' point. Rather than explaining the Affirmative's plan, she simply said, 'Let's strike a committee and the problem will take care of itself.'"

• **Global poverty**: "The second Affirmative speaker's first point was that we should immediately forgive the debts owed by every poor nation. This point could actually be called the 'write a blank check' point. No conditions to ensure government reform, no guarantee that the money saved will be spent well, and no process to determine how much debt relief is a fair amount in each circumstance."

ORGANIZING EACH POINT OF THE BATTLE

Very often, debaters will be highly organized when making their own points, but quite disorganized when clashing with their opponent's points. It is, after all, more challenging to structure an unprepared refutation of a point than to structure a point you've prepared in advance. While there are a number of ways to organize a counter-argument, here's one common method that has proven particularly effective:

1. **What they argued.** Start by making it clear exactly what point you're refuting. It may seem obvious to you, but it's probably not as obvious to everyone else. This step, while vital, can be completed in a brief sentence. Saying, "The Negative's second point was …" or "I would now like to clash with the Government's third argument, which was that …" are examples of how you can begin this part.

2. **Why they're wrong**. This part is the 'meat' of the clash, so it should take up the most time. Your goal is to explain completely and effectively why your opponent's point is incorrect. Some of the ways you can start this element include, "This point is incorrect because …" or "The problem with this argument lies in its assumption that …"

Watch Out!

Don't just say it's wrong without explaining why it's wrong.

3. **Why it matters**. Once you've shown why the other team's point is false, you should put your clash into context—the 'so what' of your refutation. A great way to accomplish this objective is to tie the clash back to your opponent's case theme. This way, you're making it clear not only that you've defeated a single point, but that you've weakened a key pillar of your opponent's case. For example, you could say, "The flaws in this argument go to the heart of the Affirmative's theme of diversity, because they reveal that …"

This type of structure makes it easy for your judges to 'check off' that you've clashed with each of your opponent's points. It also gives you a rough template to follow so that as you listen to your opponent's speech, you can simply 'fill in' the three parts of your clash for each point. Even if you don't get a chance to write down notes for every refutation point, having the words "what they argued, why they're

wrong, and why it matters" on your page serves as a valuable reminder of what you need to cover.

ENGINEERING THE OVERALL ATTACK

In addition to having a strong structure for each point of your clash, it's also essential that your overall refutation is organized sensibly. This provides a sense of completeness to the refutation and improves the flow of your speech. There are several key questions that you need to consider when designing your refutation strategy:

Where does the refutation fit into the speech?

Like your constructive points, your clash should stay together as a section of your speech. Some debaters prefer to start with clash, while others prefer to build constructive matter first. Both ways are appropriate, and which one you select comes down to personal preference. Each method has unique benefits:

• *Clashing before constructing*. The key benefit of starting with refutation is that your opponent's points are fresh in your mind and in the minds of your judges. Another advantage is that it leaves your opponent's case significantly weakened before you construct your case. You're essentially telling the judges, "We've already shown you why the other team's case has failed to meet its burden, but here are some constructive arguments to prove definitively why we're correct."

• *Clashing after constructing*. Many debaters are more comfortable starting with what they've already prepared. This method gives you confidence early on in your speech. Once you have momentum, it's easier to transition into your refutation. Also, starting with constructive matter immediately shifts the debate back into your court, seizing the agenda from your opponent right at the outset. In addition, if you're short on time and need to make adjustments, it's easier to be selective in your refutation than in your constructive matter.

In what order should you clash?

The easiest, most common sense way to order your clash is to go in the same order as your opponent presented the arguments. This method

is less complicated for you, as you can simply go down your flow sheet and fire back at the arguments in the order that they're listed. This is also easy for your judges to follow, because they'll have remembered or recorded them in the same sequence.

However, there are select circumstances when it might make sense to take a different route. Firstly, if a particular point is critical to your opponent's case and damaging it would significantly undermine its core theme, you could consider starting with that argument. Saying, for example, "I want to begin with my opponent's second constructive point. It's the foundation of the Affirmative's case because …" makes it clear why you're taking this route. (Notice the word "because." You should always say why the point is vital to the debate.) Secondly, if you're concerned that you may run out time, it's preferable to have covered at least the key points.

How do you allocate time to each point?

While it's important to clash with every point, it's not necessary to spend an equal amount of time on each one. If there's a simple, easy to state reason why you feel that a point is wrong, get it across in a few sentences and move on. Leave a greater amount of time for arguments that are more critical or that require more detailed refutation.

