Monash Association of Debaters Guide to Debating

Tips, Tactics and First Principles

By Tim Sonnreich

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Contents

Preface 3
Author's Introduction 4
Chapter One: A Review of the Three-On-Three Style 5
Part A: An Overview 5
Part B: Roles of the Speakers 5
Part C: Variants on the Style 6
Chapter Two: Definitions 8
Chapter Three: Constructing and Deconstructing Arguments 12
Part A: Making Arguments 12
Part B: Surgical Strike Rebuttal – Minimal Fuss, Maximum Damage 14
Part C: Rebuttal from First Principles 15
Part D: 'Even If' 17
Chapter Four: Tactics 19
Part A: Hard/Soft Lines and Models 19
Part B: Search for a Super-Model 21
Part C: Slippery Slopes 23
Part D: Opposing Minority Rights 25
Chapter Five: Manner 27
Chapter Six: Secret Topic Prep 30
Part A: Steps to Good Preps 30
Part B: Making Arguments from First Principles 31
Chapter Seven – More Advanced Tactics 34
Part A: Speaking Order, Filters and Tactical Concessions 34
Part B: Trends, Norms and Tipping Points 37
Part B: Classic Affirmative Mistakes and Negative Tactics 39
Part C: General Tactical Mistakes 42
Chapter Eight – British Parliamentary (BP) Debating 46
Part A: The General Format 46
Part B: Extensions 47
Appendix One – First Principles Exercises 48

Preface

Welcome to the Monash Association of Debaters' (MAD) annual Schools' Training Day. I hope that you get a lot out of today's sessions and we very much hope to see many of you in the DAV finals!

The *Monash Association of Debaters (MAD) Advanced Schools' Guide to Debating* is designed to complement the sessions you have seen today, and will be a great reference when you need to refresh or update your skills, especially as you move into the finals and beyond.

This handbook is an edited version of Tim Sonnreich's *Debating Training Guide (2006)*. Tim is one of the legends of Australian debating, having three times been crowned Australasian Intervarsity Debating Champion (2000, 2001, 2004) and twice been named Best Speaker in Australasia (2002, 2003). On top of this, he debated in the Grand Final of the 2003 World University Debating Championships. As an adjudicator, Tim served as the Deputy Chief Adjudicator of the 2007 World University Debating Championship and the 2007 Australasian Debating Championships.

On behalf of everyone at MAD, I wish you all the best for your future debates.

--Madeline Schultz,

Editor and MAD Schools' Training Officer 2012

Author's Introduction

This is a guide to debating, written ostensibly for young debaters, but along the way I think all but the most seasoned debaters and adjudicators should find something of interest in here.

There are really two types of debaters. There are those who think debating is just a hobby, something that's fun and looks good on a CV, but isn't really very important in the grand scheme of things, and then there is another group.

The second group think debating is more than just trophies, travelling overseas or having the best matter files. To this second group, debating actually has some inherent meaning and importance – not because the outcome of any given debate ever really changes much, but because in its totality, debating changes everything. Unlike any other hobby or sport, debating – if done well – will shape your personality, your intellect and your beliefs. And if we ever want to live in a world where decisions are made on the basis of logic and persuasion, not force or intimidation, then we need to take things like debating seriously.

For that reason I think it's critical that people learn to debate well. Debaters at DLSU (Philippines) have a motto – "make the game beautiful" – and while I doubt that my involvement ever made debating prettier, I'd like to think I always debated with integrity. Every debater needs to find their own style, and I certainly don't want everyone trying to sound like me in debates, but I would like to think that most debaters will eventually realise the importance of what they are doing, and the skills that they're learning. I sincerely hope this guide will go some way towards that goal.

Finally, I should thank all the people, past and present, who helped me draft this guide and who helped me learn the skills. There were a great many people from whom I learned tricks, or discussed ideas over the years, and they each deserve a slice of the credit (or blame, as the case may be) for this work. So as not to offend anyone I might leave out I won't name names, but I think all those former mentors, team-mates and foes know who they are.

Enjoy.

--Tim Sonnreich

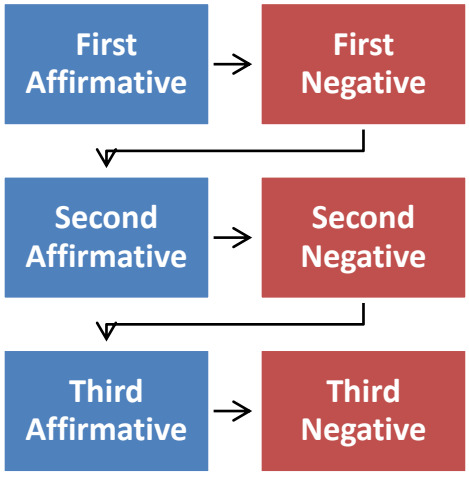
Chapter One: A Review of the Three-On-Three Style

While I expect that few of you need a complete introduction to debating, it's frequently amazing how much of the basics students forget. As such, here is a useful refresher.

Part A: An Overview[1]

While there are some variations, discussed later, the basic style has the following key features:

- there are two teams of three speakers each
- each team is assigned a side (the Affirmative, who argue in favour of a topic; and the Negative, who argue against it)
- a topic is set for each debate
- teams are given one hour to prepare[2]
- each speaker speaks for a set period of time[3]
- speakers alternate between the teams, from First Affirmative through to Third Negative, as follows:



The skills of debate are formally broken down into three categories and scores are assigned on the basis of these categories:

- Matter (40%) – the logic and relevance of your arguments
- Manner (40%) – the style with which you present yourself
- Method (20%) – the structure and clarity of your speech

Part B: Roles of the Speakers[4]

There are certain things that each speaker *must* do, in order to fulfil their role in the debate. Some of these are discussed in much greater detail throughout this handbook, but the following is an overview of what we expect from each speaker during the debate.

[1] This is a lightly edited version of a text written by Victor Finkel
[2] If you choose to participate in University-level competitions, which some students do, this time is reduced to half-an-hour
[3] At D-Grade, 4-5 minutes; at C-Grade, 5-6 minutes; at B-Grade, 6-8 minutes; at A-Grade, 6-8 minutes
[4] This section was written by Madeline Schultz

First Affirmative	•contextualise the debate and define any unclear parts of the motion •introduce a model, if necessary •outline a team split •make 2-3 arguments in favour of the motion
First Negative	•re-contextualise the debate and resolve any definitional issues •introduce a counter-model, if necessary •outline a team split •rebut the arguments made by the First Affirmative •make 2-3 arguments in favour of the motion
Second Affirmative	•resolve any definitional issues, if necessary •rebut the arguments made by the First Negative •make 2-3 arguments in favour of the motion
Second Negative	•rebut the arguments made by the Affirmative so far •make 2-3 arguments in favour of the motion
Third Affirmative	•rebut and summarise the debate •while Third Affirmative is *techinically* allowed to introduce new material, this is frowned upon and generally considered to show poor team planning
Third Negative	•rebut and summarise the debate •Third Negative is *not* allowed to introduce any new material, although this should *not* prevent them from rebutting arguments in new or different ways

Part C: Variants on the Style[5]

As you continue with your debating career, you'll learn that there are many different styles of debating. Some of the more common variations on the 3-on-3 style are discussed here; an entirely different style of debating is discussed in Chapter Eight.

Reply Speeches

Reply speeches are four-minute half-speeches used in many university-level debating tournaments, as well as at the World Schools Debating Competition. Reply speeches are

[5] This section was written by Madeline Schultz

often described as a "biased adjudication", in which each team attempts to present a meta-case[6] for why their case is better than their opposition's. Reply speeches are given in "reverse order" – i.e.: the Negative team gives their reply *first* – and are given by either the first or second speaker of each team. Reply speeches are scored out of 50, rather than out of 100.

Because of their "meta-debate" nature, reply speeches are usually delivered quite dispassionately. Reply speeches are usually structured to answer two (sometimes three) *questions* about major issues in the debate – a similar structure to that used in thematic rebuttal.

Reply speeches are *not* allowed to introduce any new material *or* to rebut. Instead, they should be a near-direct summary of the debate – but one that uses the material from the debate *tactically*, to show a clear advantage to the speaker's team. The goal of a reply speech should be to give the adjudicator reasons to award the debate to the speaker's team, rather than to defend the motion directly.

Points of Information (POIs)

Points of information are usually used in the style discussed in Chapter Eight, but are also used in some university-level three-on-three competitions, as well as at the World Schools Debating Championship. Points of information are brief (15 seconds or less) questions offered by the opposition during a speaker's speech.

Points of information are offered by an opposition speaker standing up and saying "point of information", "point sir/ma'am", "on that point" or some variant thereof. The speaker may choose to accept or reject the offered point of information (most speakers will simply 'wave down' the opposition if they do not wish to take the point). Points of information may *not* be offered during the first or last minute of a speaker's speech.

At tournaments where points of information are used, speakers are expected to accept no less than one point of information during their speech. Speakers are generally discouraged from accepting more than two points of information.

[6] Rather than arguing for the *motion*, a meta-case is the case for *your victory*

Chapter Two: Definitions

Most DAV topics tend to be intuitive in their wording – there are few ways to misinterpret "that we should ban smoking". But as you progress through your debating career, the topics you will receive will become more open to both creativity and misinterpretation. As such, it's important to have a clear understanding of what adjudicators are looking for from your definitions.

Before dealing with the more complicated matter of selecting a *correct* definition, it's worth briefly discussing when you'll actually *need* a definition. It is not uncommon to watch young debaters spend as much as a minute of their speech carefully defining every term in a motion – that minute spent there is a minute not spent on addressing something *controversial* in their case. A common sense test is appropriate – could there be confusion about my subject if I fail to define this term? Could a reasonable opposition misinterpret what I mean if I don't? In the "ban smoking" example used above, for example, there should be no controversy as to what "smoking" is, but an Affirmative case would not be complete if the model did not set out precisely what "ban" would mean for the purposes of the debate.[7]

Once you've identified whether a term in your motion requires a definition, the fairest and most effective way to define a debate is to apply two tests:

Most Reasonable Definition: (1) Context & (2) Spirit of the Motion

Context: simply put, what is happening in the world or a specific region that relates to the topic? It could be a new law or ruling being debated by a government/organisation. It might be a conflict has flared up or been the subject of significant media attention. Maybe it's that a long-standing problem has recently gotten worse, or a particularly bad example of an on-going problem has come to light.

In any case, if a significant event has occurred that seems to be related to the topic, then it should be the focus of the debate – subject to the second test.

Spirit of the Motion: the 'spirit of the motion' means "what sort of debate was envisioned when this topic was chosen?" This test relies on the assumption that topics are chosen for a reason – namely that a particular issue or conflict would make a good debate. Assessing the 'spirit of the motion' requires being sure that your definition will generate a good, reasonably balanced debate, with interesting/important issues that are complex or sophisticated enough to be sustained over the course of the debate. There is no point defining the debate to a very controversial issue if it is essentially a single issue that cannot be extended into a debate.

So, if the context to the debate suggests that a certain issue or situation should be the focus of the debate *and* that would meet the spirit of the motion, then you should have a good definition for the debate.

[7] This does not mean that a dictionary definition should be provided. The point of a definition is to introduce clarity – a word should be defined *for the purposes of the debate* – for example, "in this case, we propose to ban smoking by preventing the sale of cigarettes or tobacco products, and imposing fines on those found in the possession of either."

Note: the test of whether a *place-set*[8] definition is fair is *not* whether your opponents *do* know anything about that issue, but whether it is reasonable to assert that they *should,* based on the competition and the experience of your opponents. For example, it is reasonable to assume that debaters *should* have a working knowledge of the political situation in Israel, because it's frequently reported on in the media. However, the conflict in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan is far less widely known by even the most well-read members of society.

Figure 1: An Unreasonable Place to Set a Debate

So if a topic relates generally to separatist conflicts, and significant events have occurred in both Israel and Nagorno-Karabakh (context test), then it would be fair (and wise) to define the debate as relating to Israel because it is more likely to yield a good debate (spirit of the motion test).

With a more tightly worded topic, applying the tests might indicate that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the appropriate definition – a but make sure you are fairly applying both tests and not just looking for an opportunity to show off your knowledge of obscure places.

The more vague or 'open' the topic is, the more 'legitimate' definitions there are available to you (i.e. the more open a motion is, the greater the number of options that will be equally valid as result of applying the above tests). Your obligation is to pick a definition that is firstly very clear (don't *ever* debate vague principles and ideas – trust me, it won't be a good debate – nail the principle down to something specific and practical, as in the example below) and secondly that is most likely to create a good debate (which is a definition that you can reasonably assume your opponents can understand and respond to properly).

