

## STUDENT VIEWS

# PRACTICAL REFUTATION AND AN EFFECTIVE FIRST AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL

by Lisa Seeland

Although many textbooks describe the necessary strategy a first affirmative rebuttal (IAR) must use, practical experience reveals that many times, an ideal textbook situation cannot be reached. In reality, IAR for the speaker is rarely a textbook experience. The literal definition of rebuttal, as documented by Austin Freely in his book, *Argumentation and Debate: Rational Decision Making*, states, "The term *rebuttal*, strictly interpreted, means to overcome opposing evidence and reasoning by introducing other evidence which will destroy its effect."<sup>1</sup> To refute effectively the negative arguments and reestablish the affirmative position, a practical approach which incorporates known theories but allows a clear and personal style of debate must be used. As Roy V. Wood states in *Strategic Debate*, "Most debaters and coaches now realize that usually a debate is won or lost in the first affirmative rebuttal."<sup>2</sup> The following strategies suggest a practical approach to ensure that the debate is not lost in the IAR.

The IAR's burden is described by Roy V. Wood, who claims it is necessary "To further the affirmative's strategies of fulfilling the burden of proof, maintaining the offensive, and narrowing the debate."<sup>3</sup> At a theoretical level, this burden seems reasonable. However, realistically, because of the time constraints and the amount of material that must be covered, this becomes a difficult task. The IAR's difficulties are compounded as a rebuttalist, for he must effectively refute the negative block, twelve minutes of negative speeches, in only five minutes. As Wood comments:

The negative block is a strong strategic force in the debate because it is uninterrupted. And, more important, the affirmative team has only two short speeches in which to reply to it. The bulk of this reply obviously must come in the first affirmative rebuttal.<sup>4</sup>

To effectively counter the negative

block in the short time period allotted, however, reasoning must take precedence over hard evidence. Freely presents several methods of refutation which can be applied to the IAR in a very practical and successful manner.

The *first* area deals with reasoning. This concept is the key to a successful IAR, as there is not enough time to externally document each point. The *second* area requires that the rebuttalist reveal logical fallacies of the negative arguments and position. Wood states that:

By thoroughly understanding the "illogical possibilities," a debater can become very effective at refutation and rebuttal. It is useful and necessary, then, for the student to know the fallacies of factual, value, and causal arguments because several analytical fallacies frequently appear in the debate.<sup>5</sup>

An argument is fallacious, if, for some reason, its conclusion is not justified by the evidence that has been presented in support of it. Logic or facts used to justify the conclusion are both examples of "evidence" which, when faulty, cause the analytical fallacies. As stated, such fallacies can appear on three levels:

**factual,**  
**value**  
and **causal.**

By clearly understanding the above terms, a IAR can rapidly and effectively dispel many of the negative's arguments. At the factual level, the two common fallacies and simple examples of such occurrences follow.

1) **Personal Experience**, when the debater applies personal knowledge on a broad basis, "In my town, everyone takes a driver's education course, therefore, it is obvious that it would be redundant and unnecessary to mandate such a program nationwide..."

2) **Statistics**, using numbers from a study to prove facts. Although sounding

impressive, statistics can often be misleading to a judge as they represent only a projected conclusion based on a few samples. It is obvious that many fallacies can be created by simply neglecting to explain the sample base, the number of people surveyed or tested, from which the statistics were derived. The cross-examination period is the most logical and strategic time to reveal such fallacies to the judge. Do not be afraid to ask your opponent how large the sample base was, who the study was conducted by, and the geographical location(s) in which the study was conducted. By doing so, a "100% reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies due to sex-education," can most likely be limited to a statistic representative of a single school rather than an entire nation. This simple use of logic can make a seemingly unarguable fact an irrelevant point when applied on a larger scope required in a debate.

### Value Arguments

The second level deals with value arguments. "A value argument is one in which the advocate wants his audience to agree that a positive or a negative value should be attached to a particular situation."<sup>6</sup> This type of argument is directed at an emotional level, and often involves the application of emotional tactics rather than facts. In using value arguments, the negative team tries to make the judge see a non-existent link between two statements; one involves facts, the other simply emotions. For example, a negative might prove to a judge that the Iranian government is receiving shotguns from the United States. However, once they have proved such a point, the negative team might resort to a value argument to justify a stoppage of such sales stating, "The United States should cut all military assistance to Iran because they held Americans hostage." At the emotional level, this argument is effective, but as a IAR, simply pointing out to the judge the fallacies of relying simply on emotion can both save time and bring

the judge down to a more logical level.

The third level deals with causal arguments. Many times, a debater will try to prove one act as a cause for another. However, unless the debater can show the factual link, the actual cause and effect pattern as it relates to the two facts, such arguments are fallacious. Many times, a correlational situation is mistaken, or presented by the negative team as a causal fact. The practical logic a 1AR can use to reveal a correlational argument is to simply state that just because two events occurred at the same time, one did not necessarily cause the other. For example, just because Americans increased their intake of soda pop the same year many people in South America died of cancer does not prove that soda pop causes cancer. It is logically impossible to prove a causal link between the consumption of pop and the occurrence of cancer by using the previous example. By pointing out the correlational arguments used by the negative, and questioning the links to such arguments, a 1AR can defeat many arguments by simply using logic. Through discovering the fallacies of the negative's arguments, the third area is revealed, that of exposing negative dilemmas and inconsistencies.

