



# DEBATING ELEMENTS

Resources for Coaching Debating

These resources are to be used alongside the Coaching Debate Guide issued by the South African Schools Debating Board.

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# 1. Foreword

This is cut-and-pasted from Gauteng trainings so the vocabulary is creative, the tone is conversational and occasionally the coach threatens to kick speakers in the ovaries or hate them forever. The last word of the document is 'douche.'

In short: Don't be alarmed, coaches!

Please read through this and incorporate any of it that is useful into your Provincial Training Schedules. The explanations are very simple and always example based so anyone can relate to them.

They have been compiled by Brandon Almeida and I so if there's something you want to query, just drop us an email at [debate.kids@gmail.com](mailto:debate.kids@gmail.com)

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## 2. The Burden of Proof

The Burden of Proof (BoP) is what your side must prove in order to win the debate. Both PROP and OPP will EACH have a BoP for every debate. Correctly identifying the BoP will mean that you choose the most appropriate arguments.

When both PROP and OPP correctly identify the BoP then the debate has a proper Clash

### EXAMPLE: THW BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY

If PROP decides that what they have to prove (**BoP**) is that **the Death Penalty will help with SA's crime problem** then these are the arguments that they would choose:

- It is a deterrent to violent crime
- There is overcrowding in prisons
- It removes criminals clogging up the judicial system
- Keeping these criminals in jail unfairly costs the taxpayer money
- You cannot rehabilitate most violent criminals (many are repeat offenders) so there is no point in trying.

If PROP decides that that what they have to prove (**BoP**) is that **it is right and fair to take the life of a criminal, and that taking that life will help society**, then these are the arguments they would choose:

- It is just to seek a life for a life in retribution for the grief of families/society
- Some crimes are such horrible rights infringements that the perpetrator should forfeit their life
- SA is majority in favour of the Death Penalty and as violent crime affects citizens, citizens should get to choose to bring it back.
- Currently criminal elements in society see the lives of others as being worth very little, this will change if they know they will forfeit their own life if they harm others. i.e. It will raise the overall value of life in society.

### Which of these is the stronger Burden of Proof?

In a debate such as this one, the last BoP tackles the real issue. After all, South Africa outlawed the Death Penalty because the Government believed that it could not allow the state to kill its own citizens. That means, in order to win the debate, PROP must prove why it would be acceptable for the state to now do this. In essence, this motion expects a debate about morals (is it right or wrong?) rather than policy (a cost-benefit analysis).

OPP's **BoP** would be to show that **the principle of the Death Penalty is wrong and that introducing something so morally wrong would harm society**. Argument examples would be things like:

- The government would be engaging in the same action as violent criminals: killing. This would set a bad example for society.
- Killing criminals allows no chance for their rehabilitation
- The government and society should uphold the right to life even when others (like criminals) do not. Etc. Etc.

So essentially, in the prep preceding each debate, each team should work out the Burden of Proof **BEFORE** spending time working out arguments. That way the team ends up with relevant arguments – each of which will help them win the debate. Remember, the Burden of Proof is what must be proved or established in order to defend or attack the main issue of the debate.

Here are a couple more examples:

#### **THW LEGALISE UNLIMITED VIOLENCE BETWEEN CONSENTING ADULTS**

**PROP BoP:** Rational adults should have freedom of choice to do what they like with their own bodies – it is unfair of govt to limit this right when it harms no one else.

**OPP BoP:** There are harms that govt should always protect both the individual and society from. Unlimited violence is one of these harms.

#### **THW ENCOURAGE THE USE OF CHILD LABOUR**

**PROP BoP:** The status quo is harmful to children. Allowing children to legally work will improve their lives. This will have a positive knock-on effect in society.

**OPP BoP:** Allowing children to legally work is more harmful to them than the status quo. These harms will have a knock-on effect in society.

## 3. Matter Generation

You guys are clearly lacking here. This will also be an incredibly important aspect for S.A. selection. You want to generate all sorts of matter. Good, bad, weird. Everything! Then sort it out later.

So I don't want to hear in a prep: 'Ok, so we have two points for the first, now let's pull something out the air for the second.'

No! That is bad. If I hear it I will kick you very hard in the ovaries. What I want to hear, what will make me very happy and love you all forever, is: 'Oh crap! We've got so much matter we need to decide what we have to cut out.'

So we talked a bit about it on Saturday but here is the process:

### 1) **Work out what the debate is: Harm/Change debate or Normative/evaluative debate.**

#### **Harm/Change debate:**

- 1) Prove a harm
- 2) Show that your change will affect the harm.
- 3) Show that that effect will be positive and prevent/mitigate/fix the harm.
- 4) Show that any spin-offs of the change won't negatively impact on the original harm OR have a greater negative affect on any other situation.