Otherwise the result might be a definitional challenge (which ruins the debate and your speaker scores) and/or angry and confused adjudicators. Plus you'll get a bad reputation as a team that plays dirty – even if you didn't mean it!

Take the example topic "that we spend too much money on the stars". Since 'stars' could relate to both astronomy/space-sciences and celebrities, you need to choose a definition.

(1) **Context**: Has there just been a significant event relating to either field (e.g. the explosion of a space shuttle, or a controversially expensive film or contract)? Basically, has there been something in the media that seems to relate to this topic?

If only one meaning of the term 'stars' has a strong contextual basis, then most likely the definition should go in that direction. In either case, apply the second test.

(2) **Spirit of the Motion**: if there is a relevant context to the debate, then ask yourself which definition will yield the best debate? Which has the most interesting, controversial, debatable issues? Which has issues that both sides *should* be aware of?

[8] A place-set definition is a definition that 'sets' the debate to a location. For example, if a debater were to define the motion "that we should introduce universal free healthcare" to being solely about the US healthcare system, that would be a place-set definition

If one answer stands out on both tests, then you have a winner. In the event of a tie (think carefully, make sure it really is) then either is a good definition, but make an extra effort to set the debate up clearly and explain the relevance of the definition.

As part of a good definition, you should explain the context you used to form that definition (as well as the definition itself) in the first minute of your speech. As part of establishing the context you should *always* explain what the status quo[9] is, because as you will see later, your understanding of the status quo might not be the same as other people in the room (for reasons of culture, religion, etc). This might sound like a minor point, but making sure both sides agree on what the status quo is can often be incredibly important. One reason is because the nature of the status quo defines how 'hard' or 'soft' line your case is (see Chapter Four).

How to Mount a Definitional Challenge

by Cathy Rossouw

On occasion, a Negative team will find themselves presented with a definition that they did not expect. Many young teams default to a definitional challenge in these debates, which usually results in a low-scoring and frustrating debate. Definitional challenges should not be mounted lightly, and should usually only be considered for the following reasons:

1. **The debate as established by the First Affirmative is genuinely *truistic*, or self-proving**

The oft-used example of this is the interpretation of the motion "that we should eat, drink and be merry" as that we (literally) should eat and drink so that we do not die, and be happy because it is better than the alternative. A truistic case is one that there is no believable opposition to.

2. **The debate as established by the First Affirmative lacks any link to the motion (is a 'squirrel')[10]**

A team that defines the motion "that we should tax fat" as a debate about punishing the fattest nation on earth and proceeds to argue for arms sales to China to "punish" America should not be surprised to be met with a definitional challenge.

A definitional challenge can be mounted for either of the above reasons. The challenge *must* be made by the First Negative as the *first* part of their speech. Challenges cannot be mounted by other speakers. The following steps are important to mounting a definitional challenge:

1. **State why the definition is unreasonable**

This is as easy as saying "…the definition of the Olympics as Australia's obsession with sport is unreasonable because *it has no logical link to the topic*."

2. **Explain why the definition is unreasonable**

[9] The 'status quo' refers to the situation at the moment – for example, it is the status quo in Australia that the education system comprises of a mixture of public and private schools, both of which receive some level of public funding

[10] 'Squirrel' is a debating term that refers to an interpretation of a motion that is blatantly (and often deliberately) outside of the spirit of the motion

Usually the best way to do this is to show that the average, reasonable person would believe the topic to be about something else – e.g. the Olympics are a major international sporting competition.

3. The 'Even If'

Just because you're challenging their definition doesn't mean you don't have to rebut their arguments. This is done by saying "…but **even if** we accept their definition of the Olympics, their arguments are still flawed because…"

4. Propose an alternative definition

Make it short and simple because by now everyone has a pretty good idea of what your case is.

Chapter Three: Constructing and Deconstructing Arguments

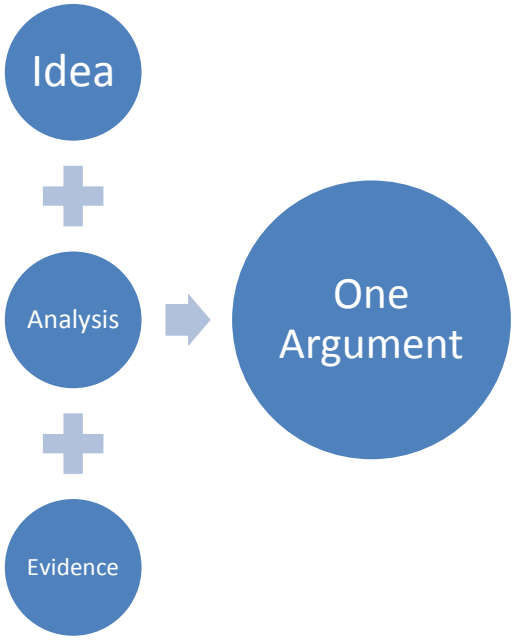
Part A: Making Arguments

Before anything else, you need to know the difference between an argument and an assertion. In simple terms, an assertion is something that is stated as true, without enough analysis to demonstrate that it is reasonable for a reasonable person to be convinced that the statement is likely to be true. It's a statement of fact, without proof of its validity.

To avoid using assertions, you need to understand the anatomy of an argument.

The 'Anatomy of an Argument'

Whereas an assertion is simply a statement of fact (in slightly more sophisticated cases, an assertion can include simplistic/superficial analysis – see 'Casual Causation' below) a proper 'argument' (in the sense of "one argument for X is…" not "we had an argument the other day…") has the following structure:



Different people will use different labels for the various sections of an argument, but this basic format is necessary to have a properly formed argument.

Idea refers to the concept or proposition that you seek to prove – it might be a principle, such as "the government has an obligation to provide free education" or it might just be something that would be helpful to your side of the debate, such as "the death penalty is an effective deterrent for criminals". Either way, it's nothing on its own – it *may* be true, or it might not. The point is that you and your team want people to *believe* that it's true.

So how do you make them believe it? Well, you start with some **analysis** of why the **idea** is likely to be true – why it is logical and reasonable to believe it. This involves saying (out loud or in your head) "why?" and "because" a lot! But I'll give you an example in a moment.

Finally there is the **evidence**. I put it last for two reasons – first because it's the least important, and second because it should be the last thing you worry about – focus first on having the right **ideas** about what your side needs to argue, and then spend your time coming up with smart analysis to make it sound reasonable. If after that you have time for thinking up evidence and examples, then that's great.

Evidence can be statistics (like the unemployment rate before and after a policy, or the percentage of people affected by a particular problem, or the costs of a proposal) or quotes (not *direct* quotes, but knowing what important people have said about an issue). But in advanced debates, evidence is most commonly presented by case study or analogy. Having an example of a similar situation or policy can be very handy if you can clearly draw the link back to the issue at hand.

Note: it really should go without saying, but you should *never* invent evidence – firstly, it's just poor form. You should have enough respect for your opponents not to try and cheat or cheapen the debate. Also, it's unintelligent – the more experienced debaters/adjudicators get, the better they become at spotting lies. It's pretty humiliating to have someone show that you were lying because they know the real details of a given situation. Don't take the risk of it happening to you!

Let's bring all that together by using a motion as an example. On the Affirmative of "that we should stop protecting our local film industry", it would be handy to be able to show that small-budget, local productions can compete with big budget imports – since fear of competition is the rationale behind government protection (so that's the **idea** – local media can compete with foreign imports).

How would you go about demonstrating an **idea** that is a little counter-intuitive?[11] Well you'd need some logical analysis mixed with relevant examples. For example:

> "The fear of unrestricted foreign media – particularly American – stems from the belief that bigger budget productions are inherently more attractive to viewers. Although it's true that people do enjoy special effects laden films and TV, there is plenty of reason to believe that even without government protection, local media can survive and even prosper. Why? Because beyond the superficial desire to see things blow up, what really attracts viewers is media that is relevant to their interests and culture. For instance, one of the most popular shows on the ABC is Gardening Australia – it consistently out-rates the news, and every other competitor that rival networks have run against it. It might seem like an odd choice for a hit show, but it has very loyal viewers because it's relevant to their interests.
>
> Similarly the ABC had a major hit with the drama series Seachange – which was not only well written, but it so actually tapped into the mood of the times that it has sparked the real-life "seachange" and "treechange" phenomenon's, in which city-based people move to beachside or rural towns to enjoy the same lifestyle they saw on the show. At the other end of the scale there is Neighbours – although it's routinely the subject of ridicule, it has been one of the most consistently popular shows in Australian television history and has launched the

[11] A 'counter-intuitive' argument is one that goes against most people's natural intuition – for example, an argument that child labour in the developing world is good for the child workers would be a counter-intuitive one

> careers of many Australian actors and artists – you might think its lame, but to 15 year olds, it's relevant.
>
> None of this should be surprising, since although American culture is almost universally popular, people from all over the globe respond to stories about their own country, and their own culture. Australian media doesn't need government protection to be competitive, it just need good writers and talented actors – which the evidence shows that we have in abundance".

Note that the argument doesn't have to rigidly follow the structure outlined above – but you should be able to clearly identify the key elements of the 'anatomy of an argument' within that example.

Part B: Surgical Strike Rebuttal – Minimal Fuss, Maximum Damage

In order to effectively evaluate the weakness in any given argument, you need to understand what a 'good' argument looks like (see above). Each part of a well-constructed argument is open to rebuttal, but some attacks will usually be more effective than others.

The argument chain is weakest at link three – **evidence** – since it's always easy to dispute the evidence presented by your opposition. For example, you could criticise the examples used in the above argument about protecting Australian film industry – perhaps they are isolated examples, or they are outweighed by counter examples you know.

But attacking the argument here is a poor strategy. Because the opposition can repair the chain by providing more evidence (which you attack and they give more and it's a stalemate) or by simply rebutting your criticisms.

Attacking the argument a little higher, at the **analysis**, is more difficult but also more effective. If you can demonstrate that the **analysis** is illogical or based on assumptions that are not true (or are unlikely to be true) then you damage the credibility of the whole argument. This is the most common sort of rebuttal used by experienced speakers.

However, it's usually not a fatal blow. For example, you might say that people's desire to see stories that are relevant to them is outweighed by their desire for exciting or well-produced entertainment, and the Australian film industry can't compete with better-funded international media without government support. Unfortunately for you, a clever opposition can rebuild their **analysis** by giving other reasons, or explaining the logical links in a different way, which weakens your rebuttal.

So finally we get to the top of the chain, the **idea**. This is usually very difficult to attack since usually it is a reasonable idea. But sometimes you can attack the idea and if you can do it effectively, it's a fatal blow to that argument.

In our example, you can attack the idea that stopping supporting the film industry won't end the capacity of Australian films to compete internationally by arguing the truth of the argument (attack the **analysis**), but you can also run an "even if" line that attacks the **idea**: even if some Australian films continue to thrive, they're not the point of this debate – for your team, the point of Australian film subsidies might not be to produce *mainstream* films, but rather to produce ones that tell stories that wouldn't otherwise be told. If the adjudicator accepts that sort of argument (or any other attack on the **idea**) then the other

links in the chain are irrelevant. Obviously, it's not that simple - the opposition will defend their idea, and you need very good reasons to show that an entire **idea** and the argument that flows from it is irrelevant. But if you think the **idea** is vulnerable, you should attack it, because it's effective and efficient.

Part C: Rebuttal from First Principles

Once you understand the anatomy of an argument, it should be relatively simple to see how best to attack an argument, as outlined above.

But in just the same way that you can (and should!) use First Principles (see Chapter Six) to construct your arguments, there some fundamental, logical principles by which you can attack arguments. So even if you don't know anything about the evidence they used, and you've never heard that type of analysis before, if you listen carefully and take good notes, then you might find one of the following flaws has occurred in the argument.

Five Common Flaws with Arguments that Anyone Should Be Able to Spot Regardless of How Much they Know About a Topic

1) **Assertion** – the argument is not an argument at all, it's simply an assertion and there is no logical reason given to believe that is it true. Simply point out why there has not been any/enough analysis to demonstrate the validity of the assertion and then provide a reason why the assertion is not obviously or intuitively true.

2) **Contradiction** – the argument may be valid, but it is in contradiction with a previous argument. To be a real – or 'full blown' contradiction, it must be that the case that it is *impossible* for the two arguments in question to both be true simultaneously. So it cannot logically be both *cheaper* and *more expensive* to do a given thing. Don't go calling every argument you hear a contradiction or you will look foolish. If it is in fact a contradiction then that can cause massive damage to an opponent's case, but if it isn't, then the false accusation can cause massive damage to your credibility.

   But spotting – and pointing out – a contradiction is only the beginning, if you want to fully exploit it, you have to explain to the adjudicator exactly how this compromises the credibility of their case.

