GIVING BETTER 1AR'S
by
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This month my aim is to offer specific, practical advice for improving the first affirmative rebuttal. Thanks to the pressure negative teams impose during the block, the 1AR is one of the most demanding speeches given in the debate, and too many rounds are decided based on technical problems there. After reviewing some of the basics, I address four issues now receiving some attention, all of which entail debunking certain myths about good 1AR's. Then I'll review some tricks of the trade, designed to help make the first affirmative rebuttal a speech of real beauty, as opposed to those painful exercises we've all seen in just "getting the job done." What may surprise you is how easily these tips can be utilized in your own debating.

Things You Already Know About The 1AR,
But Must Never Forget

If you've given even a single 1AR, you understand immediately the basic mechanics of the speech, which boil down to this simple but hard reality: The 1AR has five minutes to comprehensively extend arguments made in thirteen. This basic and brutal fact derails many otherwise good rebuttals when a speaker gives in to the temptation to over-explain, thereby misallocating precious speech time. I argue later that the time demands of the 1AR do not require a total absence of explanation, but, to be sure, the opportunities for explanation are in short supply, and must be carefully exploited.

You also know, I presume, some other 1AR basics. There is the imperative of partnership survival: Cover, cover, cover! Arguments dropped by the 1AR are especially hard to recover from later in the round, since judges expect to screen out new or resurrected claims in the last affirmative speech. You know also that good 1AR's should minimize their use of preparation time, leaving the bulk (though not necessarily all, as I discuss momentarily) to their partner's speeches. It is usually, though not always, a good idea to avoid reading new evidence in the 1AR, again simply because of the time demands. If evidence is to be introduced it must be concentrated on truly critical issues, under situations where you and your colleague have honestly concluded the round's outcome is in peril if the key card isn't read.

It is essential to extend the basic net benefit claims of the affirmative case, such as impact evidence and solvency claims where they have been contested. Certain other negative positions, because they have *a priori* standing in any judge's decision making, such as topicality, arguments that "turn" the case, and some critiques and decision rule claims, must be answered or the debate will be instantly lost.

At the end, so much of effective 1AR delivery is simply a matter of understanding one's limits. It is simply impossible to extend every claim, so choices must be made. With practice these choices can be made intelligently, in a way designed to put maximum pressure on the second negative rebuttalist. And choices are made in many ways: by consideration of what claims can be answered quickly and which can be conceded altogether, and by conscious and strategic decisions about where time is best invested, to mention two of the most important.

Effective 1AR's also come to the speech with detailed knowledge of the affirmative case. Nothing subverts argument efficiency more than ignorance. And I'm referring to more than a basic understanding of the case claims and plan mechanisms; if you have an intimate knowledge of the affirmative sources, your ability to efficiently reference key claims will help you economically move through complicated refutation.

Four Myths

The imperative of achieving hyper-efficiency in the affirmative rebuttal has given rise to four points of view, sometimes not expressed or often defended, but apparently shared in many quarters. I describe them as myths to be debunked although some make forceful cases for each, usually because they have seen a brilliant exception that, in their view, proves the rule.

MYTH 1:
"My rebuttal will be better
if delivered 'stand-up.'"

Stand-up 1AR's are speeches delivered without use of preparation time. Their appeal is obvious, and many debaters just transitioning to open/varsity division competition resolve to deliver stand-up rebut-

tals after seeing top-flight debaters do them with apparent success. Beyond the obvious benefit of saving valuable preparation time for the 2AR, it can disorient the second negative rebuttalist a bit if the 1AR stands immediately, since some rely on a brief prep period to talk things over with their partner. There is thus some case for notetaking 1AR preparation time, since it can rob the 2NR of prep time as well.

There is a considerable danger in stand-up 1AR's, however, the danger of nonextension. It happens in several ways, and in my view is almost inevitable because of one fundamental fact about stand-up speeches: You cannot flow yourself and someone else at the same time. The prospect of not flowing the block, which is explicitly advocated by some as a prep time reduced (the advice is to just listen and immediately write out your 1AR arguments), invites disaster. Not having a flow of the block makes it almost impossible to go back and do more serious prepping if it becomes necessary. One-step prepping produces less well considered extensions, for one has time enough only to write down the first idea that comes into mind before the 2NC or 1NR is off to the next idea. Consideration will almost always improve on this first instinct.

I have acquired some confidence in my own ability to tell when a rebuttal has been prepped without flowing the block. Such rebuttals are blippier and advance claims less coherent and strategically sound. Another dead giveaway is that the time allocation often precisely reproduces the allocation in the block. It should only take a second's thought to generate reasons why this fact might not favor the affirmative.

