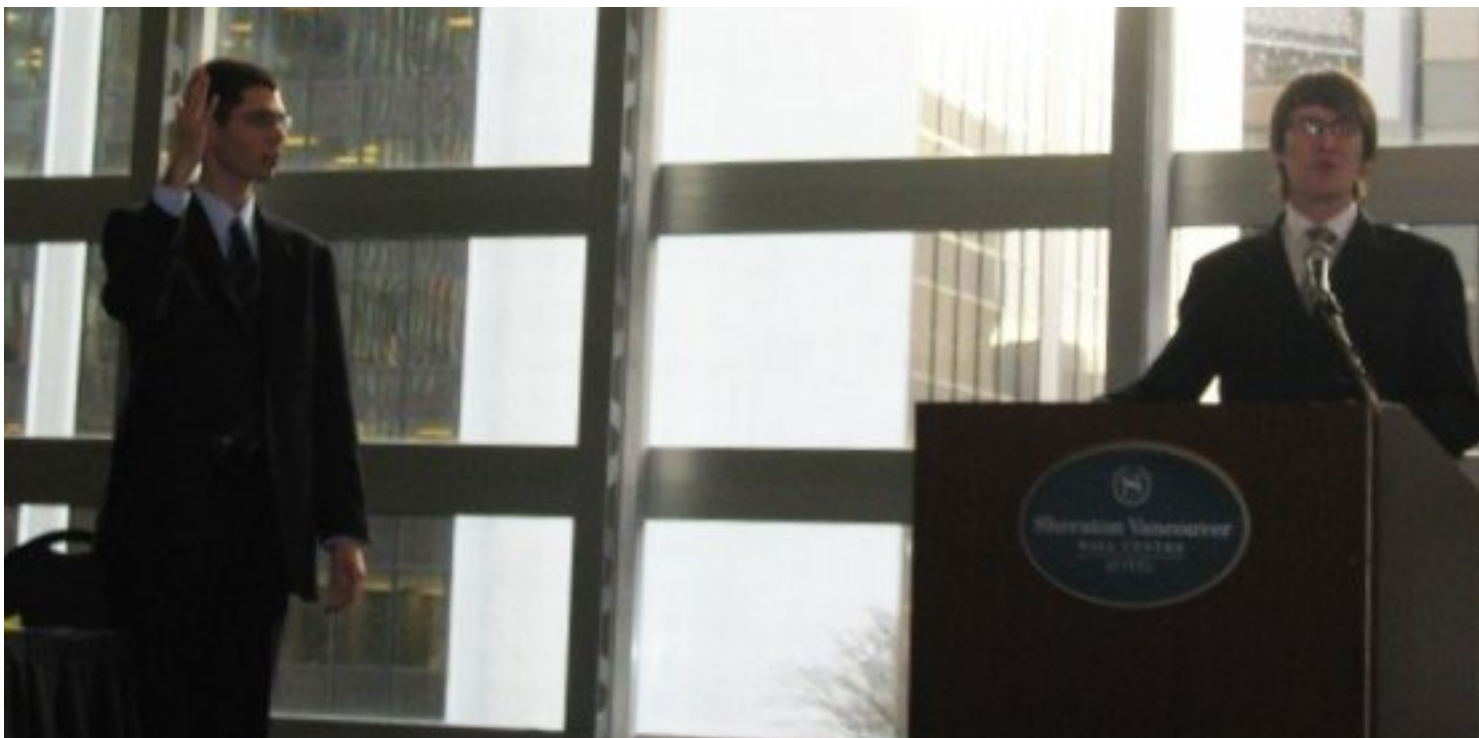


Introduction

Debate, without rebuttals, would merely be a series of speeches with no relation to each other. Like ships passing in the night, there will be no clash, no conflict and ultimately, no debate. Rebuttal, like argumentation, is one of the foundations of debate. What is rebuttal then? It is a speaker saying that an opponent's argument is not valid and showing why it is not valid. If argument is about building logic links in a case, then rebuttal is about the breaking of these links.

Types of Rebuttal



When rebutting the opponent's arguments, Debaters need to decide which particular area they wish to attack, rather than to just rush in to say, "You are wrong. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong." The various attacks which can be used in rebuttal are as follows:

Attacking Relevance

With this rebuttal, Debaters attack the relevance of their opponent's arguments to the motion and show that these arguments do not support the opponent's stance. This type of rebuttal can destroy the entire argument by showing that it does not even support the opponent's stance. For instance, in a debate on the motion "This house believes that the Internet is a dangerous force," the Opposition delivers arguments noting how useful the Internet has been in facilitating communication and education. The Proposition merely rebutted that the benefits of the Internet here does not show why the Internet was SAFE, which was what Opposition had to show.

Attacking Assumption

With this rebuttal, Debaters attack a particular way in which their opponents had described an assumed trait of the subject. For instance, for the motion "This house believes that China is Dangerous," the Proposition argues that China is a Communist country and that this leads to a conflict between Beijing and the Capitalist West. However, the Opposition can rebut by counter-arguing that China is nominally Communist but has wholeheartedly embraced Capitalism, thus having less reason to find conflict with Capitalist countries.