Because the 1AR deals with both negative speeches, very often, he will have the opportunity to point out to the judge the discrepancies in the two negative speakers arguments. Exposed contradictions not only undermine the credibility of the negative teams arguments, but also negate both arguments which contradict. A common situation occurs when the second negative constructive states, "We should not adopt the affirmative plan because if adopted, the world will be blown up in a third world war." The contradiction then commonly occurs when the first negative rebuttalist states, "There is no need to adopt the affirmative plan because it is almost in effect nationwide currently." By making both statements, each one is nullified by the logical consequences of the other statement. By simply pointing out inconsistencies, then the 1AR can dispose of many negative arguments. Finally, the 1AR can simply dismiss an argument by exposing irrelevant arguments. Irrelevant arguments can be classified as any of the previously explained fallacies or simply by completely unrelated arguments to the subject at hand. By simply pointing out such information to the judge, the 1AR will not have to spend valuable time defeating irrelevant arguments.

Once the 1AR has a firm understand-

ing of the necessary burdens and the possible arguments that are an integral part of his speech, he must transmit his thoughts to the judge. This must occur through the process of delivery; thus, clarity of argument must be given highest priority. Clarity does not include just the physical aspects of speaking such as diction, pitch, enunciation, volume and pace, but the 1AR must include the "reasoning" behind each statement; he must show the logical link behind each statement which defeats the negative argument. This is especially necessary in rebuttals since evidence is not generally used for documentation. Another necessary requirement of clarity is sign-posting, in other words letting the judge know exactly what argument is being presented and where it applies to the negative arguments in the debate. This allows the judge to spend his time listening to arguments rather than trying to find his place in the debate.

Parallel to the importance of clarity is the importance of emphasis. Freely explains:

Not all parts of a speech are of equal importance. Some parts of the speech are indispensable to the advocate's case; other parts are of lesser importance. The advocate's problem is to emphasize the more important parts of his speech. Emphasis makes it easier for the audience to grasp and retain the ideas the advocate must get across to them if he is to prove his case.<sup>7</sup>

The most practical and effective way to achieve emphasis is to use the strategy of grouping. This entails that instead of each point being refuted individually, similar arguments are "grouped together" and defeated with a single response. For example, if the negative presented three separate, but related, arguments which deal with only one major point, the 1AR should use one response to defeat the common fallacy all three similar arguments share. Other important aspects of emphasis are equally as effective in clarifying and heightening of the perceptiveness of the judge. These include:

1) **pace** (try to keep at an understandable level, and **always** slow down at the very end of the speech.

2) **volume** (increase volume at important points which are important to the affirmative.

3) **repetition** (repeat necessary information or important points, especially if the judge looks confused).

4) **Order** is also very important, and is discussed in the following paragraph. This technique helps overcome one of the

greatest difficulties of 1AR: *time*.

The 1AR must cover all aspects presented by the negative, and consequently must cover both case side (arguments) and plan side (disadvantage) workability arguments. Conciseness of argument without loss of clarity is important if time is to be used to the greatest advantage. As a general rule of thumb, the 1AR should spend an equal amount of time--2 1/2 minutes-- on both plan side and case side. This time period is flexible to a certain extent depending on the nature of the negative arguments, but the 1AR must be sure to cover all arguments presented. It is most advisable always to end on **your** strongest ground; thus, in the 1AR, the proper and most effective order of argument would be plan side then case side.

Pragmatically, then, the 1AR must clarify the round and keep the judge's concentration on the affirmative ground. As Wood says:

Refutation and rebuttal are two different processes. Refutation means attacking the arguments of the opponent. Rebuttal means to rebuild the arguments that the opponent has attacked.<sup>8</sup>

The 1AR is perhaps the most difficult speech in a cross-examination debate because it deals equally with refutation and rebuttal. The 1AR must defeat the negative arguments and simultaneously re-establish the affirmative ground. This is not an impossibility, and through practice, the 1AR speaker can practically acquire both confidence and skill in presenting a convincing rebuttal. Although the 1AR has a formidable task, practical application of theory combined with effective delivery can make the 1AR a powerful tool for a successful team.

#### EndNotes

<sup>1</sup>Roy V. Wood, *Strategic Debate*.

(Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1972), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup>Austin J. Freely, *Argumentation and Debate: Rational Decision Making*. (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), pg. 223.

<sup>5</sup>Wood, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup>Freely, p. 282.

<sup>8</sup>Wood, p. 146.

#### Bibliography

Freely, Austin J.. *Argumentation and Debate: Rational Decision Making*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1967.

Wood, Roy V.. *Strategic Debate*. Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1972.

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