

The art of disagreeing well: How debate teaches us to listen and be heard

Contents

1. Detailed Summary

Detailed Summary

2. Topic – How to find the debate
 - a. People disagree about three kinds of things
 - i. Factual – X is Y where X and Y are empirically observable
 1. Lagos is a megacity,
 2. the crime rate in Paris was lower in 214 than in 2016
 - ii. Normative – We have reason to believe that A is B
 1. Lying is or should be considered to be immoral
 2. We have reason to believe that tomorrow will be better
 - iii. Prescriptive – C should D
 1. Our family should get a gym membership
 2. Government should not impose limits on freedom of speech
3. Argument – how to make a point
 - a. Run sheet
 - i. 0 – 5 mins brainstorm
 - ii. 5 – 15 mins upload
 - iii. 15 to 40 mins case development
 - iv. 40 to 55 mins speech writing
 - v. 54 to 60 mins huddle
 - b. Coming up with an argument:
 - i. Come up with the conclusion
 1. Bob is not a nice person
 - ii. Take the conclusion and add the word because to come up with the main claim
 1. Bob is not a nice person, because he is inconsiderate of other people's feelings
 - iii. Take the main claim and then add because
 1. Bob is inconsiderate, because he is often cruel to others, including to his friends
 - iv. Support the reason with evidence
 1. At dinner last Friday he made hurtful comments about Sheryl's job
 - v. Link the main claim to the conclusion with another reason
 1. The fact that Bob is inconsiderate means he is not a nice person because, regardless of his intent, he causes people a great deal of pain.
 - vi. Apply the two burdens of proof. The truth and the importance.
 1. Truth: The main claim is factually correct or otherwise believable
 2. Importance: the main claim supports its conclusion
 3. Truth: Bob is in fact inconsiderate of other people's feelings
 4. Importance: If bob is inconsiderate, we should conclude he is not nice
 - c. Every argument has four aspects.
 - i. What is the point
 - ii. Why is it true
 - iii. When has it happened before

iv. Who cares

4. Rebuttal – how to push back
 - a. Basics of rebuttal are to show that something is untrue, unimportant and outweighed
 - b. Truth: Personal information in fact helps citizens choose good representatives
 - c. Importance: if personal information helps citizens choose good representatives, then the media should intrude
 - d. Untrue: No personal information does not help citizens choose good representatives. The majority of this information is gossip and hearsay
 - e. Unimportant: The fact that personal information may help citizens choose good representatives does not mean the media should intrude. Installing CCTVs in candidates' homes would also produce revealing information but we'd never allow that
 - f. Outweighed: Even if the media has good reason to intrude into politicians' lives, doing so would inflict collateral damage on their families and loved ones.
5. Overcoming 'tics'
 - a. Count – give a one-minute speech on any subject in front of another person. Ask them to count the number of times you do the target tic and repeat until you get to zero
 - b. Restart – give a one-minute speech on any subject. Every time you engage in a target tic start the sentence again. Repeat until you go straight through
 - c. Penalty – give a one minute speech on any subject in front of another person. Every time you commit a target tic allow the other person to enact a penalty. Throw some paper at you. Repeat until you get to zero penalties