   So don't just say "first they said their plan would be really cheap, and now they say it would be really expensive, but is worth the money – that's a pretty blatant contradiction", follow it up with some analysis, like "so which is it then? One of them clearly doesn't really understand the nature of this situation – if a cheap program can be effective, then why is this she trying to tell us we'll need to spend lots of money to resolve the problem? But if she's right and it would take a lot of money to make a dint in this problem then everything the first guy said is rubbish. Hopefully their next speaker will tell us which one of his teammates knows what they are talking about, and which one was just making stuff up".

   You need to make it as uncomfortable for them as possible and try to force them to not just retract the statement but also concede that a number of their arguments are irrelevant (they usually won't say that, they'll just stop mentioning all the arguments on one side of the contradiction, so you should listen closely to how they

defend themselves – if they stop mentioning certain arguments, then attack them for abandoning part of their case).

Note: the most important thing is that you clearly explain the contradiction – it's critical that the adjudicator understands and believes you, so explain it slowly and carefully and keep your eye on the adjudicator to see if they're following you.

As you can see, a contradiction is a serious flaw in a case, so if an opponent accuses your team of a contradiction it is very important that your side respond as soon as possible and attempt to demonstrate how the two arguments are not contradictory.

3) **Casual Causation** – essentially, this is a lack of analysis. It occurs when someone tries to draw a link between two events, without showing how the former event actually caused the latter event to happen.

   A classic is when people argue that the introduction of the death penalty for murders causes a reduction in the number of murders. Never mind the fact that there are instances in which introducing the death penalty has preceded a *rise* in the murder rate, this is simply not reason to believe – *prima facie* – that the death penalty is a deterrence. There may have been a reduction in murders the following year for any number of reasons (it depends entirely on why people commit murder in the first place).

   Between 1996 and 1997 there was dramatic drop in the number of murders in Australia – but the death penalty was abolished here in the 1970s. So what happened? In 1996 there was the Port Arthur Massacre, when Martin Bryant killed 35 people in Tasmania. Immediately after that incident, the Federal Government instituted strict gun laws, which saw thousands of guns handed in as the result of "gun buy-back" scheme and made it much harder to buy a gun and keep it in your home. Without saying too much about gun control, the point of this example is that there can be many reasons why the crime rate – especially the murder rate – goes up and down. So be careful not to assume that one factor is more important to the outcome than another, unless you have the analysis to show why that is the case.

4) **False Dichotomy** – this a particular type of mischaracterisation of a debate or problem. It occurs when someone says that there is a choice to be made and claims that the only options are 'A' or 'B', when in fact there are other options.

   This can occur because a speakers is trying to assert a self-serving dichotomy (in a decent debate this won't be true, it's almost always a choice between two options designed to improve a situation) or because the speaker is stupid/lazy and doesn't understand the debate/your argument properly.

   Either way, it's important to recognise when someone is attempting to falsely divide the debate into two positions, one of which is either not what you are arguing, or not what *anyone* would argue. Be very clear at all times about what your team is trying to prove and you should be able to deal with this situation easily enough.

5) **Straw Man** – this is another type of misrepresentation or mischaracterisation of an argument. Basically, the straw man is when a team sets up an argument (which you have not made, and don't intend too) and then proceed to rebut it.

Sometimes this happens when a speaker takes an extreme example of your proposal, sometimes it happens when they misrepresent something you said, sometimes it happens when they were hoping you would argue a certain thing and you actually proposed something different. It doesn't really matter why, it's important to point out when a team is not engaging with your case, because if you let a straw man argument be beaten to death without pointing out that it's not your argument in the first place, a weak adjudicator can assume that it was part of your case.

How to do Thematic Rebuttal

by Kim Little

It sounds impressive and difficult. Actually, thematic rebuttal isn't that hard at all. The idea is that instead of just listing the opposition's arguments speaker by speaker, you group their arguments into themes. Common examples of themes are: economic, social, feminist, national and international. Sound familiar? They are the same sorts of categories that you use when setting up team splits. A theme can also be an issue that didn't seem important at the beginning of the debate, but became a big issue. Throughout the debate, write down the opposition's arguments, and start grouping them into themes. Some debaters have coloured cards, i.e. yellow for economic arguments, red for social arguments – under which they write points concerning these themes.

When doing thematic rebuttal, watch out for trying to "force" arguments to fit into themes. If you have to leap through analytical hoops to claim that an argument was an "economic" argument, you're probably using the wrong themes. The themes you use will change from debate to debate.

Thematic rebuttal is more than just grouping themes together – it's all about presentation. At the beginning of your speech, list the major themes of the opposition, and then shred 'em one at a time. It's as simple as saying: "…tonight, the opposition have presented three themes: economic, social and environmental. I will discuss these one at a time." Believe it or not, this sort of stuff is guaranteed to whip your adjudicator into a frenzy.

And the best thing about thematic rebuttal is that each speaker can do it when they rebut at the start of their speech!

Part D: 'Even If'

In the previous discussion of rebuttal I showed you to build up a proper argument and then how to tear it down by targeting one of the links in the argument chain.

There is of course another, simpler way of discrediting an argument, and ironically it's so simple that the more experienced most debaters become, the less they tend to think about arguments in this way.

The Simplest Form of Rebuttal: Accept the Premises, Deny the Conclusion

Too often debaters – especially good debaters, who are used to thinking about issues and arguments in fairly complex ways – forget to apply the simplest and most powerful test: what would happen if the model was implemented exactly as your opponents suggest?

Of course, there are benefits to attempting to show that a problem is more complicated than your opponents seem to realise and it's good to show that their model is too unwieldy to ever be implemented in the way they suggest. But that still leaves the most important question for any debate – what if it was?

I saw a perfect example of this in a practice debate I watched recently on the topic "that Pakistan should hold free elections or lose the support of the West". The Negative team spent a lot of time explaining how elections wouldn't work – because the dictatorial government would cheat, because opposition forces have been smashed, because there are the proper institutions in place to handle the elections. Of course the Affirmative team denied all those things and said a decent election was possible.

But that's not the best argument for the Negative team. The best argument is: what would happen if there was an election right now, in just the way you say there could be? Who would win? And the answer is pretty simple: if a free and fair election was held in Pakistan right now, there is a very high chance that a radical Islamic group would win – just as Hamas won a generally fair election in Palestine. The reasons are a little complicated and not worth discussing here, but if you can show that a win by the radicals is the most likely outcome of real election, then that's potentially a much better reason not to have an election at all.

Naturally that doesn't mean the debate would be over – a decent Affirmative team will deny that the radicals would win and give some good reasons (and there is a good argument to be made – look at who has won all the previous free elections in Pakistan for instance), but it's a powerful and important argument for a Negative team.

So remember – before you spend time trying to destroy a model, take a moment to ask yourself; 'if we did do this, what would happen?' You might be surprised by the answer!

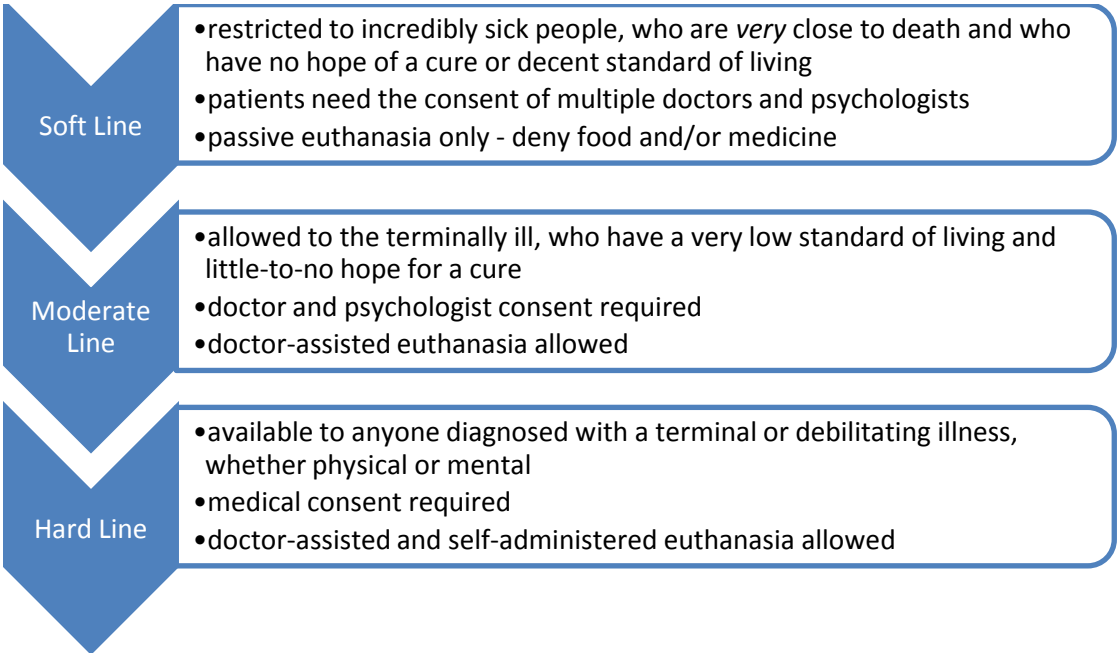
Chapter Four: Tactics

Part A: Hard/Soft Lines and Models

The terms 'hard' and 'soft' in reference to a definition or model are an indication of how profound the change is that is being proposed. A very small modification to the status quo is 'soft', while a big change is 'hard'. Once you have determined the 'strength' of your line, it should be relatively easy to create your model.

Generally speaking, these terms do not imply how difficult it is to argue for that level of change – since often it is easier to argue a 'hard line' rather than a 'soft line' – but we'll get to that later.

Example: for the topic "that this house supports euthanasia", these are different 'lines' you might choose.



A smart team will stay somewhere between the moderate and the hard line in *every* debate, because it's both the fairest thing to do, and is the tactically sound choice too.

Fairness: the problem with the soft line is that it will virtually always fail both tests of a good definition. It will rarely be a contextually-based definition or model, because a plan so close to the status quo would rarely be controversial enough to illicit serious media attention or public debate. In terms of the spirit of the motion, a soft line is highly unlikely to yield a good, complex debate with a range of important issues. It is by definition not particularly controversial, and therefore is a poor choice to debate (see "ultra-soft lines" in Chapter Seven).

Tactically: A harder line is usually easier to defend because it is more philosophically consistent (coupled with the idea of 'filters' that I'll discuss later, you should never again run an inconsistent case) and more closely bridges the gap between the scale of the problem and the scale of the solution (see "the problem-solution gap" in Chapter Seven).

Also, a hard(ish) line pushes you further away from your opposition, which gives you more space to make arguments. The single biggest problem with running a soft line is that you will run out of (smart) arguments that can't simply be conceded by an opposition stuck arguing for something very similar to your case. Just as with a truistic definition, a soft line might seem like the 'easiest' thing to argue, until you have to find three speeches worth of intelligent things to say about a model you selected because it was almost truistically obvious. So running a hard line means both teams will have a better debate, because they will both have the scope to make strong arguments, with sophisticated analysis. But don't push this rule too far, or you'll end up running 'insane' definitions.

The Extreme Ends of the Spectrum – the Status Quo and Insane Definitions

(1) **Status Quo:** simply put, the Affirmative should never run the status quo unless compelled to by the topic (this usually occurs in 'negatively-worded' topics: e.g. topics that begin "that we should not...").

Negative teams can run the status quo, but there are several strategic factors that need to be weighed up before you make the decision to do it.

The status quo is attractive to teams who are not well prepared for that particular topic. This is because any decent Affirmative will explain the status quo in their set-up before outlining their alternative and a smart (but ill-informed) Negative can use that information, but portray it as knowledge they had all along.

However, this needs to be weighed up against the fact that the Negative do not in fact know much about the details of the status quo, and risk being caught out in a lie or misrepresentation of the status quo by the Affirmative. They also risk being made to defend alleged 'harms' (established at the start of the debate as the reason for having the debate in the first place) of the status quo which may be exaggerated or incorrect, but which the Negative team will not be equipped to refute effectively.

Conversely, if the Negative invent their own counter-model then there are also benefits and risks.

The benefit of counter-proposing an original model is that will negate much of the Affirmative's pre-prepared criticisms of the status quo. The downside is that an original model concedes that the status quo is a failure and therefore weakens the burden of plausibility on the Affirmative. In other words, it's more difficult to argue that the Affirmative's new model won't work if the Negative's own model is also novel and therefore vulnerable to exactly the same criticism. But since one side's model is usually more ambitious than the others, weakening the burden of plausibility can be disproportionately beneficial to one team.

(2) **Insane Lines:** Although hard lines are good and usually there is a positive relationship between the 'hardness' of the case and its moral and practical consistency, there is a point at which this relationship breaks down. Past a certain point a definition or model stops being 'hard' and becomes insane.

