

Advice on Debating

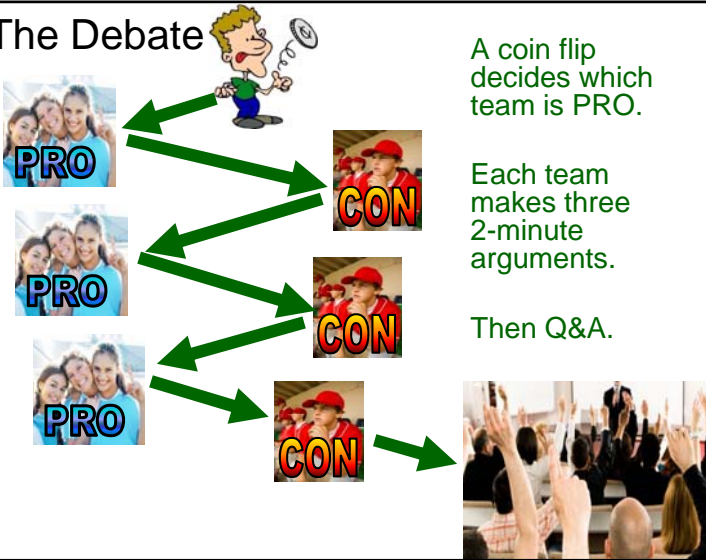
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Before the debate

1. Find out the claim whose truth your group will be debating. These are posted on the course website.

"We can be certain we have hands."
2. Prepare arguments both for (PRO) and against (CON) that claim.
3. For each of your arguments, try to anticipate various moves that your opponents might make, and think about how you'll want to respond to those moves.
4. Preparing the debate write-up will help on this.

The Debate



Define your terms

Make clear how you'll use key terms.

"To say a belief is *certain* is to say there's absolutely no doubt that belief is true."

PRO tends to have an advantage here, as PRO goes first, and can lay out definitions that make their task easier.

As CON, listen carefully to PRO's definitions, and make clear any reservations that you have about them.

"Our opponents suggested that we should understand W to mean _____. This strikes us as a very odd way of using W. We'll work with a much more standard definition: _____."

Exercise: Which terms would it be important to define?

“We probably live in a Matrix.”

“Any society is much more likely to go extinct than it is to develop the technological capacity to build a matrix.”

“If people can build matrices, they will build a lot of matrices.”

Prepare one or more Arguments

Clearly specify what **type** of argument you’re using.

- * Deductive (premises guarantee the conclusion)
- * Inductive (generalize from sample to others)
- * (Later we’ll talk about analogy, abduction, prudential)

Clearly specify your **premises**.

“In the past electronic technology has increased at a geometric rate”

“Continuing at that rate, we’ll have the capacity to build matrices in about a century”

Clearly specify your **conclusion**.

“So we will have the capacity to build matrices.”

(You may sometimes prepare other arguments for believing the premises of your main argument.)

Staying on Message

Make clear what your team needs to do to win.

“All we need is one example of a scenario we can’t rule out in which we don’t have hands.”

Make clear what the other team would need to do to win.

“We’ve given a deductive argument for our conclusion. Our opponents need to convince you that one of the premises is wrong.”

“We’ve shown how past trends would lead to our conclusion – our opponents need to provide a clear reason to think these trends won’t continue.”

Keep reiterating these victory conditions and explaining why you’re winning.

Let the audience know when various points your opponents have made would be irrelevant.

Point out irrelevant things the other team says.

Topic: “We should believe we’re in a matrix.”

CON: “If PRO is right, then even the matrix architects should believe they’re in the matrix. But they’d be mistaken!”

PRO: “The fact that some people would be mistaken to believe something doesn’t mean we don’t have reason to believe it. For example, we all have reason to believe our lottery tickets will lose, even though some lucky winner will turn out to be mistaken. Likewise, anyone with experiences like ours should believe they’re probably one of the many unlucky matrix-dwellers, even though a lucky few will actually be wrong.”



If you know that three “real people” and three simulated people are all having the sort of experience you’re having, what are the chances you’re one of the sims?

50%



What if it's 3 “real people” and 27 simulated people?

90%



Moral: The more matrices you think will end up having been built, the more likely it is you’re in one.

Compare: The more raffle tickets you think were sold, the more likely it is your ticket won’t be drawn.



Exercise: What are each team’s victory conditions?

“We are probably living in a matrix.”

“We will probably never develop matrix technology.”

“Societies that can build matrixes would be very unlikely to build them.”

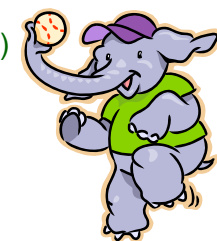
Use Examples and Analogies

Examples help to pull your audience in, and give them something concrete to visualize.

Examples are often much more persuasive than abstract arguments.

If your victory conditions require only one example, find a good one (or two) and keep pressing it.

If your victory conditions require more general claims, you can still gain a lot of mileage from a good example.



Analogies can be good examples.

(P1) The Koran says we
can trust the Koran.

(C1) We can trust
the Koran.

This argument
presumes that (C1) is
true, so it can't help
make us justified in
believing (C1).

(P2) My fancy argument
says we can trust
fancy arguments.

(C2) We can trust
fancy arguments.

This argument
presumes (C2) is
true, so it can't help
make us justified in
believing (C2).

Exercise: What examples might
each team use? Can either team win
with just a compelling example?

"We will develop the capacity to build a matrix."

"People who can build matrices will."

"We are probably living in a matrix."

Use your Time Wisely

Each time your team goes, you'll have 2 minutes.

For PRO's opening statement, you can practice and
be sure that you can deliver it in time.

Other statements will need to be at least somewhat
responsive to what the other team has said, so you
can't just memorize something in advance.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE -- learn how
much you can expect to do in the allotted time.