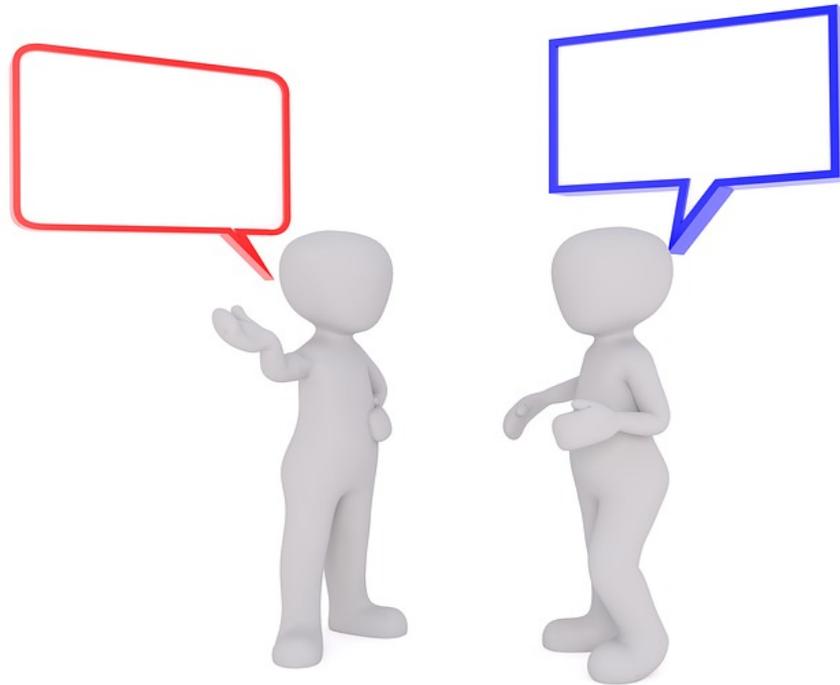


# Debate 101: 10 Steps to Successful Debating



# **Step 1: Analyze the *type* of proposition you are debating**

- Claims are the starting point of argument.
- Different Types of Claims entail different obligations and require different types of support.
- Compare “You should believe X” to “We should do X” to “X should be the general policy”

## Identify the potentially open stases

- Fact: X is Y, X was Y, X will be Y.
- Definition: X falls in category Y; X is understood to mean Y
- Causation: X causes Y; X stems from Y
- Value: X is Good, X is more valuable than Y. Normally includes an ethical dimension.
- Policy: We should or should not do X.

## Step 2: Define Relevant Terms

- Provide definitions of key terms *if* there is risk of misunderstanding.
- For policy claims, you can operationally define terms with a specific proposal.
- Be careful in your use of persuasive definitions. Normally Pro side (or “Affirmative”) has right to define, but Con (or “Negative”) can challenge if definitions are unfair.

# More about definition

Aristotelian definition:

An *X* is a *class name* with these *attributes*—  
e.g., a bed is furniture used for sleeping

Persuasive definition:

A non-neutral  $X=Y$  relationship embedded in a  
concept phrase—e.g. “tax relief,” “crony  
capitalism,” “trickle-down economics”

## Step 3: Organize & Number

- Debate is an analytical process. It is persuasion through *reasoning*.
- Your responsibility is to advance clear, supported arguments to support your side. Numbering/outlining is key.