There a few ways to judge if your line is 'insane'. The first is the laugh test. If the opposition (and audience) laugh when you propose the case, it's usually a good sign that you have stepped across the line (it may be the way you explained the argument, but nevertheless it's

a good indication). Secondly, if anyone in the team feels seriously uncomfortable making the argument, then that's a bad sign. Debaters should be flexible and willing to argue counter-intuitive positions, but if a reasonable person is offended or disturbed by your case, then you have a problem.

It's fine to argue for things that are unlikely to happen, even things that are *highly* unlikely to happen, but you should think carefully before arguing in favour of something that is *incredibly* unlikely to happen.

The best test is to remember that the model is not the debate. Your model simply exists to clarify and focus the terms of the debate. If you are spending all your time defending the reasonableness of the terms of your model, then you have probably gone too far (or are debating against terribly pedantic, inexperienced debaters).

Using the previous example of euthanasia as a guide, the insane line might be providing 'suicide pills' on request, to any adult or child, following the initial diagnosis of a serious medical problem, which they could use at their discretion. It's just too far-fetched.

Part B: Search for a Super-Model

There seems to be a fair bit of confusion about what a model is, how to construct one and what to do once you have it. Models are an extremely important and useful part of debating, so let me try to clear up all those questions.

The first question is *what is a model?* The answer is simple. A model is a specific set of practical actions proposed by a team in a debate. So it means that instead of just arguing that a certain idea is good, the team actually set up a particular type of system that they support for reasons that are linked to various parts of the model.

For example, the 'heroin trials' debate (i.e. "that we support safe heroin injecting rooms") is one where there is room for a range of models, because there are many different ways of applying the idea. For instance, teams should choose between a model of government-supplied heroin and a 'user supplies' system (i.e. a 'no questions asked' policy about where a user obtained their drugs as long they use them in the safe injecting rooms).

Both these models have strengths and weaknesses. The government-supplied model will generate criticism on the grounds that it turns the government into a drug dealer, as well as questions of how long the government can afford to maintain such a system (especially if the number of users grow as a result). However, this system does effectively put many drug dealers out of business and it also means that users will always get pure heroin and not the 'dirty' varieties often found on the street (which is a major cause of overdoses). The choice of model can change the focus of the debate, and bring in (or cut out) various issues.

Building Your Model

There are many ways to construct a model, the easiest of which is to steal someone else's! The vast majority (if not all) of the debates you'll do are real, contemporary issues. That means that they are being debated in the public arena right now. So it's perfectly legitimate for you to take the side of one of the groups who are publicly lobbying on this issue. Take the Republic Referendum held a few years ago. At that time, debates about a republic were obviously common and the model picked was critically important. But thankfully the

Constitutional Convention produced a wide range of models representing the ideas of each of the republican groups represented at the convention. By keeping up to date with the news, and becoming aware of the various proposals being suggested by different groups in society, you have ready-made models just waiting to be debated!

Once you've stolen a model from someone, you might be able to think of ways to improve it or expand it. That's fine too. Just make sure that you're really clear about how your version of the model is different to the group that you stole it from.

The other way to come up with a model is to invent it from scratch. This can be time consuming, but rewarding in many ways. It requires you and your team to really talk about the issues in the debate. Remember that most debates stem from 'a problem', whether real or perceived; and if you understand the problem, you might be able to come up with a solution. The best thing about invented models is that they are original – your opposition won't be prepared for them (whereas they can be prepared for a common model) and you have a chance to have a truly unique debate, on issues that you have established.

I encourage teams to come up with their own models, because it shows research (no matter how smart you think you are; there is no substitute for learning the details of an issue), thought and a genuine attempt to tackle the issues; however I have one warning: make sure your model is realistic and practical. By realistic, I mean make sure that you are taking into account the way people really behave, otherwise your model will be hopelessly flawed (for example, the counter-model to attacking Iran is not "world peace" because at this point it is simply unrealistic). By practical, I mean that it should be possible given the resources that currently exist. Don't propose a model that would cost trillions of dollars, or require technology that doesn't exist or is unlikely to exist anytime soon.

How To Use Your Model

The model should be presented by the first speaker, before they present their substantive arguments. This is because you want your model to frame the debate and structure which issues are important. You can't do that if your model comes at second speaker.

Nevertheless, it's important to accept that models are not the 'be all and end all' of debates. There are few debates where a good model will win the debate all by itself. The model is a tool to structure debates and focus them around important issues. It is the analysis of those issues that will be the deciding factor in most debates. A model makes a debate clearer because it tells the audience precisely what the debate is *about*, but you still have to show why that's a good thing and why the benefits of the model outweigh the inevitable costs.

Final Tips on Models

- Negative teams can have a model too. They're called counter-models and are just as effective as Affirmative team models.
- Don't get too hung up on how much a model costs (in monetary terms) as long as the benefits of the model are worth the cost (and the cost is realistic). Lots of programs cost the government money, but they are important and worthwhile.
- A good way to attack a model is to look at what assumptions the team have made when they constructed it. Did they realistically assess how individuals and groups act in society? Is it really the role of the government (or other organisation) to do what is being proposed?

- It is perfectly alright for opposing teams to concede some of the benefits of a model so long as they show why the problems the model will create are worse.

Part C: Slippery Slopes

A "slippery slope" argument is where you attempt to prove that by doing one thing, you will also, as a by-product, inevitably do something else worse.

So you might say (for example) that if we legalise abortion even under very specific circumstances (such as where the pregnancy presents a medical danger to the mother) we will unleash forces that will eventually lead to legal abortion under any circumstances ("abortion on demand").

This type of argument is incredibly common, and is a natural instinct for inexperienced debaters who are seeking to inflate the harm of their opponents' model. Inexperienced debaters are notorious for making slippery slope arguments that are so extreme that they become absurd and hence most adjudicators discourage any argument that even approaches a slippery slope. Consequently, there is a now a common – but mistaken – belief that slippery slope arguments are automatically weak or invalid. That isn't true.

The problem with the way a lot of people make slippery slope arguments is that they aren't actually "arguments" at all, they are in fact "assertions" and that's why they seem weak. Assertions are always weak – by definition – and slippery slopes are almost always assertions because those making them don't know *how* to do proper analysis.

Note: before I explain how to develop a slippery slope into a proper – and often powerful – argument, it's important to note that this type of argument shouldn't be overused. Firstly, there are effective ways to counter slippery slope arguments, and secondly they are only truly relevant under specific circumstances. So that's the trick – first learn *how* to do them, and then think hard about *when* to use them.

Making Slippery Slope Arguments Work

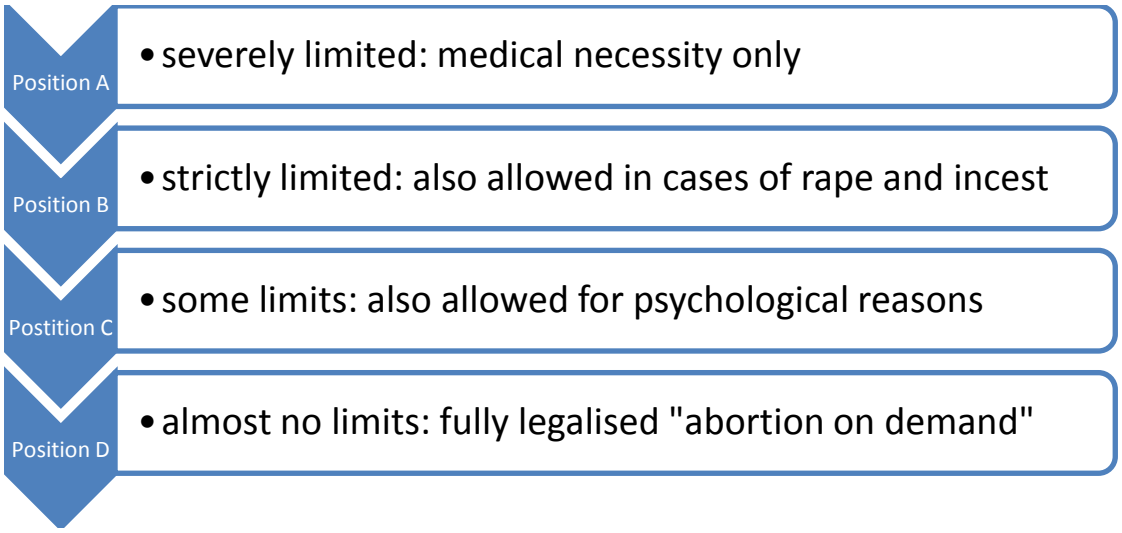
The key to an effective slippery slope argument is showing how strong the motivation will be for a government to take additional steps down a particular policy path after they have taken the first – but that's not automatically or intuitively true and that's the trick.

What you're really trying to do is to show that your opponent's model will change the social norms and begin a new trend – a trend that will inevitably lead to unacceptable conclusions.

Let's take the abortion example I used before. Imagine an Affirmative team is proposing that abortion should be legalised, but only under certain circumstances (e.g. where the pregnancy would threaten the life of the mother) – we'll call that Position A. And you want to make the argument that legalising abortion, even in such a limited way, will inevitably lead to a much wider tolerance of abortion, meaning "abortion-on-demand" – we'll call that Position D.

The problem is that it is not reasonable to believe that a government would move from Position A to Position D in one step, so you have to explain what the middle steps - Positions B and C – would be, and why the trend would be to legalise those positions too. Here's an example:

The Abortion Slippery Slope



It should be obvious just by looking at each of the positions that there is a clear progression and a continuation of logic flowing from Position A to D. Position A relies on a key concept – that the health of the mother outweighs the health of the foetus. But that's essentially the same logic that justifies each of the other positions, and you can demonstrate that:

"If we allow abortion, in cases where the health of the mother is endangered by continuing the pregnancy, then we will enshrine in law a principle that will inevitably go much further than we intend. How can we say that it is acceptable to disregard the rights and interests of the foetus if the mother's medical health is at risk, without accepting the same rationale in cases where a woman has been the victim of rape or incest? Since clearly the psychological health of the mother has a strong influence on her physical health, and we know that the victims of rape and incest often suffer from severe depression that can lead to suicidal tendencies, surely we must treat all these risks the same way.

But if we accept that the trauma of rape, compounded by an unwanted pregnancy, creates a psychological harm that is a significant health risk to the mother then why does the cause of the psychological harm matter? If the health of the mother is the over-riding concern, then it shouldn't matter *why* a women is suffering a severe depression or why she is suicidal, all that should matter is that she is, and that if the pregnancy is exacerbating that, then the women should be able to terminate the pregnancy.

Of course, if the health of the women truly is paramount; and a risk to her health, whether medical or psychological is connected to the pregnancy, then surely we must extend that to any set of circumstances that endanger the health of the mother – whether they are medical, psychological, economic or social. If having a child would leave a woman impoverished, then that could represent a threat to her health. Equally, if a pregnancy could result in social exclusion or ostracism, then there is a risk of depression and poor health. So what we have here is a model that seeks to be restrictive, but which if we are to believe the arguments that sustain it, then there are very few reasonable restrictions on it at all."

So you see the key is to take it step-by-step and show how logically, once you accept certain principles of the model, it is unreasonable to include the sort of restrictions that are in the

model. The important thing is to sound reasonable and measured – follow the chain of logic, explain every step and keep referring back to the original arguments for Position A.

It helps if after explaining the argument you can throw in a case study and in the example of abortion it's pretty easy because it's hard to think of a country that has legalised abortion in any way in which there hasn't been a trend for further liberalisation. But just because history is on your side, doesn't mean that you don't need to do good analysis of *why* it is true, and why it will *remain* true.

Part D: Opposing Minority Rights

As a general rule, you should avoid arguments that force you to oppose any move towards greater equality for a minority group. The reason is simple enough: because discrimination is inherently wrong and illogical, you'll struggle to overcome those problems in a debate.

However, there are times where you're forced into opposing an increase in rights for a minority group (such as gay marriage/adoption, cultural rights for ethnic minorities, etc) and you need some tactics for approaching these difficult situations.

The first rule: never oppose the *aim* of equal rights

You can (and should) argue about *how best* to move society towards of equal rights for all, but you're digging an unnecessary and dangerous hole if you oppose the aim of equal rights. Again, the reason is simple: it's virtually impossible to explain why a particular group deserve to be discriminated against without straying into bigotry or sexism, and not only are they inherently weak arguments, they also violate the Code of Conduct at most tournaments.

Basically, this is an example of a situation in which a "tactical concession" is the prudent course of action. Simply concede that there is a problem – no society on earth has reached a position of full entitlement for all its citizens – and explain that the processes by which rights are achieved are crucial to the acceptance of those rights in practice. Then the debate becomes about new issues, such as how important it is that society at large – the 'majority' – accept the legitimacy of these new rights for the minority. Of course, then the question is how we engender acceptance of minority rights by the majority.