If you've already presented additional constructive points, you could decide to shorten a refutation point by stating how you've already covered the crux of your opponent's argument through your own point. For example, if one of your new points is that "forgiving the debts owed by poor countries will speed up government reform," you could refer back to this point when refuting your opponent's argument that "debt relief excuses and does nothing to reduce corruption."

What if your opponent's speech was disorganized?

We've discussed how to organize refutation on the assumption that your opponent's points were well-organized. Unfortunately, not everyone's speech will have a clear structure. Sometimes you won't be able to tell when one point ends and another begins. If so, chances are that your judges are having the same problem. This type of situation makes it more challenging to organize your clash effectively.

Although you could simply conduct your refutation in an equally scattered way, you would only be dragging yourself down in the

process. How do you deal with a disorganized speech? Organize it yourself! As odd as this technique may sound, it will make you more organized and will make it easier for the judges to follow the round. You aren't really assisting your opponent, as you would get credit for improving the quality of the debate. The way to accomplish this task is to read through your notes, find logical breaks, and number the points yourself. For example, you could say, "The first area that our opponent focused on was … then, the second issue she moved to was … finally, she discussed a third point …"

Success Tip!

If your opponent's speech is disorganized, organize it yourself.

CLASH INSURANCE: THE 'SNOWBALL' SYSTEM

Usually, a single argument is met with a single point of refutation. This tactic is typically clear-cut, as it creates a well-matched 'point and counter-point' structure to your refutation. It allows you to be thorough, because you can zero-in on a particular problem and explain your point of contention fully.

Unfortunately, your whole clash against the argument in question relies on this one line of attack. If a judge doesn't buy into your claim, the point will stand. How do you 'insure' yourself against this possibility? You could use multiple angles of attack in sequence, creating a 'snowball' that gathers strength as it moves through an argument. You're creating more reasons to reject the point, even if the judges don't agree fully with every one of them.

Let's take a debate over environmental laws. The Affirmative makes a passionate plea to curb global warming using a combination of regulation and enforcement, aiming to curb carbon dioxide emissions. To illustrate how the Negative could use cumulative, 'snowball' refutation, here's an exaggerated example:

• "Firstly, despite what's often stated in the media, there's no definitive proof that there even is a long-term global warming trend. Scientists around the world are divided on this question—there's no clear consensus. For example, we know that …"

• "Secondly, *even if* you believe that global warming exists, it can't be firmly established that carbon dioxide is the primary cause. Solar activ-

ity—the sun burning hotter in some years than in others—is another possible cause, supported by research from …"

• "Thirdly, *even if* carbon dioxide is a problem, many scientists believe that less than 5% of it is caused by human activity. The rest is naturally occurring, which means that …"

• "Fourthly, *even if* we assume that human activity is a leading cause of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, are the potential consequences so severe that drastic action is needed? Despite the doomsday scenarios presented by the Affirmative, there's good reason to believe that …"

• "Finally, *even if* significant consequences will result, the Affirmative's proposals aren't the best ways to deal with them because the costs clearly outweigh the benefits. As with historical climate changes, humankind may actually need to adapt to the situation by …"

THE CLINCHER: PLAY TO WIN IN THE REBUTTAL

Over the four constructive speeches, many arguments and counter-arguments have been hurled back and forth. In a typical debate, this could add up to 10 arguments between the two teams, plus refutation of these points. That's a whopping 20 parcels of information that the judges have to process!

Can you blame the judges if they're having trouble deciding who's up and who's down? For this reason, close debates are won and lost in the rebuttal. It's your last chance to make an impression on the judges, which is why your rebuttal strategy is critical to how your side is evaluated. Like closing arguments in a court trial, the rebuttal makes it clear for everyone concerned what has happened in the debate and why your side has prevailed. Let's begin by revisiting the three key roles discussed in Chapter 6:

Success Tip!

Refer back to previous speeches in the rebuttal.

• **Refute** the other team's case as a whole.
• **Compare** and contrast the competing themes.
• **Summarize** your team's case.

While you could order your rebuttal based on these three sections, feel free to experiment with what works best for you. The organization of a rebuttal speech is less rigid than that of a constructive speech. You may decide to focus on contrasting the two perspectives, incorporating overall refutation and overall summary into this comparison. Alternatively, you may want to start by analyzing and evaluating the debate chronologically and highlighting the key points made by both sides. It all depends on your personal style and on what you're trying to accomplish with your rebuttal.

