

A. How to Create Refutations.

While you listen to a speech by a member of the other side, you are listening to understand each argument, and you are listening to discern a flaw in the argument because you are expected to offer a couple refutations, which are criticisms, of the arguments when you stand up to speak. Often your refutations come at the beginning of your speech, but some prefer to place them at the end of the speech. Some advanced debaters will even place them throughout the speech to connect a current argument to a related argument that was delivered by the previous speaker. To create refutations, it is helpful to consider the following questions while you are listening to a speech.

- 1) **Is the argument realistic?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the argument is not practical enough to be used in society. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it is unrealistic.

For example, the other side argues that we should reduce the wait times in hospitals by hiring more doctors. However, you can refute the argument by saying that it is unrealistic because there is not enough money to hire more doctors without the government borrowing money to pay for the doctors.

- 2) **Is the argument ethical?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the argument does harm to oneself or to another person(s). If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it is unethical.

For example, the other side argues that a particular head of state should not be charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with crimes against humanity. However, you can refute this claim by arguing that your side supports the ICC ruling because it is promoting a rules-based world order, which is based on ethical principles, rather than a world order that is based on military or economic power.

- 3) **Is the argument fair?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that it does not apply equally to all people. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it is unfair.

For example, the other side argues that lowering corporate taxes is fair for society because the producers will lower the prices of products, which benefits everyone. However, you can refute this argument by saying that lowering corporate taxes mostly serve the wealthy because prices on products rarely go down, so the average consumer does not benefit. It is better to keep the taxes on corporations high, so the additional tax revenue can be used by the government for social programs, such as education and health care, and this will be the most effective way to create fairness.

- 4) **Is the argument impactful?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the argument is not well designed or intense enough to achieve the stated goal. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that the argument is unlikely to achieve that desired goal.

For example, the other side argues that we should drop the Carbon Tax and instead offer subsidies on companies to nudge them to use less energy. However, you could refute the argument by saying that it lacks impact because it will take ongoing monitoring, which is costly, whereas a Carbon Tax forces companies and individuals to conserve energy and therefore reduce pollution.

- 5) **Is the argument a short-term solution?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the argument is harmful in the long-term even though it solves the problem in the short-term. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it is only a short-term solution.

For example, the other side argues that the European Union (EU) should not enter the Russian Ukrainian war. However, you can refute the argument by stating that it is necessary for EU members to intervene in the war because, if Russia succeeds in taking over Ukraine, it will likely try to take over other nearby countries.

- 6) **Is the argument reversible?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the outcome of the argument is not reversible. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it should not be accepted because the decision creates irreparable harm.

For example, the other side argues that the government should drill for oil on Conservation land. However, you refute the argument by saying that the policy of drilling on Conservation land causes irreversible damage to the ecosystem of the Conservation land because all drilling, regardless of the extent of the clean up, causes irreparable harm.

- 7) **Is the argument a priority?** By considering the argument from this perspective, you suspect that the outcome of the argument is not urgent relative to other priorities. If you make this conclusion, you can refute the argument by saying that it should not be accepted because there are more important priorities at this time.

For example, the other side argues that green energy development has limitations because it will not provide enough energy to meet the demands of the economy. However, you could refute the argument by stating that research and development into green energy improvements and sources must be the priority because we can only survive as a species if we sustain our environment.

B. About Points of Information (POI)

A POI is critical question that you ask while you are listening to a speaker. The intention is to expose a flaw in the argument of the speaker. In this regard, a POI is like a Refutation, so please consider the suggestions above when formulating the content of a POI. However, there are distinct differences. For example, whereas Refutations in a 5-minute speech should be at least one minute long, the POI should be no more than 2 sentences long. Also, whereas a Refutation does not expect an immediate reply, the POI should always be framed as a question, so you are expecting an immediate reply. Finally, whereas Refutations come usually at the beginning of your speech, POIs are asked while you are listening to a speech.

Although the POI should be a criticism of some aspect of the argument of the opposing speaker, your question can sometimes be simply a **Point of Clarification** (POC) if you believe that the speaker has left out some important information that is necessary for you to fully understand the argument.

Finally, whenever you are listening to a speech, **you must ask at least one POI**. If you do not, the judge will assume that you are unwilling to engage in clash. Likewise, the speaker must accept at least one POI during her (his) speech. If not, the judge can also assume that she is unwilling to engage in clash. The speaker can delay taking the POI by saying, "In a moment," and the speaker can choose to take only one POI by saying, "No thank you," to any additional POIs.

Finally, you cannot take a POI during protected times, which are the first and last 30 seconds in a 5-minute speech and the first and last minutes of an 8-minute speech. It is NOT good practice to take POIs early in your speech because you need to concentrate on unfolding your case without interruption, so you should plan to take at least one POI in the last couple minutes of your speech.