In a good debate, the teams will disagree on both counts. One team will say that the acceptance of rights is not really required for rights to be meaningful (e.g. voting – it didn't matter that many men didn't accept women's right to vote when it was first allowed, that right was still empowering for women) and the other side will say that acceptance is crucial (e.g. equal pay provisions – an employer is legally required to offer equal pay, but if that employer is sexist he can promote women more slowly or reduce their access to important clients or additional training – all of which affects their pay).

Additionally, the teams can dispute the best way to generate community support for minority rights. One team says that people's natural fear and reluctance to change social norms evaporates once people see that new rights for minorities don't result in diminished rights for the majority and their opponents argue that it's better to continue the debate and the discussion until there is clear acceptance of change (Canada is a classic example – it legalised same-sex marriage after a long period of public debate, and although there will always be critics, by the time the law was enacted there was virtually no social backlash and

even when a conservative government was elected promising to 'review' the decision, they made no moves to restrict same-sex marriage because the majority of Canadians accept it as fair).

This second approach can be hard to make, but if it works then you'll win and it's still easier to argue than 'discrimination is right'. The key is to broaden the debate – it's not just about whether Group A can do X, it's about how that group fits into the society and the long term process of change that is a true 'rights movement'. You want to emphasise that these decisions (about when to grant new rights) should be made when there is something approaching a consensus – especially when you're talking about rights that require interaction with society to enact like employment rights and social rights (adoption, etc). The worst outcome is for a right to be turned into a political football, which the right being given and taken away at the whim of the political cycle. To be truly meaningful it must be enduring, and (generally) be accepted, not a source of social division.

But I'd remind you that tactically, the best outcome for you is to avoid these sorts of debate – it takes a great deal of skill and credibility to pull off a case like this, and you're constantly one wrong word/phrase away from saying something bigoted. It's a minefield best avoided if the topic gives you room to do so.

Chapter Five: Manner

Unfortunately, there are very few convenient tests or tactics for manner. But that's not to say that good manner can't be taught and so it must be possible to describe it. I'd stress that there is no narrow definition of good manner – you can be loud or quiet, you can be funny or serious and in some speeches you might do all those things. If you made up a list of the best debaters in the world, it would include people with range of styles. But that said, I think good manner is the right combination of three things: **Persuasiveness**, **Credibility** and **Conviction**.

Persuasiveness is about making your message appealing to the audience. It incorporates all of the obvious things that coaches teach you, like making eye contact, projecting your voice and so forth. But that's like saying that driving a car is just a combination of turning a wheel and moving your head. It's too simplistic and it sucks all of the art of out it.

The art is in the psychology of persuasion. For instance, it's vital that you understand the difference between intuitive and counter-intuitive arguments.[12] Running a counter-intuitive argument is not bad *per se,* but it is harder. If you don't acknowledge when you're running a counter-intuitive argument, you'll never make it fly in the debate.

But how to you make a counter-intuitive argument work? Well, you have explain it carefully and use strong analysis (discussed earlier), but from a manner point of view it's crucial that you choose your language carefully and don't overcomplicate things – and most importantly *look* at your adjudicators while you're saying it. You have to learn to read the faces of your judges and if it doesn't look like they understand you, then you need to slow down and try again until they get it.

At its heart, persuasiveness is about matching your manner to your material in such a way that you seem completely serious about what you're proposing and draw your audience into that same serious consideration of your arguments. Persuasiveness is about making an audience *want* to agree with you.

Credibility: Learning to have *gravitas* is difficult, because it's linked to personal maturity, which you can't rush, but in the meantime there are some ways to project the maximum amount of credibility that you're currently capable of.

Rule Number One: take it seriously and don't undermine yourself

Often, inexperienced speakers do everything possible to emphasise how inexperienced they are. That's just counterproductive. Don't ever talk your speech down while you're giving it. That sounds obvious, but it's astonishing how many debaters will make an argument and then say something like "that didn't make sense did it?" I'm not sure if it's a result of nerves, or some misguided attempt to be endearing, but either way you should stop it immediately.

Another classic example is deferring to your opposition. Often, a speaker will make some arguments that sound good about an area like economics and the next speaker will say something like "well I don't know as much about economics as the last speaker, but I'll have

[12] A counter-intuitive argument is something that people will initially find difficult to accept – something that seems to conflict with their gut feeling

a go at rebutting her argument anyway". This is a double hit – it weakens your credibility and it *increases* your opponents' credibility!

I can't stress enough how much damage this does to your credibility. It seems like a small thing, but it can be devastating. Talking yourself down can act as a subtle but powerful confirmation of any negative perception of you that an adjudicator might already be harbouring.

Rule Number Two: sound like you know what you're talking about

That means one of two things – either *actually* know what you're talking about (by learning First Principles as well as specific knowledge), or *sound* like you know what you're talking about (the first is better). You can sound credible by avoiding simple mistakes – like making sure you get the names of things right, including pronunciation; and use then them confidently. If you're not sure whether the name of the Chinese President is Hu Jin Tao or Wen Jao Bao, take a guess, but whichever you choose, say it confidently!

The only sure way to build up your credibility is to really know what you're talking about, but that takes time. Meanwhile, focus on being confident, and remember that your adjudicators/opposition will rarely know anything about you – if you look confident, and sound confident, they'll usually think you are confident!

Conviction is probably the most under-rated facet of manner. If you don't look like you care about the topic or the arguments you're making, then why should anyone else care? Remember that adjudicators suffer from all the same things that you endure at tournaments – they're tired, they can be bored, they can dislike the topics – if you don't do everything you can to make the debate engaging and appealing then you can't expect them to make much effort either.

There is a fine line between sounding passionate and sounding ridiculous, but your manner should say "I'm here to persuade" *not* "I'm trying to win a debate".

Trying to persuade means engaging in the issues first and foremost; and again, you should be trying to project the image that you care about them and you genuinely want other people to believe you – not just so that you can get another win for your team, but because it's *inherently* important to you that people believe you on this issue.

That means avoiding referring to the fact that you're having a debate –don't say things like "welcome to today's debate, the topic is" or "as the first speaker it's my job to explain the model"[13] – just get to the issues as fast as you can. Use your context and set-up to explain the *debate*, not the location or the people present – that's why you should contextualise at the start of the First Speaker's speech. In team splits, talk about how your case expands logically, rather than giving the impression that you've made some arbitrary distinction. Sound professional, sound sophisticated and sound genuinely interested.

[13] It amazes me how many high-school debaters waste the first 45 seconds of their speeches on meaningless platitudes welcoming everyone to the debate. The audience has presumably realised where they are and what they're about to watch long before you stood up, and while you might appreciate your grandmother's presence, your adjudicator will in no way be persuaded by your greetings to the random individuals in the room. Sentences like those listed here should be erased from your debating vocabulary.

Again, these are subtle things and individual instances of 'debate-speak' (talking about the debate, instead of talking about the issues) don't matter much, but cumulatively they have a big impact. They remind the adjudicator that this is just a contest, and the teams are just trying to score points. You can still win when that happens, but you'll never really learn to "persuade" – instead you'll learn how to be better than other team; and sometimes that's not saying very much.

People often ask how to "put teams away"; in other words, how to win by large margins – and the key to scoring big wins against good teams is manner. If you can master these three facets of manner, then when coupled with a strong case you will able to smash opponents, not just beat them. But it takes patience, practice and perseverance!

Chapter Six: Secret Topic Prep

Part A: Steps to Good Preps[14]

1. Identify the Controversy

Think about the following questions: what is the context of the debate? What is the status quo and/or what event related to the topic has occurred recently? Has something been proposed in relation to a controversy? (e.g. by a government or by an interest group?) What is the *issue* that this debate is about?

This step should help you understand why the topic was set in the first place – why it's an issue that people are discussing (or should be discussing!). When it comes to the first speaker's speech, this step should help you set up the debate, let the audience know what the debate's about and why it's a debate worth listening to.

2. Form a Dichotomous Statement about the Debate.

Form a statement about the debate that can be answered "yes" or "no". This should set up the divide between the two teams in the debate – both agreeing and disagreeing with the statement should be valid positions, so that a good debate can occur. Avoid restating the topic – the statement should be the backbone, or main contention, of your case.

3. Define the Terms of the Debate

Your context should already make it clear what it is that the topic 'means' in terms of what any unclear or ambiguous terms. Thus, setting up a definition does not mean going through what each word in the topic 'means' – you should have already made this clear, so it means defining the terms of the debate:

Model Debates – in a lot of debates, defining the debate means proposing your solution or *"model"* for solving the controversy. The details of your model should include the scope of the debate (the first world? Australia? schools?) and should give the debate a clear structure thorough which your arguments can be analysed.

Empirical Debates – these are debates where you're not arguing for a policy but merely evaluating something – e.g. "that our celebrities are no good". Your definition of the topic in these kinds of debates should set up the benchmarks by which you'll be assessing the issue. The definition stage is critical because it sets your team (and sometimes the other team too) clear markers against which your arguments can be evaluated.

Remember – you should never try to win a debate by your definition (either model or benchmarks). Your aim in defining the debate should be to set up a good strong structure *through which* both teams can wrestle with each other's arguments

4. Make a 'Wishlist'

Think of things you'd like to prove for your case – anything that would be beneficial to your side of the debate – things that if you could prove, would make it easier to win. If you're stuck for ideas, think of the groups involved in the issue – what their interests would be and how they are affected by the issue (or would be affected by your proposal).

5. Cull and Expand Your Wishlist into Arguments

[14] This is a lightly edited version of a text written by Nicole Lynch

Now it's time to transform your wishlist into a case. This is where your ideas get transformed from mere assertions to actual arguments (see Chapter Three).

With your whole team working together, you should be able to come up with the best analysis and the best evidence (examples, statistics, etc) for each of your arguments. Ask yourself whether you have made all the links to explain how you reached your conclusion so that someone who'd never even thought about it would be able to follow your reasoning (and be convinced by it!)

Once you have expanded your wishlist, read through it carefully and identify things that are unprovable and get rid of them. Anything that you can't logically prove at this point should be cut – it's a waste of valuable time to pursue arguments that won't help your case and it means you'll have less time to develop your stronger arguments. Prioritise your arguments so that you know which are the central to your case and which merely strengthen it – cut the weaker ones if you have too many and be prepared to defend your important arguments!

6. Do Your Team Split

Finally, as a team, work out the logical progression of the arguments and decide which speakers will be covering which material. Then speakers can finalise their notes for their own speeches in the final few minutes.

Some Final Comments:

You and your team should be talking to each other for the majority of your prep time. If you construct your case according to the method above, every member of the team should be clear as to what the key clash in the debate is, what your team is proposing and the details of your team's arguments. This is important so that your team presents a consistent, logical case that fits together well. It is also a good tactic because although only one speaker will be *presenting* any single argument, any speaker may need use that argument in rebuttal (or have to defend it from attack) – so understanding all your team's material is vital – and collaborative preparation of your case ensures all speakers can do this. Plus, it means that if anyone is hazy about anything, they have two other people to consult with to smooth out the bumps before they get to the debating room.

Finally, remember that this method is all about actually debating. Don't work through all of the steps and then stand up to give your speech and completely forget what you've just talked about. The structure of your team's case should follow the structure of your prep – when you identified the controversy at the start of your prep, it was so you knew what the debate was about and why it was worth debating: don't launch into your arguments before you enlighten the audience, the adjudicator and your opposition too! If they're all on the same page as you, your arguments are likely to make a lot more sense and the debate will work better!

Part B: Making Arguments from First Principles

As a novice, or even intermediate debater, you will constantly feel like you don't know enough to debate most topics to their full potential – and unfortunately that's true. But how to you fix that lack of knowledge? You focus on First Principles.

First Principles are key concepts that form the fundamental 'clash' in the majority of debates (see Appendix One for a basic list). Using those principles in combination with basic logic (i.e.

knowing how to show that an argument is logically flawed without knowing any facts/matter about the issue) will allow you to run a reasonably good case for any topic.

Simply put, you can't prep a good case without having good and consistent **ideas** about a topic, and short of being an expert on every issue; First Principles are the best way to generate those ideas in prep.

Note: the language isn't that important. Don't worry about learning the labels/jargon used in Appendix One, it's the **ideas** contained in those theories that are important.

None of this is meant to suggest that you shouldn't try to keep up with the news, and even go further than that and research issues that you think might be useful – of course you should do that. But that's a process that will be ongoing throughout your debating career. At the start, you want to give yourself the best possible chance of building good cases on a wide range of issues – and First Principles is the best way to do that.

