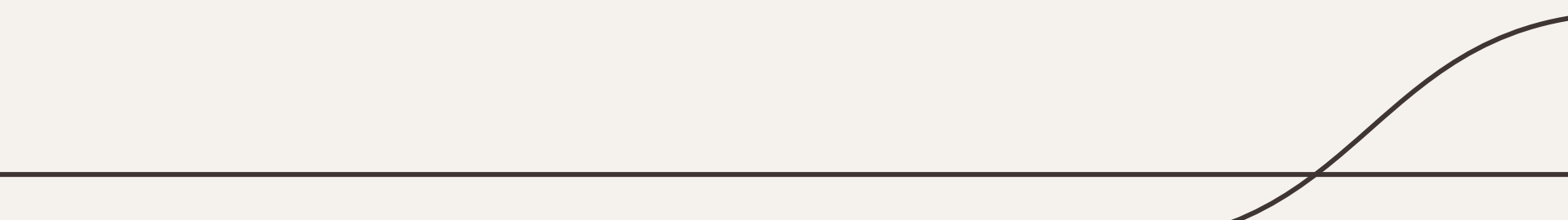




Intro To Rebuttals

New York Parliamentary Debate League



Overview (Part 1)

- The goal of **rebuttal** is to demonstrate why the other team's arguments aren't strong enough to win the round over yours!
- Although rebuttal is often thought of as “less important” than argumentation, you (generally) need to have both a **strong, offensive case** and **well-executed set of defensive rebuttals** to win rounds—in other words, both are important components of effective in-round strategy!
- That being said, “rebuttal” isn't synonymous with “explaining why every single statement uttered by the other side is total nonsense.” In some instances, sure, the material you're working with is absolutely incoherent—but in the *vast majority of debates*, there will be *some degree of truth* to the other side's arguments. The job of a good rebutter is not to lie and pretend like the other side's arguments are stupid, but rather to **explain why the other side's arguments are simply not enough** to win the debate!
 - Ex: THS the EU's decision to limit imports of Russian energy (e.g. oil, natural gas)
 - Opp: “this will increase energy prices in Europe”
 - Wrong: “No, this is nonsense, Europe doesn't need Russian energy, and Europe is super rich anyway...”
 - Right: “Even if there's a short-term harm in terms of energy prices, European countries will shift their energy sources and find alternatives, thus limiting the degree of harm!”

Overview (Part 2)

- It's worth remembering, though, that rebuttal overlaps with *other components of effective and strategic debating*. Refutation and weighing, for instance, should go hand-in-hand—whenever you're rebutting arguments, you should probably also be thinking about how you can *weigh against* those arguments! The same is true for argumentation and refutation—whenever you're dealing with the material presented by the other side, it's probably a wise move to think about how you can integrate your own *constructive material* into the rebuttal you present!
- You have a limited amount of time, and—generally—a *lot* of things to deal with (probably more things to deal with than you have time to deal with)! This means that you need to be thinking, *consciously*, about how to best spend your time, and how to best focus your brainpower!
- Relatedly, this means that not all arguments are deserving of the same amount of airtime or number of responses. Some arguments are *absolutely vital* to take out of the round or **you might just lose right then and there**. Some other arguments that you'll face might not be as important—yes, obviously you still need to respond, but *they simply don't pose the same degree of threat to your case!*
 - Ex: THW lower the legal drinking age in the US to eighteen
 - Gov arg to focus less on: “When eighteen year olds can drink, more people will buy alcohol and our economy will thrive!”
 - Gov arg to focus more on: “Since many youth already drink—just illegally, they are often forced to drink in settings where they are unsupervised, leading to more harm.”

Structuring Responses

- **First**, identify the argument you're responding to
- **Second**, attack the central claim made by argument you're responding to
- **Third**, weigh your argument against the one you are responding to
- **Fourth (optional but helpful)**, summarize how your rebuttal beats their argument

- Example: THP a world where all writing is pseudonymous (written under a fake, anonymous name)
 - Gov: "When writers don't reveal their true identities, they won't face things like death threats when people disagree with their writing!"
 - Step 1: "I'm going to respond to GOV's first argument on the authors' safety"
 - Step 2: "Their logic is flawed, since if writers currently fear they might face death threats, they can just choose to use a pseudonym!"
 - Step 3: "The vast majority of writers aren't publishing highly controversial material, so our arguments are more important because we affect a bigger group of people!"
 - Step 4: "Thus, we beat this argument by proving it can be easily avoided and applies to very few people"