ARGUMENTATION SCHEMES and  
TOULMIN can help here

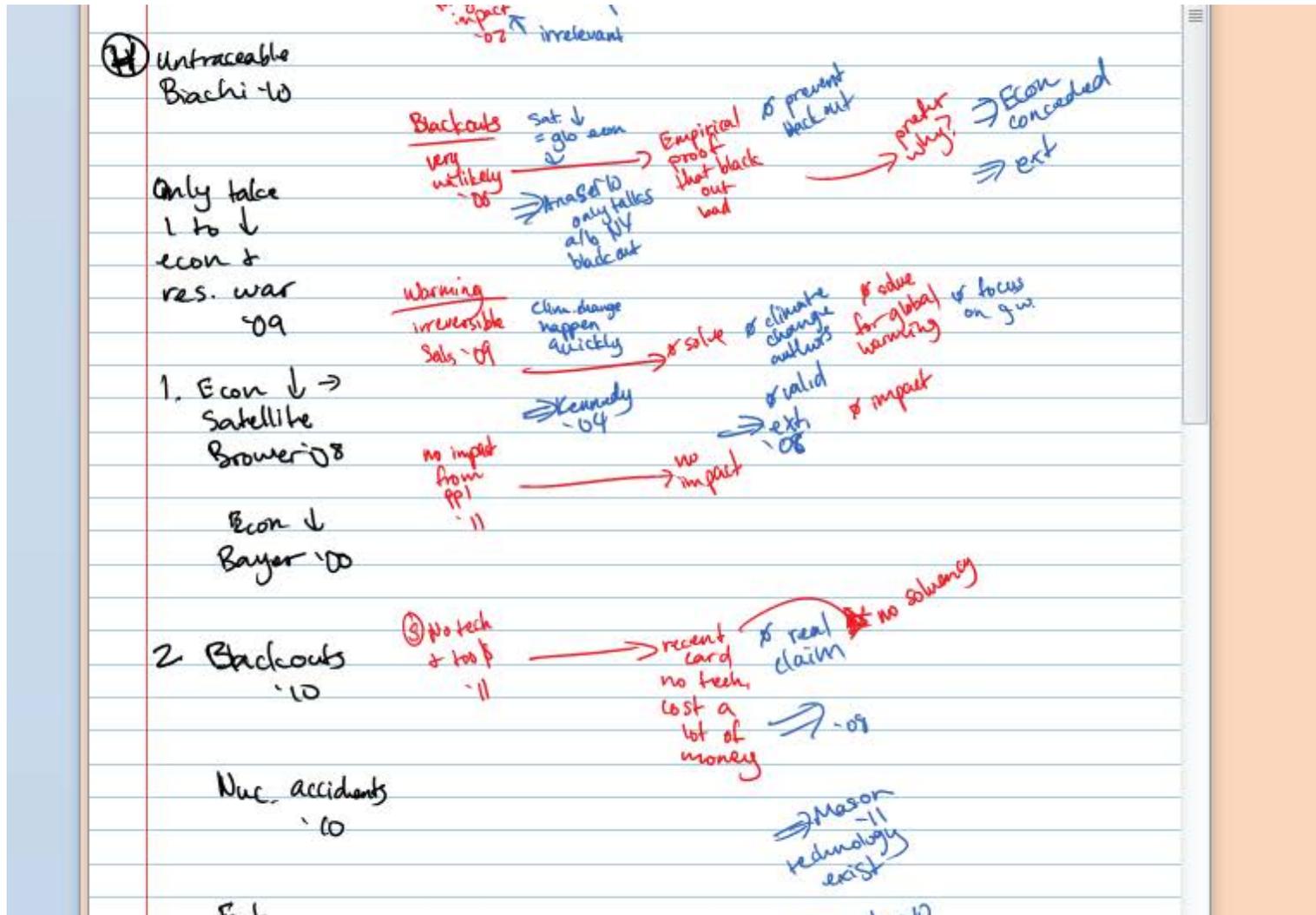
## Step 4: Go with the Flow

- “Flowing” is debate terminology for taking notes of debate interaction.
- Divide your note pad into 4 columns:
- Prop → Opp → Prop → Opp
- Flowing is just a way of tracking how arguments “flow” in the debate: What is said (or not said) in response to what.

# Debate Flow

- Allows your audience to track the interaction between the debaters.
- Allows you to note which of your arguments have been answered, which have been “dropped.”
- Also useful as a predictive map of which arguments your opponents might use and in which order

# Sample Flow (partial)



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## **Step 5: Know Your Speaker Duties**

- 4 minutes Prop side presentation
- 4 minutes Opp side presentation
- 4 minutes Prop side's further arguments + rebuttal
- 4 minutes Opp side's further arguments + rebuttal
- Each presenter can be questioned twice for 15 seconds each
- **audience vote**

# Initial presentations

Order your arguments in a hierarchy—  
which are your best available means of  
persuasion?

How much time do you want to allot to  
each?

Which critical questions are your  
opponents likely to ask?

# Rebuttal Speeches

- 4 minutes Pro side's rebuttal
- 4 minutes Con side's rebuttal

argumentatively, important both to *extend* your original arguments & *reply/rebut* those of your opponents. Thus, need to *anticipate* opponents' arguments.

## **Step 6: *Construct Your Case***

- A “case” is simply your set of arguments pro or contra the proposition / topic.
- Should be organized into numbered points; each point should be supported by reasoning and evidence.

# Forms of Reasoning

- Expert Opinion
- Position to Know
- Analogy
- Sign
- Positive consequences
- Negative consequences
- Correlation to cause
- Verbal classification

# Evidence

- Quality of evidence is key: Whether quoting expert opinion, or data provided by researchers, be sure to explain why your source is credible.
- Resolving an evidential dispute is a valuable skill: Explain why your source is superior to your opponent's.

## Step 7: *Rebut* your Opponent

- Rebuttal speeches require double duty: You need to defend your case but also reply to your opponents.
- Various ways to reply, but the two most common are to *Refute* their point as false; or *Admit* their point but claim it doesn't support their overall case.

## Step 8: Provide Criteria

- By “criteria,” we mean a *way to resolve the issue*. A *heuristic* for argument analysis & resolution.

# Policy Case Approaches

- Two primary approaches:
- Problem → Solution  
Show a *need* that your policy meets.
- Comparative Advantages:  
Show how your policy offers a better situation than we have without it.

# Contra / Negative Approaches

- Policy is not really Needed.
- Policy does not really provide the advantages or meet the needs claimed.
- Policy would cause *disadvantages* that would outweigh any good the policy might provide.

## **Step 9: Recognize the Role of Values**

- All policy propositions involve underlying values.
- There are many ethical and value-oriented theories & norms. The challenge is getting on the same page.
- The key is to identify your ethical framework and be ready to defend it.

# Value v. Value

- 1) One value maximizes another agreed-upon value; i.e., one value is a key to another (Economic justice *facilitates* peace).
- 2) One value is a prerequisite for the other; i.e., X is a necessary condition for Y.
- 3) One value is more important than the other, due to magnitude, frequency, or precedent.

## Step 10: See Debate as a Means to Truth

- Since the ancient Greeks started to formalize the process of philosophical discussion known as *dialegethai*, we have understood dialogue & debate as a *cooperative* exercise in seeking the truth.
- Give it your best shot, but be prepared to let your mind be changed!

# Legal Analogy

- Both sides in legal disputes must provide full disclosure of the arguments & evidence they will provide. That is because the goal is Truth.
- Similarly, full disclosure should be your goal as well. See your counterparts as collaborators, not “the enemy.”

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