The case prepping method outlined in Part A is designed to show you how to build a case by approaching it from First Principles – incorporating logical progression of ideas, as well as identifying and understanding the philosophical clash that lies at the heart of any debate.

There are few shortcuts to learning First Principles. The best ways are to read and to pay attention during debates/adjudications. All debates are built on a foundation of conflicting ideas and theories about how to solve problems – like how to best run the economy (Keynesian or neo-liberal?) or the best principles for a political system (communitarian or liberal?). These ideas might sound complicated, but for the purposes of debating you just need to understand the key concepts in each theory.

So what is an example of First Principles theories in action? Well, many of the First Principles theories relate to disputes over the 'true' role of the government – and you can learn the fundamentals of dozens of debates by mastering a few simple concepts.

First Principles – The Role of Government

At some point everyone learns about liberalism ("small 'l' liberalism", not the Liberal Party). Because Australia is a 'liberal-democracy', the concept of liberalism must have a lot to do with how we conceive of the proper role and responsibilities of government. But what does it mean?

Well, liberalism essentially means 'small government' – giving individuals as much freedom as possible (as long as that freedom wouldn't be used to hurt other people). So true "small 'l' liberals" believe that when given the choice between banning something or regulating its use, governments should choose to regulate it, because banning something implies that the government is telling you what sort of behaviour is acceptable or beneficial for you – and liberals think that wrong.

So while it might save lives and money if we banned smoking and drinking, true liberals would argue that these things should be regulated (e.g. preventing children from using them) but otherwise if people want to choose to do something that will do them harm, that's their choice. The key is informed choice – so long as adults fully understand the choice they are making, they should be free to make it. Everybody knows that smoking is dangerous

– if they still want to smoke, the government shouldn't stop them, because it's an 'informed choice'.

Conversely, there are people who are sometimes called 'communitarians' or more broadly, 'socialists', who take the opposite view. They favour "big government", a government that actively involves itself in shaping the choices that people can make, in an effort to create a society that promotes the 'social good'.

So it was 'big government' communitarians who decided that wearing a seatbelt or getting immunised for diseases should be compulsory. That's the government telling you what's best for you – it's the government saying "we're not going to take the chance that you're stupid enough to ignore the obvious benefits of wearing a seatbelt, so we're going to make it a law and then punish you if you don't do it."

This clash between 'big' and 'small' government is a constant theme of Australian politics. In practice, people don't usually support one philosophy consistently, but both sides are always represented in public debate.

Regards of whether the topic is about gun control, gambling, pornography, drugs, smoking, (etc), the *core* of the debate is the same – big government versus small government. On top of that core clash, you would include any specific knowledge you might have the harms or benefits of the thing in question, but each debate would be a clash of the same principles.

Once you learn a few First Principles ideas, you'll start to see them underpinning every debate you do. Even if no-one mentions the names of the theories involved, you'll see how the logic of those ideas permeates every argument made. It would be great if you were an expert on drugs, guns, gambling, (etc); but in the meantime, learning these First Principles ideas will help you build a strong case in any of the innumerable 'role of government' debates. It will also help you devise rebuttal.

Chapter Seven – More Advanced Tactics

If you have understood everything so far about how to choose the right definition, how to pick a good 'medium-to-hard' line and then how to construct good, analysis-rich arguments, then case construction is really just about bringing those things together in a way that is consistent.

In addition to having prep techniques that help you develop more innovative arguments, there are tactics that you can employ to improve your team's consistency and responsiveness to challenges. The first tactical decision to make regards **speaking order**, the second is a technique I like to call "**filters**" and finally there are **tactical concessions**.

In addition to those concepts, it is also vitally important that teams properly contextualise their cases – to not only explain the factual context of the debate, but to help build momentum for their argument, and set the tone for the debate. Three factors that are useful to contextualising a case are **trends, norms** and **tipping points,** which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Part A: Speaking Order, Filters and Tactical Concessions

Speaking Order is difficult to generalise about, because each team has its own strengths and weaknesses, but there are some things worth considering.

Ideally, speakers should be capable of competently performing any of the speaker roles (even if most people have a favoured speaking position) and young debaters should set themselves the goal of gaining that level of flexibility as soon as possible. Being able to speak in any position is crucial to developing an understanding of the dynamics of debates, which will improve your debating skills (through better understanding of tactics and case construction) and is also a crucial part of becoming an elite adjudicator.

All things considered equal, it is my view that more knowledgeable person on a given topic should speak second.[15] There are two good reasons for this. First, it helps with consistency – the first speaker can be briefed on the issue in the prep and the second speaker (as the principle source of that information) should be well placed to avoid contradictions or inconsistencies as the case expands. Second, this configuration gives the team maximum flexibility when responding to the initial attacks of the opposition. Since this person is the most knowledgeable on the issue, they are best placed to reposition the team following the opposition's first speaker.

I think this is a good rule for teams of all skill level, but especially for teams at the ends of the spectrum – very inexperienced teams and very experienced teams. Intermediate teams might find it difficult to identify which speaker is the most knowledgeable, and speakers at might have limited capacity to be flexible in terms of speaking roles (whereas at the novice level speakers might feel more comfortable in a given role, but few would actually have a significantly higher level of competence in that role then they do in any other).

Of course, a good set-up to a case is absolutely vital, and great care and attention should be given to a first speaker during prep to ensure that they are able to fully explain all aspects of

[15] A slight variant on this used by many teams is to have the most experienced speaker speak "first response" – i.e.: Second Affirmative and First Negative.

your definition and model. There is no point having maximum flexibility at second speaker if the case has been badly presented from the start.

Finally a note about speaking third: a disproportionate number of high school debaters consider themselves to be 'natural' third speakers. That's not necessarily a problem, and every good team needs a strong third speaker; but the reality of debating is that in most cases, third is the last place to have your best speaker. Especially in 3-on-3 styles, the strength of the case and the analysis early on is absolutely vital; and if it's not done well then even a brilliant third speaker will be unable to save the team from any decent opposition. Speaking first and even second can seem daunting or even boring sometimes, but at this level a great first speaker is much more valuable to a team then a great third.

Filters are simply 'tests' that you establish (either explicitly or just with your teammates) by which you gauge your side's reaction to any question or argument raised by the opposition. So it's a 'guiding principle' of sorts, by which your team will navigate throughout the debate.

Applying clear filters to your case has two benefits, the first of which is that it generates consistency – anytime the opposition asks whether your plan will include a certain group, you will know immediately what the correct/consistent answer should be, even if you hadn't considered it during prep.

Secondly – and this is especially useful when debating with inexperienced speakers with whom you need to spend a lot of time building up their understanding of the fundamental issues in the debate – filters give clear boundaries and confidence when delivering rebuttal.

What are some examples of a filter in a debate? The topic "*that intellectually disabled children should be taught in mainstream schools"* was run at a debating tournament in 2005 and my team successfully employed a simple filter to keep our case clear and consistent – allowing us to defeat a team with a higher (average) level of experience. The filter was simple and drew on the most obvious and relevant analogy – as the Affirmative team, we set as our guiding principle that we would not accept any restrictions on intellectually disabled children that were not the norm for physically disabled children.

With that in place, my team could focus during prep on developing ideas and persuasive analysis. This meant that we didn't spend much time thinking about the opposition's arguments, but instead had a well-developed case.

During the debate, we were challenged on issues like violent students, severely disabled children, specialty staff and upgrades to facilities to accommodate the intellectually disabled; and every time my team answered confidently and consistently – even though we hadn't discussed many of those issues. We don't tolerate extremely violent physically disabled children in the mainstream system, we don't put severely physically disabled children in mainstream schools (but the vast majority are do get in) – but we wouldn't tolerate a child in a wheelchair being denied access to a mainstream school because the government didn't want to pay for a ramp or a special aide teacher – so why apply different rules to the needs of intellectually disabled children?

This is not to suggest that our case was flawless, or our opponents' case had no merit; the point is that running every argument through a clearly defined filter keeps your responses consistent and relieves the stress on inexperienced speakers.

Negative teams can also make use of filters: a good example would be the topic "that we should ban all pornography that features violence or coercion." This is a difficult topic for the Negative team and you need to clearly establish what sort of pornography you are prepared to defend. Not everyone is knowledgeable about various kinds of hardcore pornography and it's not an area where everyone will be easily able to think of examples and evidence. But the filter is fairly obvious: a smart Negative would set as their test that we should only accept a restriction on pornography if the same restriction was the norm for mainstream media. This gives the Negative a chance to spend their time preparing the best possible free-speech/pornography case they can think of, without worrying too much about how they will cope with the arguments raised by the Affirmative.

This filter means a model that deals with violence in the same way as for other media – it should be assessed, classified and if necessary access should be restricted (such as with R rated movies). However, there is a limit to how much violence a mainstream movie can get away with and it should be the same here – so grotesquely violent pornography can be banned – but just like ultra-violent movies, this is a minority, and lots of violence is still allowed to be shown, and violent pornography shouldn't be any different.

Just like the previous example, using this filter throws the onus back onto the opposition to show how the analogy is inappropriate – so in the first case they would need to show why intellectually disabled children cannot be treated under the same principles as physically disabled children and in the second case they would need to show why pornography is so special that adults are unable to process it in the same way they can violent action and horror movies (i.e. without turning into serial killers). There isn't a simple filter for every case, but it's a trick you should have up your sleeve.

Tactical Concessions are in the same tactics family as filters – because in both cases the issue choosing your battles. It's not possible or advisable to try and rebut every argument made by your opposition – it's better to prioritise the arguments and focus on attacking the most potent ones your opponents made. But which arguments should you let through? There are two answers to that – those that are weak and those that can simply be conceded.

Obviously, weak or irrelevant arguments should be ignored if dealing with them is an unreasonable distraction from more important issues (although sometimes it's worth pointing out quickly how stupid an argument is to discredit your opponents, but you'll still only win the debate if you deal with their strongest points).

The second option is to make a tactical concession. Basically, this is admitting that you happen to agree with a proposition put forward by your opponents. Some people think it looks weak to agree with your opponents too often. I think that as long as you're smart about it, tactical concessions make you look reasonable and allow you to focus attention on the true areas of clash in the debate.

So when should you concede? There are two rules to concessions – concede if you would like stupid otherwise, and concede if it makes an argument you can't win go away.

So what are some examples? Well, in 90% of debates both sides should agree with the existence of a problem (you can still disagree with the proposed solution). In a debate about drugs, it would seem churlish to deny that there is a drug problem; or in a debate about 'rogue states' like Iran or North Korea, it would look silly to claim that these states are not

dangerous – but admitting those things doesn't mean that any particular course of action is automatically the right response.

The second rule is more difficult to implement. Conceding in order to make problematic arguments 'go away' (in other words, lose relevance in the debate) is a fine line. Often, it's better to concede that there is a moral imperative to act (in response to some sort of problem or situation) than it is to fight it.

But be careful: if you're going to defend the status quo and an opposition is foaming at the mouth about how terrible the current situation is, it would be a bad idea to concede the problem. But if both sides have agreed that there is a problem, and both sides think the status quo needs to change, then don't let your opponents go on and on about how morally superior they are. Concede that there is a moral imperative to act, then remind the adjudicator that your side has a plan to tackle the problem and your opponents are just wasting time talking about an issue that everyone agrees on.

Part B: Trends, Norms and Tipping Points

When building a case, the first thing you should do is clearly establish the context in which the debate occurs. This requires discussing some of the factual circumstances that have led to the debate, but your case will be made most potent by developing a sense of urgency – a need to implement your particular policy *now*.

How can you do this? Well it's critical to understand the nature of the problem so that you can describe why something is a problem. But simply pointing out a problem is often not enough – to make the case really strong you need urgency: why should this be done now (especially if it's something that has been debated many times before, like euthanasia)? One way to create that urgency is to point to **trends**, **norms** or **tipping points**.

Trends are the current direction of public policy.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9-11, there has been a clear trend of governments passing increasingly restrictive 'anti-terrorism' laws (detention of suspects, intrusive investigation powers, increased penalties) in the name of public safety. It's clear from the way that Australia has modelled some of its most recent reforms on laws in the UK that there is a widespread trend emerging, with a cycle of increasingly stringent laws.

Some trends can be very broad: since the early 90's there has been a clear trend amongst Western governments to pursue economic policies based on 'neo-liberalism' (privatisation, reductions in trade barriers, deregulation of industry). That's not to say that this process has been universal, but it clearly happening in the majority of cases and regardless of whether it is good or bad, it is the reality. In the wake of the GFC, there has been something of a trend in the opposite direction, with the re-regulation of investment banks in many countries.

You might want to propose a policy that would be a change to this trend, perhaps even reverse it. That's fine, but it's important to understand the trends, because that will help you understand what sort of problems your proposal will be likely face.

