REFUTATION IN DEBATE

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DIFFERENCES

• In debate the focus is on the big issues, so those are what you are refuting. Do not sweat the little stuff unless it tips or turns the big stuff.
• Refute the strong arguments, not the weak ones. Pounding on a weak point may make you feel good, but it does not make you look strong.

FUNCTIONS

• To establish the lack of strength in their argument.
• To turn their argument back to your advantage.
• To show that their argument is not very important even if it is true.
• To attack major examples that prove their argument, offer counter-examples.
• To put issues to sleep so they drop out of the debate.

STRUCTURE

• There is no “line-by-line” in public debate.
• You must have refutation to each of their major arguments.
• Make sure the audience knows the major argument of theirs that you are refuting.
• Your language should be, “Their first major argument is XYZ, and we disagree for four reasons…” and then number them 1-2-3-4-etc. Numbering helps the judges write more down.
• Watch your time allocation: do not over-refute, spend more time on their better arguments, less time on the weaker arguments.

STYLE

• Be direct in your language use. Use more flowery language on your substantive arguments.
• Emphasize word economy.
• Use a dismissive tone when you describe their argument, and a more assertive tone when you are refuting it. As always, do not go overboard on this.

VIDEOS

John Sadek
https://vimeo.com/72641916

Maja Cimerman
https://vimeo.com/32784725

Mary Nugent