6. Rhetoric – how to move people
 - a. Rule 1 – No abstract words
 - i. Bad = Our educational institutions are failing
 - ii. Better = our schools and colleges are underfunded
 - b. Rule 2 – No confusing metaphors
 - i. Bad = Injustice reigns and pervades the air that we breathe
 - ii. Better – Injustice reigns and makes subjects of us all
 - c. Rule 3 – No excess qualification
 - i. Bad = The right to life, notwithstanding the complications of how we define that term, is one of the most important rights we have
 - ii. Better = the right to life is paramount
 - d. Rule 4 – No buried leads
 - i. Bad: On one hand, the proposal is cost effective but I worry about the PR risks, so I would lean against it
 - ii. Better = WE should not adopt this proposal. This is how I see the trade-offs
 - e. Rule 5 - No thoughtless repetition
 - i. Bad = The kinds are unhappy about their new school. Their discontent is palpable. The school is not working out for them at all. They say it is horrible
 - ii. Better = the kids are palpably unhappy with their new school. We need to do something
 - f. Rule 6 – No emoting
 - i. Bad = This thing is a catastrophe
 - ii. Better = This inconvenienced me
 - g. Rule 7 – No insinuation
 - i. Bad = I want to protect our way of live
 - ii. Better = I believe in reduced migration and a commitment to assimilation
 - h. Rule 8 – Reveal the journey
 - i. Bad = mandatory sentencing is a grave injustice
 - ii. Better = I came et o believe that mandatory sentencing is a grave injustice through the experience of...
 - i. Rule 9 – Name the stakeholder
 - i. Bad = the prohibition of alcohol will lead to the creation of a black market
 - ii. Better – the prohibition of alcohol will incentivise criminals to set up an illegal market that preys on addicts and children
 - j. Rule 10 – Find the applause line
 - i. Bad = the good citizen does not make endless demands. He or she seeks to contribute in what ways he or she can
 - ii. Better = ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country

7. Quiet – how to know when to disagree
 - a. Engage in a debate if it is real, important, specific and if it's aligned. Definition here:
 - i. Real – there is an actual difference of opinion between the two sides
 - ii. Important – the difference of opinion is important enough to justify a disagreement
 - iii. Specific – the subject of the disagreement is specific enough to allow the two sides to make some progress toward resolving or ameliorating within the allotted time
 - iv. Aligned – the two sides are aligned in their reasons for engaging in the disagreement
 - b. When to respond to a claim. If it is a necessity or if it is progress. Definitions here:
 - i. Necessity – do we need to contest the claim in order to resolve the overall dispute?
 - ii. Progress – does contesting the claim necessary or no get us closer to resolving the overall dispute
8. Self-defence – how to defeat a bully
 - a. Trump bullied Clinton
 - b. How to deal with different bullying techniques:
 - i. The dodger – Pivots
 1. Stay the course
 - ii. The twister – strawman, burden push
 1. Correct the record
 - iii. The wrangler – moving goalposts, dog whistle
 1. Pin the wrangler to a position. Ask them what they mean specifically
 - iv. The liar – Lie, bluster, liar's spread
 1. Focus on some specific lies and prove that they are lies.
9. Education – how to raise citizens
 - a. Educating citizens in debate and good practice, improves the overall discussions
10. Relationships – how to fight and stay together
 - a. Make sure you don't debate if it's unreal, unimportant, unspecific or unaligned (see above section 6 - quiet)
 - b. In the last five minutes of prep for a debate, practice one or more of the three side switch activities
 - i. Brainstorm – take out a new piece of paper. Imagine that you are now on the other side of the motion. Brainstorm the four best arguments in support of the position
 - ii. Stress-test – review your arguments from the perspective of an opponent. Think up the strongest possible objections to each claim and write them in the margins
 - iii. Loss ballot – imagine that you have won the debate from the opposing side write out the reason why you won, including the mistakes made by the opposition.

11. Technology – how to debate in the future

a. Online arguments

- i. Move fast – the likelihood of changing an original posters mind diminished as delays in entry time increased. The first and second responders to the original post were three times more likely to succeed than the tenth responder
- ii. Be honest – the more persuasive posts tended to acknowledged he uncertainties and qualifications. Perhaps for similar reasons, effective arguments tended also to contain more ‘arguer relevant personal pronouns’ (e.g., I, you, us) to break up what might otherwise have been blanket and general statements
- iii. Don’t be too responsive – successful arguments were more likely to provide new information or new perspectives measured by differences in wording than to respond using the same terms in the original post. The researchers also said the com on practice of quoting ones opponent does not seem to be a useful strategy in rebuttal
- iv. Show receipts – persuasive posts tended to cite external evidence using hyperlinks and markers such as for example and e.g. a separate study by university researchers in 2018 found that the persuasiveness of evidence was robust in both discussions about sociomoral issues and those on less charged topics
- v. Let go after forum – the likelihood of changing a view peaked at three back and forth between original poster and respondent then plummeted after four such turns.