It's perfectly fine to use the development of a trend as the impetus for a policy. So you might say as part of your set up: "there is a clear trend developing over the last decade for the United States to act militarily without the consent of the United Nations (Bosnia, Iraq) and

we think it is critical that we make reforms to the international system to encourage the US to act more multilaterally, and to strengthen the relevancy of the UN. We would do this by reforming the UN in the following way…"

Or: "from the recent trend of corporations (World Com, Enron, HIH) going bankrupt as a result of the serious mismanagement by directors, we think it's time to institute far harsher penalties for directors who deliberately run companies into the ground. Therefore we will be proposing the introduction of laws to make directors personally financially liable for acts of deliberate mismanagement that they conduct…"

But equally, there is nothing wrong with proposing a case that would be an extension of a current trend – you can use analysis of the trend to add momentum to your argument. For example: "over the last ten years, we have a clear trend of parents increasingly being given access to reproductive technologies as a means to better plan their families and ensure healthy babies (IVF, pre-natal genetic screening) and we think that it is the simply the next logical step to give potential parents access to the next generation of reproductive technology – which involves genetic manipulation of the foetus. Therefore we support a parent's right to genetically modify their unborn child".

This is an example of how you can use 'trend analysis' to make something that is objectively *very* controversial appear to be simply the next step along the path that society is already on. It is analysis that will form part of the core of your case – genetic modification is not that different in principle from what we already allow (if we allow a foetus to be screened for genetic diseases that might lead to the parents making a decision to abort, why not allow parents to use technology to ensure that the foetus is healthy in more ways than simply avoiding disease?).

If you can demonstrate that the relevant trends are pointing in the direction of your team's logic, then the task is that much harder for the opposition.

Norms are closely related to trends, in that norms are the status quo, or what people are willing to accept now (the trend might be moving in any direction but at any given moment a particular position will be the commonly held 'norm').

For instance, it is a norm in our society that citizens have equal rights. This seems simple enough, but it wasn't always the case. Less than a century ago it was the norm (globally) for women to be denied the right to vote; just 50 years ago it was the norm in Australia for Indigenous people to be denied the same right. Since those times, we have seen a growing trend towards equality; but as it stands, the norm is that neither group has reached a position of full equality. The extent to which society accepts inequality is the norm, while the direction things are moving is the trend.

Norms can be highly culturally specific. In Norway and Japan, many people view the consumption of whale meat as being little different to any other meat, but in Australia the norm is for people to view whales as worthy of special protection.

Norms can also be influenced by economic status (poor and rich people can have very different ideas about norms), religion, ethnicity, nationality and many other factors.

It is important to understand norms in order to understand how 'hard', 'soft' or 'insane' a particular argument/model is (because this is largely based on how different people perceive your case to be from the norm).

Tipping Points are what happens when a 'trend' gains momentum to the point where a major change is considered. Tipping points are important because they add weight and credibility to what might otherwise be seen as an unlikely outcome. So when you're setting up your case, you obviously want to make it sound like the plan that you are proposing is going to work – that people are going to be fairly willing to do it and that it's going to have benefits. Sometimes this is hard to do – especially if you're arguing for something quite hardline. If you can describe the situation – or the 'problem' of the debate – as being at a 'tipping point'; you can give your case a sense of urgency and credibility. These are both powerful things to have on your side.

What are some examples of a tipping point? They occur when a situation has reached a critical juncture – where policy makers are forced to make a fundamental choice and there is really no 'half-way' point. Or maybe a series of events have quickly moved a situation forward, making previously remote options seem more plausible. A recent example of a debate which somewhat unexpectedly reached a tipping point is abortion.

Abortion was a bit of a non-issue in Australian politics for many years and with the conservative Howard government winning control of both houses of parliament, most people thought the issue would be largely ignored for the foreseeable future. But because of pressure by a cross-party alliance of MPs, there was a vote on the legalisation of the abortion pill RU486. Immediately following that, MPs in Victoria's parliament started agitating for a decriminalisation of abortion under State laws. That sort of series of related events could be said to be moving Australia (or Victoria at least) towards a 'tipping point' in the debate about abortion laws. Before the RU486 vote it would have been hard to imagine how the abortion debate could become a live issue in Victorian politics, but after the vote both the leaders of the major parties were forced to discuss it and state their positions.

A single event could cause a tipping point – like (to take an extreme example) if Iran tested a nuclear weapon. You can imagine how strong the sense of urgency would be to find ways to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons and to do something about the dictatorship in Iran. It would make options like invasion or attack *much* more likely than they are at the moment. But usually a tipping point is the result of a series of events that propel a debate into uncharted territory.

Part B: Classic Affirmative Mistakes and Negative Tactics

Many of the mistakes that Affirmative teams make when setting up debates are also the perfect weapons for Negative teams to use – especially if they have squirreled[16] or have limited knowledge of the issues in the debate. For that reason they are discussed here together.

Classic Trap One: The Problem-Solution Gap

This mistake is most common and most damaging when teams propose soft models.

[16] 'Squirrel' is a debating term that refers to an interpretation of a motion that is blatantly (and often deliberately) outside of the spirit of the motion

Basically the trap is this: usually when a team propose a soft model they will start by identifying a very real problem, but simply offer a soft solution – or worse still, offer a soft mechanism to 'improve' the situation. The trap is that it's morally inconsistent to be aware of a great and pressing problem, but then think it is defensible to do very little about it. The trap grows stronger the more the Affirmative push the moral dimensions of their case.

To give an obviously exaggerated example: a team identifies the context to the debate as the growing problem of hunger and starvation in the developing world and cites a recent UN or NGO report filled with horrifying statistics of the suffering these people endure and *then* proposes a model in which rich nations increase the amount of food aid they donate by some tokenistic amount. It is certainly true that this tiny amount of extra food is literally 'better than the status quo', but there is a vast inconsistency between the scale of the problem they have identified and the solution they have offered. If they truly think the problem is that big and that important than their model is unconscionable.

Realistically, in a 'euthanasia' debate, if a team started by identifying the suffering of the terminally ill in our hospitals and the desperate need to find a way to help people alleviate their pain and to have dignity in their final moments (a common and reasonable way to contextualise that debate) *and* then they ran the soft model described in Chapter Four, they will have fallen into the Problem-Solution Trap.

How to Exploit the Problem-Solution Gap

There are two ways to exploit this gap, although a combination of the two is most effective.

Firstly, opposition teams should attack the case as being unable to effectively combat the problem they themselves wanted to tackle. This is pretty obvious but still worth doing.

Secondly (especially useful if the opposition don't know much about the topic), simply counter-propose something that would be even marginally be more effective at tackling the problem (the more effective the better). The tactical advantage of this is that it totally neutralises the moral argument and in fact steals it for the opposition. It's the perfect opportunity to hijack the debate. This is one way that teams can win debates after being squirreled. It's a form of 'First Principles' case construction/rebuttal. It also works sometimes against ultra-soft lines.

Classic Trap Two: The Ultra-Soft Line

I've already discussed previously why it is, tactically speaking, a bad idea for an Affirmative team to propose the status quo as their model – and generally speaking any competent topic selector will word motions so that running the status quo is impossible. But that doesn't stop stupid or inexperienced teams from proposing very-soft line models which are almost the status quo, but not quite.

This creates a number of problems for both teams and a decent adjudicator should expect something pretty special from the Affirmative if they are to win (so long as the Negative team don't panic and drop the ball).

The reason why an ultra-soft case is a bad idea is because they have the strong potential to 'collapse' a debate and make it difficult for the teams to find any meaningful 'clash'. From

the point of view of the adjudicator, the Affirmative team have an obligation to provide the conditions for a good debate – which basically means a good, reasonable clash (there is a strong clash between an Affirmative team that is in favour of freedom and asks the Negative team to defend slavery; but that is an 'unreasonable' clash and should be punished by an adjudicator because – amongst other things – it breaks the definitional rule and probably the Code of Conduct).

But the Negative team also have an obligation to come to the party and engage in the debate established by the Affirmative, so long as the clash is reasonable.

The tactical reason why Affirmative teams should avoid ultra-soft lines is that they don't give you enough opportunities for providing deep analysis. Almost by definition, an ultra-soft line is likely to be uncontroversial – meaning that there is nothing much to say in favour of it!

If the topic was "that all public schools should have a uniform" and the Affirmative team define it as "a common dress standard – no 'name brand' clothes, no expensive jewellery, minimal make-up and only flat heeled, closed toe, single colour shoes", it might seem like an impossible case to lose. But ask yourself how many quality arguments you could make in favour of this standard? Can you think of enough to fill 15 minutes (First Affirmative, and half the Second Affirmative) of speeches, without it getting repetitive, simplistic or boring? I'd be impressed if you could.

Even assuming that the Affirmative team have done themselves a massive disservice by running an ultra-soft line, the Negative still need to be careful they don't become victims of an imploding debate – where the area of clash is small and gets smaller and smaller until there are virtually no strong areas of difference between the teams. Under those circumstances, an adjudicator will have few good reasons to award the debate and will probably end up giving it to the team which is penalised *less* for ruining the debate.

As a Negative team, your best tactic – under all circumstances, but especially in response to an ultra-soft line – is to *create space* in the debate. That means taking a hard line (or at least a very firm line) to clearly delineate the stance of your team and to give your team a principled line to defend. In effect, the debate ends up being more about whether or not you can clearly explain and defend your line than it is about defeating your opponents position (in a normal debate those priorities are equally important).

Of course, you still need to make a strong effort to engage with your opponent's case, but the central thrust of your rebuttal is likely to be that the Affirmative have based their case on the wrong principle – rather than that the specifics of their case will cause some harm.

So, in relation to our example, a Negative team should run a fairly strong, clear line that students should be able to wear any clothing they wish that is not inappropriate (you don't want be condoning students coming to school wearing pyjamas or dressed like prostitutes, but that still allows a very wide range of acceptable attire). The Negative would then focus on why it is important that children be able to wear whatever they like – both because it's a form of personal expression and important to the development of their personalities; and because it's important for children to learn to cope with material differences – everywhere they go after school, the way they look will have an impact on their life: from job interviews and workplace, to fitting in socially – and school is a good place to learn those skills.

The attack on the Affirmative team is that any attempt to stifle the sartorial freedom of students is simply limiting the development of their personal autonomy, and making harder for them to learn how to interact with others in the real world. This would be the same line you would have run had the Affirmative set up a reasonable model, but the focus shifts from comparing the potential harms of a proper school uniform (cost, strict conformity, etc) with the harms of free dress (bullying, social segregation, peer-group pressure) and becomes more about whether freedom of dress and expression is the superior principle to the alternative of uniformity of dress.

The Affirmative team – being the soft and timid people that they obviously are – will probably try to have the best of both worlds and argue that their 'soft uniform' still gives children room to express themselves – but this is the crucial thing, now they are fighting on your terms! You need to keep your cool and simply point out the hypocrisy of their position – if they think that free expression is important, they can't have what amounts to a uniform by stealth. The more they defend the need for students to have self-expression, the more you can argue that students will consistently bend and break their rules and that the 'natural' position will be more like that you are proposing.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that this would be a great debate – once a team go ultra-soft its very rarely a good debate (which should be reason enough to never do it yourself) but it's a fight for survival. An ultra-soft line is an attempt to suck the controversy out of a debate, and controversy is the oxygen of debate. So the best Negative tactic is anything that increases the controversy and injects in some more oxygen.

Any decent adjudicator should reward a team that is trying to save a debate and so they will hopefully be generous towards you, but you have to keep your cool and run a clear and consistent line. Basically, you should go back to 'First Principles', figure out what the clash *should* have been, then figure out which line you can run that will push the debate as far towards that original level of clash as possible.

Part C: General Tactical Mistakes

Mistake One: The Fallacy of 'Mutual Exclusivity'

The concept of 'mutual exclusivity' has been thoroughly overused and misunderstood by debaters of all styles. This would be bad enough, but there also seems to be a widespread belief that mutual exclusivity is a powerful rebuttal to an opponent's case – when tactically speaking it can be easily and effectively countered.

The problem of mutual exclusivity is this – teams think that if they can show that an opponent's model is not practically incapable of being enacted at the same time as their own, that weakens the validity of their opponent's case. There is some truth to this, certainly rhetorically but also argumentatively, but it's overstated and quite simple to refute.

The first point is that mutual exclusivity is not a fatal flaw in an opposition's case automatically – only under certainly circumstances is it even a weakness.

For example, if the topic was "that this house would legalise recreational drugs" and the Affirmative proposed a model of licensed distribution of drugs like ecstasy (essentially treating recreational drugs in the same way as cigarettes and alcohol – regulated, restricted, but commercially available) the Negative might counter-propose a model that is essentially

the status quo, but with greater education about the effects of drugs and drug abuse to discourage their use.