The advocates of stand-up 1AR's prepared in this way strongly disagree with me, to be sure. And, as one of them, you may be taken with the sheer thrill if jumping to your feet the second the 1NR sits down. If so, at least consider this compromise: Decide as the block unfolds where the time is going to be allocated, and based on their decisions, choose to flow some and not others. There's nothing wrong with refusing to take a detailed flow of throwaway case claims you would want to group anyway, and doing so can contribute to your preparation and coverage efficiency. But deter-

mine to take a good flow of the 2NR and 1NR on the couple most complicated and essential arguments, so that at least there, you have the flow necessary to generate and extend your most sophisticated claims.

MYTH 2:
"I explain; therefore I fail."

Time allocation mistakes are the most common errors made by 1AR's, and we have grown so sensitive to the risk that we now commonly tell 1AR's to omit all explanation of any kind. "Just say it and move on" is now typical advice. This thinking is misguided when stated so extremely, and can produce speeches where explanation has been discarded along with reasons, warrants, data, and all the markers of thought itself.

The trick is to know when explanation is appropriate, even conceding the harsh time limits that circumscribe opportunities for oratory. Sometimes explanation can increase efficiency. There are times when simply articulating a complicated thought once (say, in overview, or at the first available line-by-line opportunity) can save you time later, if only preventing repetition. Of course there is no time for extravagant overview introductions, and they aren't strategically wise so early in the rebuttals anyway. But a crisp explanation of a confusing link takeout, or an articulate explanation of why a theory objection to the counterplan should be voted on, can have enormous effect.

MYTH 3:
"It is more efficient to have my partner prep part of my 1AR."

This can be debunked the most easily, I hope. Relying on someone else to script the 1AR (or any rebuttal, for that matter) is a terrible idea in all but the most extreme circumstances:

(a) it diverts your partner from flowing you, a bad idea;

(b) you sound worse reading someone's else's bad handwriting than making your own arguments. The result? Greater inefficiency and confusion. And,

(c) script reliance increases meltdown risks. The process of delivering a high speed speech is stressful enough without the added strain of sightreading a brand new script. Don't let yourself be scripted!

MYTH 4:
"A little 1AR incomprehensibility is a good thing."

This is the most insidious myth of all, in part because while many judges and debaters implicitly endorse it, you won't often

hear this point of view openly expressed, and so the occasions for debunking it are rare.

Since you won't often hear a coach advocate 1AR incomprehensibility (maybe you've never heard it), it seems harder than it is to explain this paradox of top-flight national circuit debating: Perfectly skilled debaters, able to give exquisitely clear negative rebuttals, suddenly turn into monsters of spew in the 1AR. I think this outcome happens because we implicitly endorse it in our judging and coaching behavior: Although we all say we want perfectly clear and understandable 1AR's (and in the abstract, for the good of the activity, I'm sure we do), too often we encourage, or fail to discourage incomprehensibility there. It happens for reasons quite easy to see, which prove all too tempting. The dark secret, well known to any skilled 2AR, is that a little incomprehensibility in the 1AR can be quite helpful, and sometimes even a lot of confusion can help the affirmative more than the negative. 1AR incomprehensibility arguably hurts the 2NR more than the 2AR: the 2NR doesn't want to waste his or her prep time chasing down unclear claims, and knows judges are usually unpersuaded by pleas for mercy (most judges I know think they sound whiny). This phenomena explains for some why 2AR's with basically skilled but incomprehensible partners so often do well in speaker award competition: 2AR's end up benefitting from their job as clean-up artists. Incomprehensibility often goes unfixed because it is rarely penalized; judges empathize with the pressures 1AR's feel, and are loathe to come down too hard on a 1AR who was incomprehensible but covered everything.

But 1AR incomprehensibility is on-balance a terrible thing. It degrades all the speeches that follow, as the last two rebuttalists desperately struggle to turn your undecipherable Rosetta Stone into a translatable document. Inarticulate 1AR's introduce a fatal disconnection between constructives and rebuttals, and the price is usually that much of the subtlety of the 2AC/2NC/1NR speeches is lost forever. And while the occasional 2AR is bailed out by the ability to artfully reinterpret 1AR jibberish, the on-balance effect is harmful there as well. Judges usually figure out the new 2AR lies, eliminating any benefit. And the points go down, down, down.

The most fundamental problem in the pro-incomprehensibility view is its concession that you are better served when they

don't know what you're saying than when they do. What does this say about the quality of your arguments?

