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—1934—

Part 4

IT'S NOT WHAT ARGUMENT YOU MAKE;
IT'S HOW YOU MAKE THE ARGUMENT

Engaging in such practice debates before actual competitions can also allow you to consider what your opponents' strongest arguments are. However, this does not mean you are prepared for anything your opponents might say in the actual competitive debate. Practice debates are an opportunity to discover arguments that might be employed by your opponents.

Never assume that your real opponents will be anything like your imagined opponents.

Get your team to review their arguments in light of the lessons learnt from a practice debate. If it is not possible to hold a practice debate, your team must consider both sides of the debate before all of you start drafting your speeches.



Should I think just about the content of my team's arguments?

NO. You should consider the style your team wishes to adopt for the actual competitive debate. But what exactly does style mean? Unfortunately, it is difficult to pin this idea down. Its meaning depends significantly on the context in which it is used.

What is STYLE?

Thinking about style in a debate is **NOT** focusing on whether an argument works logically or whether an example is accurate.

It involves questions like:

- What general mood do I want to create for my speech?
- Should different speakers on my team vary the mood they evoke in their speech?
- How do I vary the tone of my speech as I move from one section to another?

Different people have different answers to such questions. But the point is: think not just about the logic of your arguments, but also the style in which they are delivered.

If style is so vague, why bother with it?

This is especially important as you progress as a debater. As you become more experienced, you may focus overwhelmingly on the intellectual aspects of your speeches. But always consider the stylistic aspects of debating.

Debate is NOT an exercise in reading off an essay you have just written. Great WSDC debates happen when two teams decide to *speak to* an audience and persuade them.



So how do I think about style?

You can think about incorporating style as a debater in numerous ways.

Being aware of style can help you make decisions about the mood you want to create in your speech.

Let's understand this with the help of the three style questions mentioned above.



What general mood do I want to create for my speech?

Trying to create a serious mood in your speech is often useful when you are faced with defending the side of a motion that seems unsympathetic.

Anecdote Time

A motion I debated at the 2012 WSDC preliminary rounds was: *This House Believes That States should enshrine legally actionable socio-economic rights.*

If you consider the arguments in favour of the motion, you will soon realise that they are very emotionally charged.

A Proposition team could appeal to the plight of millions of people in developing countries who do not have access to food or housing.

Having painted this bleak picture, the Proposition could suggest a way out by giving such people a legal claim to food or housing in the form of a right.

Hence, a First Opposition Speaker is likely to come after a First Proposition Speaker who has already created a sympathetic mood for the audience and judges.

As First Opposition Speaker, I realised I had to change the mood for our arguments to work.

Why so? My team was arguing that governments often needed time to implement long-term policies that would be blocked if people had legally actionable socio-economic rights. This is because such policies might involve breaching such rights in the short term.



For example, if everyone has a right to housing, governments would often be blocked from evicting squatters to build new flats over their land, even though the new flats could house more people.

For this to be persuasive, I had to encourage the audience to think more in rational, and not emotive, terms. To do this, I had to ensure that the mood I created in my speech was dispassionate, rather than heartrending.

Thinking about style in this way explains the opening lines of my speech: *Just because you call something a right doesn't make it a right. Some rights are wrongs.*

Instead of keeping the debate centred on the plight of oppressed peoples, I shifted the focus to the harms created when states enshrine legally actionable socio-economic rights.



Should different speakers on my team vary the mood they evoke in their speech?

YES.

If everyone on a team creates the same mood throughout the debate, it makes for a very bland performance.

But trying to vary the mood each speaker creates is useful not just because it makes the debate more interesting to watch. It can also help your team gain the winning edge because different judges may be persuaded by different styles.

While all your speakers should make arguments that are logically consistent with each other, they need not all sound the same. In fact, if they sounded different, you have a far greater chance of winning, especially if you are unfamiliar with the judging panel.

Since you will almost always come across unfamiliar judges in competitions, this is often a good approach to adopt.

Anecdote time

I want to explain this again using the debate on the motion: *This House Believes That States should enshrine legally actionable socio-economic rights.*

I noted that as the First Opposition Speaker, I sought to create a serious mood to contrast the sympathetic mood left by the Proposition arguments.

But my Third Opposition Speaker realised that it was not ideal for every member of the team to sound as hard-hitting as I was. He thought we could make our case in a friendlier manner near the end of the debate. He wanted to create a mood of calm and understanding that might persuade judges who might not have been persuaded earlier.

He did this with a more relaxed and conversational opening:

'Let's make some things very clear.

We stand, on the part of Team Singapore, and think that it's generally a good thing that people get to eat food.

What we disagree with is that socio-economic rights are the right way to do this.'

In doing this, he remained consistent with the position we had taken throughout the debate, but he was also able to convince judges who might have been thrown off by the style I had chosen as First Opposition Speaker.

Such variations can happen by chance. But try to brainstorm some variations before you debate. If you do this, you will be more prepared to deploy them if you have to.

Even if you do not use the variations in style you prepared before you debate, you have not wasted time. The actual variation you use could be inspired by the one you prepared.

How can I use this to prepare?

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Can I watch this speech?

Yes. Find the video of this speech at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CZ-3P-gSRo>

How do I vary the tone of my speech as I move from one section to another ?

Variation in style can be compared to the way we see variations across a musical score.

When a musical score indicates *accentato*, you are expected to play that part of the score with emphasis. But when a later segment of the same score states *allegrezza*, you are directed to play that segment with a lighter touch of cheer and joy.

Something similar could be said for debating speeches. Certain sections of your speech can be funny, others serious.

But sometimes this can happen with just a single sentence; it does not always have to involve a minute or 30 seconds in your speech for example. Just as a single chord can shift the mood of a piece of music from jolly to gloomy, a single twist can sometimes be all you need to create variance within your speech.

Again, this can happen without you even noticing it. But if you are conscious of the role that varying your style can play within your speech, then it becomes a tool at your disposal.

You can use it to create surprise which keeps audiences and judges excited about what you are doing as a Speaker. This can often turn the key points of your speech into memorable ones.



Thank you!