It's critical that you understand the difference between clash in a constructive speech and refutation in a rebuttal speech. In first part of the debate, you should have clashed with every important point made by your rival, trying to weaken its case one piece at a time. In a rebuttal speech, your goal is to refute the other team's overall case. A rebuttal speaker shouldn't put much emphasis on detailed analysis of evidence or on taking apart individual arguments.

Watch Out!

Avoid point by point clash in the rebuttal.

The only possible exception to these guidelines is if the second Negative speaker has presented new points, and the rebuttal speech is your team's first chance to respond. If you decide to clash with these arguments individually rather than rolling them into the overall attack, keep the clash brief and put it at the beginning of your rebuttal. Leave the bulk of your rebuttal for overall refutation and summary.

The top rebuttals accomplish one task extremely well: framing the debate. This means putting forth your version of what the debate is actually about—what the judges should consider when making a decision. There are three steps involved in framing the debate, which can also be used as a structure for your rebuttal:

Success Tip!

Use the rebuttal to frame the decision criteria.

Step #1: Tell the judges what the key issues are. Tell them bluntly and concisely—don't skate around them in a roundabout way. You're best off listing and numbering your version of the deciding issues for your judges. This helps them remember your interpretation of the key issues and encourages them to write them down. As with arguments in a constructive speech, you're well-advised not to identify more than

two or three issues. Any more will be too much for you to talk about and for your judges to digest in such a short speech.

Step #2: Explain why they're the key issues. A judge can be forgiven for thinking, "On what basis have you selected *those* issues as the *deciding* issues?" If you're going to condense the debate down to core themes or zero-in on selected arguments, it's your responsibility to justify your decision. Tell the judges why the entire debate rests on the pillars you've identified.

Step #3: Argue how you've come out ahead on these issues. Of course, it only makes sense to choose issues that you feel fall clearly on your side of the resolution. Drive home these advantages in your rebuttal. Explain how you've prevailed on these dimensions and why that means you've won the debate.

If you're delivering the Negative rebuttal, one effective way to frame the debate around your key issues is to tell the Affirmative what exactly it must do in its rebuttal. This tactic can throw off your opponent's rebuttal, as well as encourage your judges to pay attention to how well your rival responds to your challenges. But only include those issues that you're very confident fall clearly on your side of the debate. There's nothing worse than laying out what you feel should be the key decision criteria, only to have the Affirmative team prove itself right on each of the points.

For example, you could say, "So what are the two core issues of this debate? What must the first Affirmative speaker prove to you in her rebuttal? Firstly, she must show you why a tax dedicated to roads won't end up in the government's general coffers and in other departments. We've revealed how easy it is for this to happen. Secondly, she must show you that …"

How should you respond if you're the Affirmative rebuttal speaker and this tactic is used against you? There are two options: tackle the issues directly, or ignore them altogether. The first option is risky, because you're allowing the Negative to control your speech. If you're very confident that you can explain why you won on the criteria presented, by all means go ahead and do so. But if you fall short, you're bound to lose the debate. The second option allows you to carry out the rebuttal as you see fit. If you're going to ignore the Negative's criteria, you have to explain clearly why they're not the key issues of the

debate. Logically, it then falls on you to provide a different version of the key issues and to justify why your interpretation is right.

This chapter is perhaps one of the most important in the book, because it told you about a key aspect of a vibrant debate: the point by point and overall refutation of the other team's arguments. If you want to excel at debate, it's essential that you understand the different ways to make counter-arguments and how to deliver a rebuttal speech.

Chapter 8: Keys to Success

✔ **Clash with every argument**. Leaving a point unchallenged suggests that you agree with it and makes your opponent's case stronger. Refutation may be a challenging, 'on the spot' skill, but it's essential to the debate.

✔ **Think about the different ways to refute a point**. Analyze whether the argument is logical and rests on sound assumptions. Look for contradictory, irrelevant, or poorly linked points.

✔ **Simplify your refutation with labels**. Label each of your opponent's points in a way that communicates what you think is wrong with them. This tactic makes is easier to discuss the core themes, rather than having to describe each point in detail.

✔ **Be organized when you clash**. For each point, say what you're refuting, refute it, and explain why it matters. Using your flow sheet as an aid, work methodically (usually in order) through your opponent's points. Place greater emphasis on the most important arguments.

✔ **In the rebuttal, focus on 'big picture' ideas**. Frame the debate in a way that favors your side of the resolution. Tell the judges what the key issues are, why they're the key issues, and how you've won on these issues. Rather than engaging in point by point clash, focus on the debate's key themes.