Tricks of the 1AR Trade
TRICK 1: Circle the Best.

Here's a very simple trick the 1AR should use in preparing the speech: as you listen to your partner give the 2AC, on each major position (disadvantage, topicality violation, critique, major case argument) circle the two or three best or truest answers made, or just circle the number of those responses. After a couple of debates you will know these instinctively, since the experience you've accumulated has taught you what turns or permutations or takeouts tend to work best over time. And you've seen what your partner tends to believe is the truest answer, what s/he sounds best in extending.

There are, of course, important strategic calculations to keep in mind when making this selection. In debating counterplans, think carefully before you commit to extend intricate theory objections (such as that conditionality, dispositionality, negative fiat, or plan-inclusive counterplans are illegitimate); they will eat up your time like no other argument, and are often hard to win judges on. You will in all likelihood want to keep a permutation alive in the 1AR. In critique debates, it is usually time efficient for the 1AR to extend so-called "permutations,' or performative contradiction claims, and not so efficient to extend even intricate "wrong forum" arguments. It may be best to keep alive certain 'counter-critique" arguments, especially in debating Foucault on this year's education topic. When extending disadvantages, beyond the obvious insight that good turnarounds should be extended, remember also to extend the relevant uniqueness responses, so the turn is unique and you preserve the possibility of a marginal net benefit for the affirmative.

From the 2AC on, let those circled numbers guide you. First, put your prep priority on those responses. Make sure you are comprehensively extending prioritized arguments even if your desire to limit prep time use means those are all you precisely script. Second, let those circles guide your eyes down the flow during your speech. If you get to the last disadvantage with only seconds remaining, instead of starting at the top, or forcing your partner to wave his arms so you'll jump to the right critical response (as in, "IDIOT: GET TO THE

TURN!"), just cover the issues you've prioritized. Your coverage may still be metaphysically inadequate, but at least the essential arguments are extended for your colleague.

Much of what you will want to say on these highlighted arguments can be prepped, by the way, in advance. While the 2NC takes his or her couple of minutes, the 1AR can often script a very concise summary statement of the argument, even writing it out word for word, so the temptation to orate too much is corrected (that is, once the 1AR gets there, just clearly read what is scripted, as opposed to trying to explain the point over again). So often, critical disadvantage turns are simply mishandled in the block, and a very quick and clear restatement of the argument in the 1AR can be enough to win the debate on, since the judge will often end up simply calling for the relevant evidence and deciding the issue from there.

The circle trick solves a major source of time misallocation in the 1AR, since too much time is wasted extending so-called argument "pimps," those quickly made 2AC presses. 1AR's go for them because they attract little 2NC ink, so 1AR coverage seems efficient, but the payoff is usually not worth it, and too much time gets wasted at the top of the argument as a result. An important clarification: I'm not urging you to never extend these fast asserted takeouts. If there truly is **no internal link** to the disadvantage, of course you should extend the point. But letting circled arguments set your priorities for the speech will force your attention to only the best of your partner's answers. Here's a tip, by the way, for the 2AC who debates with a less experienced partner: Before the tournament review what these couple most important responses are, so your 2AR bases will be covered even if the rest of the 1AR goes astray.

TRICK 2: Prep the Sequence

I hope this tip speaks for itself. Too often 1AR's stand up and produce a road map for the speech off the top of the head. Sometimes impromptu decisions about the road map doom the speech, leaving the rebuttalist with too little time at the end to adequately cover something critical. It is worth taking just a couple extra seconds of prep time to talk through the sequence with your partner. Proper sequence in the 1AR is no less important than in either of the last two rebuttals; in fact it is more important than 2NR sequencing, since the 2NR has

the luxury of picking and choosing what she will go for.

Sometimes the problem is that sequence ends up dictated by preparation (or its absence), and so a critical counterplan will be sequenced last to give the partner time to fill in the flow. This is almost always a disaster, since it keeps the 2AC from flowing, and disorients the 1AR when the missing sheet is pressed into the order.

TRICK 3: Group Where Possible, and It's Almost Always Possible.

Consider grouping topicality violations and case positions, almost always. That is, literally say: "Group the violation," and then make six to ten global arguments in response. Less frequently, but importantly, consider grouping major positions (like off-case arguments) which received attention in the block but which were hurriedly extended. It is rare that you would want to group major positions receiving major attention in the block.