Commonly, the Affirmative would respond by saying that the Negative's case is not mutually exclusive with their own, because an identical education campaign would be consistent with the aims of their own model. While strictly speaking this is true – something can be legalised *and* there can be a broad education campaign about the harms (e.g. cigarettes), the lack of formal mutual exclusivity is not a fatal flaw, or even an effective attack – because *philosophically* the two models are predicated on two mutually exclusive concepts: that the best way to limit harm is to allow supply and encourage responsible use and that the best way to limit harm is to restrict supply and explain that generally there really is no such thing as responsible use. These *concepts* are mutually exclusive.

Secondly, and flowing from the philosophical difference, there is a simple practical distinction. The Negative's model is mutually exclusive in the sense that if the education campaign works as well as it argued that it would, then there would be no need to legalise supply of drugs as a harm minimisation strategy – if education does effectively limit harm from drugs, then the only reason you would go further than that and legalise it is if you thought people had a right to access it (which is an argument exclusive to the Affirmative).

Mistake Two: The Illusion of 'Sameness'

Quite often, debaters will analyse an entire category of things together, when they should rightly be seen as a wider number of discrete entities that have a small number of things in common but nevertheless possess significant differences. Some common examples include the media, corporations, developing countries, and racial/ethnic/gender/sexuality groups.

In each of these cases, there are commonalities between individual members that make some generalisations fair and accurate. For example it's fair to say "corporations are profit driven", because any corporation that doesn't seek (maybe amongst other things) to make a profit is not really a business – it's a charity, or community service, but it's not a 'corporation' in the colloquial sense of a private business. However, the pursuit of profit takes many forms: corporations aim for different markets (e.g. cheap and low quality or expensive and high quality) and operate under different conditions (e.g. big businesses that have large profit margins and substantial resources and small businesses that run on small margins and have limited resources).

Any time an opposition talk about a one of these categories as though they are homogenous ("what women want is to be represented politically by women" or "West Papuans don't want development, what they really want is to be free to pursue their traditional culture"), even if you know nothing about the group in question, you can confidently assert from First Principles that the situation is more complicated than that ("many women are more concerned with the ideological beliefs of their representatives, rather than their gender because 'women' are as a group are far from united in their views") and then provide the analysis for why these differences within the group are reasonable, important and how they will complicate the fair application of the opposition's model.

Mistake Three: The Myth of the "Opposition's Onus" (or Push Debating)

This is one of those 'fine line' issues in debating/adjudication; when is an opposition team 'push debating' and when is it simply pointing out the obvious about the fundamental 'clash' in the debate?

Push debating can occur in many forms. Two of those possibilities were covered in Chapter Three when dealing with false dichotomies and straw men – when an opposition are trying to force you to (or convince the adjudicator that you should) argue for something totally irrelevant, or to oppose a truism.

As an adjudicator or debater, these are simple situations that really only require you to explain why such dichotomies are ridiculous and irrelevant to the real debate, then establish what the 'true' dichotomy is and get back to defending your side of that equation.

But there are other, subtler forms of push debating that inexperienced speakers and judges sometimes miss and that's when a team try to 'push' an entire case onto their opposition – either through an unfair definition of the terms of the debate, or through the establishment of some sort of (unfair) test or criteria through which they assert the debate should be judged.

Remember this simple rule – no-one can tell you what your side needs to prove. You *never* have to accept an 'onus' or a set of criteria that is placed on you by an opposition speaker. If your team has a good first speaker, they will clearly spell out exactly what your side will be attempting to prove or which position you will be advocating for and that's what you should be judged on.

As an adjudicator, you should be wary of letting competitors tell you how to judge the debate. It's fine for a team to point out problems with the opposition, or to challenge their definition or their arguments, but in the end the only criteria that matter when awarding the debate are those set down in the rules. This doesn't mean that every time a team try to set out criteria for a debate they are trying to be unfair – but in almost every case these criteria are irrelevant.

But there are subtleties to this and as you become more experienced you'll learn to tell the difference between a team that is trying (consciously or not) to unfairly push their opposition, and one that is simply trying to establish the parameters of a fair debate.

For example, if the topic was "that Australia should use nuclear energy", the Affirmative team have the right to choose exactly how much nuclear energy – and under what conditions – they are willing to defend (that's an issue of how 'hard line' or 'soft line' they choose to be) but they can't define the opposition's case. So they can't say "we would like the government set a target of generating 20% of Australia's electricity through nuclear power and the opposition have to defend the status quo – of virtually total fossil fuel use – as a better strategy". That's push debating. If the Negative team want to defend the status quo, then that's their choice; but if they had a case based on some alternative (like green energy, or reductions in energy use) then it's their right to set the parameters of their case.

All you have to do as a Negative team in that situation is to acknowledge the 'push' and reject it. For example, you could say "the Affirmative team are eager to see nuclear power used in Australia and we reject that, but contrary to what they think, our alternative is not a dirty fossil fuel energy industry, the alternative that we will be advocating is…" and then insert your model.

Every time the Affirmative try to say that your team is defending the problems with the status quo you can calmly say "no, we want to change the system too, just in a different way..." and get back to the debate.

There are times when an Affirmative team is right to stake out the grounds of the debate, but this is only the case when the topic *forces* the Negative team (by virtue of the wording) to defend something. If the topic was "that Singapore should abolish the death penalty as a punishment for drug traffickers", then the position of the Negative is obvious – they have to defend the status quo. They might try to insert some minor modifications (a better appeals process, etc) but if they're not defending the use of the death penalty for drug traffickers, they have failed to engage properly in the debate.

Push debating occurs mostly when the wording of the topic is focused on what the Affirmative should defend, and doesn't say much about the nature of the Negative team's case (such as "that we should invade Iran" – the position of the Affirmative is made obvious, but the Negative have several options open to them – sanctions, economic engagement, etc). Under these conditions, some Affirmative teams will try to limit the Negative's choices. They might be doing it because they think it's in the spirit of the motion, or they might be doing it because they are trying to gain some tactical advantage. In any event, the Negative is *always* free to reject the push if they want to.

On a final note, it's worth pointing out that it's not necessarily 'weak' to accept a 'pushed' position. If the Negative want to embrace the case/test/criteria pushed onto them by the Affirmative, that's not an inherently bad decision. Sometimes, it is tactically smart to do so, just as sometimes a tactical concession can help move a debate forward, or neutralise an argument (see Tactical Concessions in Chapter Seven).

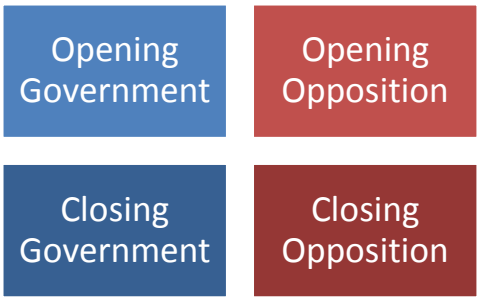
Chapter Eight – British Parliamentary (BP) Debating[17]

Until very recently, this style of debating was nearly exclusively the domain of university-level competitions. In the last few years, the style has been embraced for a number of school-level competitions, and as a result this new chapter has been introduced.

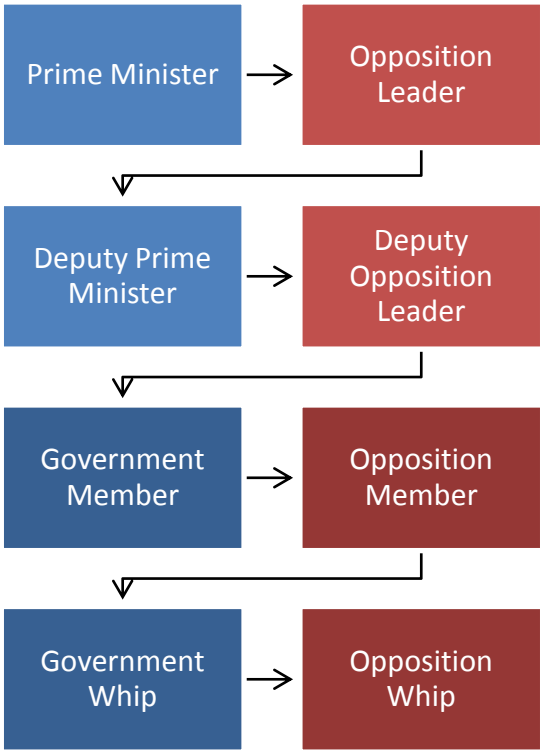
While many key elements of debating remain the same in this different style, the differences are quite substantial. This chapter is at best an introductory guide and students are encouraged to seek further resources if they wish to debate in this style.

Part A: The General Format

British Parliamentary debates involve four teams of two, as follows:



The two 'government' teams act as a sort of coalition, called a 'bench', as do the two 'opposition' teams (although the teams are still competing against the other team on their bench). Speakers speak in an alternating order between government and opposition speakers, but each speaker has a different name for the purposes of the debate, as follows:



[17] This chapter was prepared by Madeline Schultz

The 'opening half' runs in much the same way as the first four speakers of a three-on-three debate; and the roles of the speakers are roughly analogous to the roles of the first and second speakers in a three-on-three team. However, because opening teams are also competing against the 'closing half' teams, most deputy speakers will include a summary in their speech in an attempt to round out the debate before it continues into closing half.

The roles of the closing half speakers are more unique, although they can be somewhat analogised to three-on-three roles. The whip speakers are somewhat similar to third speakers in three-on-three debates, except that they need to emphasise their own team's material in comparison to the material discussed in the opening half.

The member speakers have a role that is somewhat analogous (at least in terms of speech structure) to that of a second speaker in three-on-three style. However, member speakers are required to present an 'extension', which is sufficiently different to warrant its own section below.

British Parliamentary debating also makes use of points of information, as discussed in Chapter One. Preparation time for a British Parliamentary debate is also reduced, to between 15 and 30 minutes (depending on the competition). Rather than simply declaring a winner, teams are ranked first through fourth and awarded 0-3 team points on the basis of their ranking (first receives three points, second receives two and so forth).

Part B: Extensions

Because closing half teams are trying to differentiate themselves from their opening, they are required to present an **extension**. In order for a closing half team to win a debate, they need to do more than simply improve on the arguments and analysis presented by their opening half (they have had longer to prepare and should be able to do so easily). Instead, they are required to present something that can be considered unique to their team.

Extensions may take the form of new arguments, substantially new analysis, an important new stakeholder or case study or an overwhelmingly more convincing way of framing the debate. Extensions must be presented by the member speaker and take the place of substantive material in their speech.

Because closing half teams do not prepare with their opening half, teams don't know what arguments their opening half will run until during the debate. As a result, preparing an extension requires substantial brainstorming in prep, to ensure that sufficient options are available during the debate.

Extensions should absolutely not be restricted to the member's speech – the key role of a whip speaker is to emphasise the value of the extension to the debate, to make it more likely that the adjudicator considers it to be the 'strongest' material on that bench. Because the value of a team to the debate is assessed on the persuasiveness of their material, to win a closing team must make their extension sound like the key reason to agree with their side of the debate.

Appendix One – First Principles Exercises

In 25-50 words describe the key features of the following philosophies/concepts, including an assessment of the strength of each position.

Governance

1) *Liberal* Democracy
2) *Social* Democracy
3) *Guided* Democracy
4) Dictatorship
5) Communism
6) Regionalism

Morality

1) Kantian (Rights based)
2) Utilitarianism (Preference and Hedonistic)

Environment

1) Humanist Ecology (Sustainable Development)
2) Technological Ecology
3) Deep-Green Ecology
4) Tragedy of the Commons

Economics

1) Keynesian
2) Neo-Liberal

Legal

1) Social Contract Theory
2) J.S. Mill's Harm Principle
3) Aims of the Criminal Justice System

Business (Corporate Governance)

1) Corporate Social Responsibility
2) Stakeholder Model
3) Shareholders Only Model

Security

1) Collective Security
2) Cooperative Security
3) Democratic Peace Theory
4) Just War Theory
5) New Security Agenda
6) Golden Arches Peace Theory

Political

1) Liberalism
2) Socialism/Communitarianism
3) Secularism

Science

1) Precautionary Principle

Feminism

1) Liberal Feminism
2) Radical Feminism
3) Developing World Feminism
4) Difference Feminism
5) Power Feminism

Australian Politics

1) Federalism
2) Centralised Power
3) Constitution (ss 51, 109, 128)
4) Mandates
5) Party Discipline (Australia *versus* USA)

International Relations

1) Rationalism
2) Realism (and Neo-Realism)
3) Neo-Liberal Institutionalism
4) Dependence Theory

Diplomacy

1) Bilateral
2) Regional
3) Multilateral

Others

1) Game Theory