Types of Responses

- **Gut checks:** It's very easy to assume—falsely, sometimes—that just because an argument sounds fancy, it must be true. But that's **often not the case**. Whenever you listen to arguments, pause and ask yourself: would a non-debate person find this argument persuasive? If not, tell the judge to gut check it themselves.
 - Ex. THO religious charity
 - Gov: "In a world without religious charity, secular NGOs will fill the void and make up for the loss!"
 - Gut check this, how and why would they make up for the loss? It doesn't make sense.
- **Mitigations:** essentially saying **"why is this argument, in-and-of-itself, insufficient to win the other team the debate?"** Often, this includes proving that your opponents overstated the importance of something. After explaining why this is true, because their argument still stands, you need a comparative: now that we know the opponent's argument isn't all that important, **why is your argument more important** than theirs?
 - Ex. THS a substantial increase in the minimum wage
 - Opp: "This will disproportionately harm small businesses, driving them out of existence and decreasing commercial competition"
 - There are existing programs to help small businesses with financial difficulty, and the government would only increase aid as public pressure mounts in the wake of the increase
 - Thus, it's unlikely that too many businesses would be shut down, but it's certain that many people in poverty would be helped.
- **Delinks:** arguments are based on a series of analytical links and warrants connecting one statement to the next, and ultimately the impact. If you can take out one piece of analysis, you can dismantle their chain of logic.
 - Ex. THBT AP tests do more harm than good
 - Gov: AP tests are harmful to low income students they have a fee that could be unaffordable
 - Financial aid is available to students who need it

Types of Responses

- **Non-uniques:** sometimes an argument may be true, but the same thing happens on the other side of the motion. Essentially, it doesn't matter if their argument is true because it's true no matter what.
 - Ex. THW not disclose margin of victory in US presidential elections
 - Opp: "People would think elections were unfair if they didn't know which states they had lost."
 - Gov non-unique: "regardless of whether margin of victory is disclosed people find reasons to think elections are stolen, look to January 6th"
- **Turns/flips:** try to **prove the inverse** of their argument, and **take their impact for your own** side of the debate!
 - Ex. THW make voting compulsory in the US
 - Gov: "This will increase turnout from minority groups that tend to vote liberal, thus resulting in better policy outcomes for vulnerable groups!"
 - Opp turn: "Now, liberal parties don't need to attract minorities to **turn out**, which makes these parties less accountable and likely to listen to their constituents."
 - Ex. THW abolish the Olympic Games
 - Opp: "The Olympics are good because they benefit the economies of host nations by increasing the inflow of tourists!"
 - Gov turn: "hosting the Olympics is actually bad for the economy because countries go into tons of long-term debt and build useless white elephant projects."

Types of Responses

- **Weaponizing Characterization:** Arguments are often premised on a certain assumption about how the world works and most commonly, warrants/mechanisms (as well as impacts!) only apply **if that conception of the world is proven to be true!** Consider how you can **counter-characterize** how the world works, such that you can take arguments out of the round not by **directly beating their logic**, but by **indirectly beating the characterization they're premised upon**.
 - Ex. THW allow ex-felons to become police officers
 - Gov: "When ex-felons become police officers, they'll act in better and less violent ways since they have empathy for the communities they're policing"
 - Opp: "this logic assumes that ex-felons would become officers to reform the justice system, whereas violent criminals could be doing so to engage in 'legal' violence or exact vengeance."
- **Washing clashes:** Take the clashes you're losing, or never going to win, and **make them seem unimportant** enough and enough of a tie that **neither team can win the debate there**—any offense is minimal at best and the whole thing should be ignored. This is especially useful if the clash is a bigger part of your opponent's case than it is yours (for example, a turn), so you can **neutralize a lot of their argument with a little of yours**.
 - Ex. THW ban homework
 - Gov: "Homework takes up useful time and worsens their academic performance through burnout."
 - Opp: "Homework improves academic performance by reinforcing concepts taught in class."
 - Gov washing: "since homework both improves and worsens academic performance in different ways, it probably doesn't make that much of difference, who knows? But what we do know is that it also takes up useful time."

Types of Responses

- **Order of importance/weight in a round:**
 - **Turn**
 - Always gives you offense, can help you win the round
 - **Weaponizing Characterization**
 - At least a delink, but can give you offense depending on the recharacterization
 - **Delink/Nonunique**
 - Fully takes out their argument
 - **Washing Clashes**
 - Fully takes out their argument, but at the cost of one of yours
 - **Gut check**
 - Calls out bad logic, can often take out arguments
 - **Mitigation**
 - On its own the least important because leaves opponents with offense, but combined with weighing can win you the round, especially with layers of mitigation

Things to Avoid

- **Double Turns**
 - Link turns and impact turns on the same contention are something to avoid. If you say the opposite thing will happen, but also the opposite thing is actually better, you just gave them offense.
- **Undercoverage**
 - Make sure, no matter how many responses you have to one contention, you don't spend all of your time on them. Make sure you get through everything.
- **Contradicting your case**
 - It sounds unlikely, but make sure you don't rebut any logic that you also rely on in your case.
- **Reliance on your case**
 - If you rely too heavily on your case when crafting your rebuttal, the other team can take them down at the same time, giving them double the responses you have on either part. Its ok to do to an extent, just make sure you have some other responses as well. Consider how strong the contention you are relying on and rebutting are when choosing responses: are you rebutting a potentially round winning contention of theirs with solely an easy-to-rebut contention of yours? Reliance usually comes in two forms:
 - Sometimes, when the two cases in a round are completely at odds, teams decide to just reiterate their points in response to the other team. That is ok to do to a certain extent, but make sure to also have other responses separate from your case.
 - Sometimes, a large portion of your rebuttals rely on logic that you also rely on in your case, such as an overview/observation or a main link to one of your contentions.