Grouping increases your time economy in several ways, and is strategically valuable too. Not having to signpost to every single 1NR topicality extension can save you critical seconds. Grouping can reduce prep time use (this is one reason stand-up speeches are possible, since so much prep time can be saved in not scripting line by line you can literally write down answers as the 2NC/1NR speaks). Grouping can help your partner too, by giving him or her sometimes essential flexibility to creatively apply your answers where necessary.

There are some important dangers to be avoided. One is that too much will be grouped, making the 1AR sound blippy and committed only to taglines, as opposed to real argument extension. As I mentioned, this is one of the concerns which leads me to oppose a general "standup" strategy, since too often it leads to overgrouping. The point to remember is this: grouping is a time allocation aid because it frees time for the more important positions, not because every argument should be grouped. The other important danger is that grouped positions will not substantively advance the argument. When a disadvantage is grouped, for example, it can be too easy for the 1AR to revert to simply repeating 2AC claims. When this happens, the job of the 2NR is made easier, not harder: he or she needs only to extend their original takeouts and the debate is won.

TRICK 4: Prep the Endgame.

Try to debate in ways that make your partner's 2AR easier and more damaging to major negative claims. Convert arguments which have you on the defensive, grinding away at your speechtime, into offensive voting issues for your side. If the negative has made a particular decision rule claim into a voting issue, answer it but also see if you can devise a way to argue for their defeat based on the original claim. Or try to shift the argumentative ground onto issues where you know you have a lot more evidence to read, if necessary, in the last rebuttal.

TRICK 5: Practice, Practice, Practice.

The 1AR can especially benefit from rebuttal reworks at home, in part because so much of doing them well revolves around larger skill and structural dimensions (the basic level of comprehensibility, signposting clarity, and time allocation, to name three) that an external observer can judge even without having seen the whole round.

The basic rework drill is usefully revised in two ways for 1AR's. If there is a major "overexplanation" crisis, then requiring that the rebuttal be regiven in less time can help. Cutting the speech down to four minutes so overtaxes debaters with a tendency to overexplain that they are almost invariably broken of the habit by the drill. Of course, one must be careful in thinking condensation is a cure-all: if all the drill accomplishes is superfast or less coherent talking, then it is self-defeating. A second revision can work better, and involves the 2AC as well. Instead of a full practice debate, pick one issue that is debated through a hypothetical 1AR. Start with the 2AC reading scripted responses to, say, a Clinton disadvantage, then have the appropriate team member give a full 2NC blow-up, followed by an abbreviated 1AR focused just on the disadvantage. Zeroing in on just one issue in this way can promote useful discussions about strategic thinking, signposting, grouping, the appropriate use of very efficient issue overviews, and the adequacy of point-by-point explanation.

This last drill is sometimes resisted by 1AR's, since it fails to reproduce both the overall climate of pressure typical of the speech, and the normal sense of panic that accompanies quick preparation. But when one considers the percentage of debates on this topic which comes down to Clinton, the Lopez counterplan, and the Foucault

critique, it is foolish not to carry out concentrated 1AR drill work on this issues.

TRICK 6: See Targeted Feedback.

I often find myself in this scenario when judging, and I don't think I'm alone: After the debate I'll be asked by a debater how they might have improved the 1AR. It is a good question you should always ask if you give the speech. But the problem for most judges, unless some immediate problem or compliment comes to mind, is that their thinking is understandably focused on what happened in the last two speeches. After all, those speeches almost always generate the final grounds for decision. I confess I often hear myself say vague comments, like: "Well, you overallocated a bit to that cheapshot topicality argument. Otherwise, pretty good!" But of course such advice doesn't help much.

Smart debaters don't let me or others off the hook that easily. They may follow up with the question, "Well, what one major change should I have made"! But this may not work either, not because the question is poor so much as that it, too, fails to trigger full recollection of the speech in the judge's mind. Try this instead: "May I ask a favor? Would you mind looking at your flow of me on the Clinton disadvantage? Do you think I went for the right answers? Do you see any particular place I screwed up and over- or underallocated time? Do you see places on your flow where you found it hard to make sense of my extensions?" It's not necessary to wear a judge down by going through every major position to quickly elicit productive feedback. And focused feedback of this kind will be much more useful than general cliches.

Here's a final piece of advice, though it may seem a bit bizarre in a debate world used to giving the glory to debaters who give the last rebuttal: Work to become so effective a 1AR that you are in contention for major speaker awards. It happens every now and then, and while it's rare, judges crave hearing a 1AR so well argued and clear they can justify awarding it a 29 or 30. Wouldn't it be great to overcome the worst 1AR myth of all, that the 1AR is always the "weaker" partner?

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