

At Novice Training Day, one of our experienced members, Jake Roth, presented a seminar about the basics of debating. Here is his detailed recap of that lesson...

Welcome to the QDU!

To help illustrate my tips, I will use the following sample motion:

This house would abolish sexual education in schools.

### **Arguments**

When you are developing arguments with your partner, consider some of these strategies:

- **Actors/stakeholders:** Whom or what will the motion affect? Argue why your side of the bill is best for the relevant actors and why your opponents would harm them. I often begin my preparation by simply identifying all the pertinent parties. In the sample motion, some of these actors could include: parents (within this category think of different types of parents, i.e. religious, ethnic minorities), students, teachers, society, and the government. In short, list the consequences that this policy would have on these groups and then choose the ones that benefit your team.
- **Problem/cause/solution:** This tactic is especially helpful when you are on proposition. First, you should identify some relevant problem. For example, some students feel alienated in sex ed classes. Second, explain this problem's cause. Perhaps major maturity differences between students underscores this dilemma. Or, maybe families have vastly different values towards this topic. Finally, tell me why your side's arguments would solve it. Case in point, abolishing sex education in schools would reduce this anxiety because...
- **Establishing Relevance:** A winning argument contains a plethora of analysis. When you are developing them on your sheet of paper, continually write "Why?" Why does what you just said matter in the context of the round? Why should the judge care? Why should the world care? In our sample case, why is sex ed so important? Or, why are the harms (i.e. uncomfortable religious parents, breach of boundaries between teachers and students) so egregious?

I caution you against making these three common errors:

- **Slippery slopes:** Avoid taking a premise to its extreme version. For instance, getting rid of sex ed would not be a harbinger for eliminating math, science, and English, or ridding ourselves of school altogether. Never use the words "slippery slope" in your speech. And, please, refrain from Glenn Beckisms. Don't bring up the Nazis, as doing so is almost always both ridiculously hyperbolic and in poor taste.
- **Cost arguments:** In the non-debating universe, you could criticize a policy because it is fatuously expensive. However, in our bubble, those arguments don't work, as your opposing team could merely say that such expenditures would be worthwhile. Avoid talking about costs.

- **Using legal documents:** Just because something is in the Canadian Charter of Rights of Freedoms, the UN Charter, or in the criminal code does not mean that is normatively correct. I don't care that rights or laws exist. You need to analyze why they ought to exist. So, I recommend never even citing charters, laws, etc.

## Refutation

Here are some handy refutation ideas:

- **Even/if:** This twofold strategy works as follows. First, spot the assumption of your opponent's argument. Then, point out that such an assumption is wrong. If you are on opposition in our sample case, you could question prop's assertion that students feel uncomfortable in sex ed classes. You do not need to accept the problem that prop posits! Second, explain why *even if* that assumption were true, your opponent would still be incorrect. So, even if sex ed made students feel icky, it is still valuable for a bunch of reasons. Here are some of them, etc.
- **Negative consequences:** What are the negative corollaries of what the other team is proposing? What could go wrong?
- **Your arguments:** Juxtapose your arguments with your opponents' points and tell me why yours are clearly better.
- **Refute their Strongest Material:** Don't devote much time to the obviously silly things that your opponents said. Deal with their best stuff.

## Time Management

- **Scheduling:** Create a loose schedule, so your speech can accomplish its goals. Use a timer and move on to the next part of your schedule at specified intervals (i.e. 1.5 minutes per argument or what you deem appropriate). In general, if you are not the Prime Minister, you should spend at least two minutes talking about what the other side said.
- **Don't waste time:** You don't need to thank everybody in the room. You should only introduce your argument titles while mapping; do not get into your arguments when you are introducing them. Your introduction shouldn't exceed 30 seconds. Don't restate your points at the end of the round. Spend almost all of your time contributing something to the round.

## Organizing Your Paper

**Arguments:** The simplest way to organize your arguments is through clearly numbered and labeled points. Within each argument, you can note sub-points, examples, and other forms of evidence. Here is an example:

1. Educating the uneducated

-Most likely demographic not to know about sexual health=conservatives

-They're also most likely to oppose sexual education.

-Sex is instinctual. "Accidents happen." People do it.

-We can't expect conservative parents to prepare these children for if it happens.

-So, school's educational obligation ought to extend to sex ed

Continue this style for the remainder of your arguments.

**Refutation:** The two-columned chart is the most common organization tactic for refutation. On one side of the line that you shall draw down the middle of your sheet, you will note your opponent's arguments, while your response to them will run parallel. Here's an illustration:

<b>They</b>	<b>We</b>
1. Some students feel isolated in these classes.-Classroom ceases to be a positive and engaging place.2. Students can this knowledge through other sources, i.e. Internet	1.-We don't buy that students can't handle this instruction.-Even if...class material can't always be about comfortable topics.-Safe sexual practices are important because...-There's too much misinformation out there.

**Rebuilding:** Reminder: rebuilding means dealing with the other team's criticism of your partner's arguments. You could use the same format as the above refutation technique. However, I prefer just writing my partner's point titles as headings, jotting down their criticism, then indicating my response. Here is how this structure might look...

1. Educating the uneducated

Their response: This information is not neutral, as it implies that students will have sex despite what their parents tell them. Parents should be able to teach their kids according to their own beliefs.

Our response: Even if this information isn't neutral, it's necessary. Students don't always listen to what their parents tell them. Conservative kids should know how to do it safely too.

If you have any questions about this information, you can e-mail [ojr19@queensu.ca](mailto:ojr19@queensu.ca).