Attacking the Impact

With this rebuttal, debaters attack the presumed impact of the subject's assumed trait. For instance, for the motion "This house would dissolve the UN," the Proposition speaker points out that the veto system (trait) in the UN (subject) has caused unhappiness between the P5 countries and the rest of the world. However, the Opposition speaker can rebut this by saying that the veto system has actually facilitated cooperation between the P5 countries and smaller states as the P5 countries often cast their vetos to protect the smaller countries' interests.

Attacking Logic Leap

With this rebuttal, the debaters attack the lack of logical links between the assumed traits of the subject and its presumed impact. For instance, for the motion, "This house would ban prostitution," the Proposition could argue that frequency sexual activity is associated with STDs transmission and that the whole society is put at risk. Here, the Opponents can rebut the lack of a link between the frequency of intercourse in prostitution and having a public health risk involving the whole of society.

Hung Arguments

Hung arguments are arguments which are contingent on another argument to survive. With this rebuttal, Debaters can take two arguments out with one attack. For instance, for the motion, "THW censor the arts," the Proposition first argues that extremist messages are found in art.

Next the Proposition argues that the viewers of art should be protected from such extremist messages. The Opposition could rebut that there are no extremist messages in art these days and that art itself was value-neutral. With this argument taken down, the point about needing to protect viewers of art has little impact, as it is a hung argument.

Attack Examples

In general, Debaters should attack the logic of an argument before moving on to attack the examples. Attacking the example first is usually not advised, as it allows the opponents to just refer to another example and the argument will remain standing. The only time debaters should attack the example first is when the opponents had used the example as the only basis for the argument. The First and Second speakers may sometimes not have enough time to attack examples and will have to delegate this task to the Third speakers. The Third Speakers must attack the opponent's key examples, if not all of them.

Rebutting Rebuttal

Debaters prefer to have their arguments delivered without having to come back to them. However, once these arguments have been rebutted, it may be necessary to defend them and in essence, rebut the rebuttals. However, Debaters should take care not to prioritise this over rebutting the opponent's arguments. Thus, the opponent's arguments should always be rebutted first before taking a defensive stance on one's own arguments.

Do's and Don'ts



Do Attack New Arguments First

Debaters should prioritise by rebutting the latest arguments from their opponents **FIRST**. These arguments are fresh and attacking them quickly ensures that they will not linger in the minds of the judges. Furthermore, these arguments are the only ones which have not have been addressed thus far in the debate. So the debaters **MUST** attack these points first. If these arguments are left for the later parts of the speech, they may not be given sufficient time for proper rebuttal.

Do Complete the Attack

Some debaters tend to only point out the shortcomings of an argument without actually attacking its logic in full. For instance, Debaters often describe an argument as lacking examples or not having any strong links but fail to do anything more. Instead, Debaters should always attack the logic of the argument in order to complete the attack.

Don't Do One-Liners

Some Debaters also tend to use only a single line or two to make a rebuttal. This is not considered a complete attack and will usually not be rewarded much content score by the judges. In order to rebut effectively, Debaters will have to dedicate sufficient time to properly explain why a particular argument falls.

Don't Just List Rebuttals

Some Debaters, especially in the First and Second positions, also have a habit of merely listing several “responses” to a particular argument. However, if these were proper rebuttals, they will

have taken way too much time to be articulated in full. Thus, each “list” tends to consist of one-liner counter-arguments. This habit should be avoided, as it signals to the judges that the Debater is unable to make a decision on which rebuttal is the strongest for the argument. It may also compromise the ability of the Third Speakers to demonstrate their ability to generate new points.

Don't Ask Rhetorical Questions

Debaters should also avoid using rhetorical questions as a substitute for rebuttals. If these questions are to be used, they must at least be answered by the Debaters themselves. Otherwise, the judges are left to answer the question for them and they will not necessarily agree with Debaters. For instance, if Debaters merely ask “but how will the opponent’s policy work?” and leave it at that, the judges may well end up thinking of several ways it could work. Further it merely provides an opening for the opponents to answer the question later and show how the policy will work!!

Develop Rebuttals

In order to successfully attack an argument, it should be rebutted more than once. Ideally, an Argument will be attacked at its core logic by the First (Opposition) Speaker or Second Speakers and then attacked again from a different angle by the Third Speakers. Speakers should avoid merely repeating the rebuttals that have already been delivered by their teammates. In this case, they are wasting time while not really adding value to the debate.

Push to Other End

Wherever possible, Debaters should try to rebut an argument by taking the opposite stance. This will allow for the greatest degree of clash and the highest degree of differentiation between the two teams. For instance, for the motion “This house would ban handguns,” the Proposition can argue that handguns make communities more dangerous by empowering criminals. The Opposition can make a “neutralizing” rebuttal by saying that handguns do not make communities more dangerous. However, it will be best if the Opposition can make an “attacking” rebuttal by saying that handguns make communities less dangerous and more safe since the citizens are protected against criminals.