

DEBATE GUIDE: RESOURCE 8

Structuring Arguments on the Spot

It can be hard to come up with arguments when you first receive a debate topic, especially when you have the pressure of limited time to prepare.

The goal is to spend enough time analyzing the topic itself and making sure you are clear about how key terms are defined and what is the intended ground for argumentation on both sides. As you brainstorm, make sure your arguments are unique and not repetitive, balancing offensive arguments that show what you achieve and defensive arguments that protect you against something someone might say. Most importantly, make sure every argument includes a claim, a warrant, and an impact. In other words, start off with a clear statement of your opinion, how it is supported by adequate evidence and reasoning, and why it is important. Avoid the need to make each argument perfect and concentrate more on covering a complete picture of the topic.

Skill and Technique	Guidance
1. Topic Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you hear a topic, analyze the language carefully.• Look for the major concept and be clear about how it is defined and what it means.• Look for the verbs -- what are the key actions?• Look for the actor -- who is taking the action?• Look for the result -- what is the desired outcome?• Make sure you spend time thinking about the available ground for the debate. What are the main areas of clash? What is the available ground on both sides?
2. Argument Outline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every argument is made up of three elements: Claims, Warrants, and Impacts.• Start with the claim: What is the main thesis of your opinion? State this in as few sentences as possible.• Follow up with the warrants: what facts, real or hypothetical examples, evidence, or logical reasoning support your claim?• End with the impact: Why does your argument matter? What does it lead to, or what is the implication? What are the short and long-term results?

Skill and Technique	Guidance
3. Argument Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your arguments are unique and cover different angles on the topic. This avoids repetition and gives your side more ground. • Some choices include: 1) whether something is morally right or wrong; 2) whether something works or doesn't work; or 3) whether something leads to something good or something bad.
4. Offense and Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you make arguments that propose something new and beneficial as well as arguments that avoid something bad. • Offensive arguments: Tell us what we get by supporting your side. What unique benefit do you bring? • Defensive arguments: Tell us how you avoid something bad that happens if we don't take action. Anticipate what you think the other side will say and make an argument that says why this won't happen.

