

BASICS OF EFFECTIVE REFUTATION

winning debate strategies

Debating involves the construction and development of arguments. It also includes disagreement – efforts to undermine, erase, and overpower the arguments presented by an opposing team.

One technique for learning core refutation is the 4-Step Method of

Refutation™. This is a primary critical thinking tool – it is a mental representation of disagreement.

Comprehensive refutation includes diverse techniques. Some of them even involve strategic agreement. But disagreement is a foundational

THE 4-STEP METHOD

element of argument clash (Argument A v. – [negative] Argument A). The 4-Step Method teaches students to block a well-developed and opposing idea.

mspdp / hspdp

The Middle School and High School Public Debate Program

STEP/CONCEPT

EXAMPLE

STEP 1 – They say...

An answer should begin with the precise language used by an opponent. It should not be a generalization about an opponent's position. Specificity is required.

Sample Topic – Lower the voting age.

My opponent stated "a lower voting age would produce more public policies for the benefit of youth."

STEP 2 – But I disagree...

This is the initial critical thinking part of the 4-Step Method. The speaker presumes that the opponent is wrong. This encourages the debater to seek the reasons that it is wrong. Is it missing an important part of the argument? Is it poorly analyzed? Has the opponent failed to provide evidence support the argument's logic?

The fact that people have the ability to vote does not mean that they vote. And voting and popular opinion does not always affect the public policies of government.

STEP 3 – Because...

This is the argumentation stage of the method. To disagree, it is necessary to make an argument of one's own – ARE + S that is, Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, Significance...

Voting rates are low among groups that are traditionally socially and economically excluded, although the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, and young people have the right to vote. Despite raising eligibility to vote, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance reported that voter turnout has been decreasing since the 1980's. Poor and minority populations have declining participation. When voting was lowered from 21 years to 18 in the US, only 60% of newly eligible voters registered and barely 50% vote. And when they do vote, it might not influence policy. It is more likely that corporate and lobbying influence in small numbers will determine national and local policies than elections. The inequities of public policy are apparent in every country, That kind of injustice matters to nearly everyone.

STEP 4 – Therefore...

This is the result of the 4-Step Method – the result (the last R in ARESR). This step explains what is gained by disagreeing with the opponent's position. Does it help win the debate?

Lowering the voting age will not have a beneficial result, More importantly, it might makes us think that reform is underway – it might distract us from the kind of electoral reform that matters – limiting the influence of money and nepotism in politics, establishing rules that are fair to all.