#### **Evaluative/Normative debate:**

- 1) Identify the issues at play
- 2) Create a value metric
- 3) Measure your side's issues against that metric
- 4) Show that the metric is fulfilled

2) **Establish the Burden of Proof.** Write in big letters across the top of your page. Never forget...ever!

### 3) **Individual Prep**

Here we said you follow four clear steps.

3.1.) **BOP generation:** write down anything (even if it isn't a clear point) of what needs to be done to achieve that BOP. Basically you're establishing what is vital to prove your BOP.

3.2.) **Run through the standard arguments list:** Buy-in, Dignity, Morals/Ethics, Government Mandate, Supply and Demand, Rights Analysis, Perception

3.3.) **Actor Analysis:** Write a list of everyone who remotely involved with the topic in specific terms. So not just 'people' but rather 'parents', 'siblings', 'child itself' etc. Then next to each of those actors write down how they are affected by the topic/your plan/their actions etc. Basically, possible points concerning them.

3.4.) **Opposition Potential points:** Here it isn't: let's try and pre-empt the other team (that will be another kick in the ovaries) rather it's a: what might the opposition say? Is there any way we can twist it to be a point for our side. (This is actually possible in a number of situations)

**\*Note:** The final step here is a hidden step. Look at everything generated in 1, 3 and 4 and ask if they can't be fitted into one of the arguments considered in step 2. It makes it easier to organise.

### **THEREAFTER**

Then comes the job of dividing the points up. This is the part you seem to battle with. So we know a few things. We know that each speakers matter should be separate and individual from the others. We know that the same point should, ideally, not be split over two speeches. And we know that the first speaker needs to get the most important strategic issues out first.

My suggestion is to look at the type of debate. If it's a change/harm debate then the first speaker has to deal with the harm, the solution affecting the harm in a positive way. The second can deal with additional supporting benefits and showing that it won't result in another harm being created.

For an evaluative/normative debate the first speaker needs to identify the core issues, explain the metric and then start measuring the most important points/issues against the metric. The second then takes the supporting points and issues.

Rule of thumb for matter splitting: Is the juice worth the squeeze. Ask yourself if the point you're explaining is actually going to further your case at that point in time. If not then you either have to drop it or move it to another speech.

A final thing to remember with your analysis is the need for actual examples. So we know that just giving a bunch of examples isn't an argument BUT we also have to realise that making a bunch of theoretical arguments (Rights represent the morals of society. They're intrinsic to all etc.) is no good unless you can slip in an example to support it.

It doesn't have to be a long case study or anything like that. It can be as simple as a half a sentence or two. Rights are intrinsic to all. We can see this because most S.A.'s are so invested in the idea of the constitution and everything it espouses. So throw in a few examples to legitimise your case.

And the final final thing is that once you've analysed your different options in 1, 3 and 4 and are looking to slot them into an argument in 2 then sometimes those points in 1, 3 and 4 can be slotted into multiple standard arguments. So an analysis of a specific actor can be used in a perception argument and a buy-in argument.

Consider, for example, a debate to do with economics and investment. You could analyse investors (as an actor) in such a way that the analysis can help you make a perception, buy-in and supply and demand argument. So once you've started slotting the different points into standard arguments always check if they apply to more than one of those arguments. And if there is any analysis that doesn't fit into a standard argument then just run it as a separate point.



## 4. Basic Arguments

Please note that these are *not* cases or motions. These are guidelines about how to approach some common areas. They often come up as arguments and, if handled well, help win the debate.

Please read through them. Give yourselves some time to make sense of them and to think about how you would use them in different debates. Some of these arguments/areas will be useful in motions set for both Junior and Senior trials and selectors are looking to see how you utilise them.

### Rights Analysis

***Rights are the fundamental rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people. It is believed that individual rights must be exercised without infringing on the rights of others.***

Set out the right to be discussed

Establish the value of the right: Why is it considered important? (societal value, historical value etc.) How important is it? (All rights are value judgements; so how important is this right considered? Does it trump other rights? What limits do we place on it?)

The value of the right will dictate what responsibilities come with the right. Why are these responsibilities important to ensure continued belief/support of the right in the society we live in? What does the right allow that would be harmful to society/the right/a group of people?

If the debate is about limiting a specific right, show that the right needs to be limited for a legitimate reason (responsibility/harm caused/potential harm) and that the value of the right is such that the limitation is acceptable. The greater the value of the right the greater the harm/potential harm needs to be.

If the debate is about trading off a right against another analyse each right (as above) and then show that the right you want to keep either has greater value or less harms (or both) than the other.

## **Buy-In**

***Public/group commitment to, and involvement in, a social/political/economic issue.***

Identify the group/s that your policy/topic needs the support of to work successfully.

Explain why the group (s) has the power to determine the success or failure of the policy/topic. This establishes the necessity of ensuring that they support the policy/topic.

Analyse the group in relation to the proposed policy. Is the topic/policy important to them and their interests or to the people they represent? If so, in what way? This will shape their willingness to expend effort on it and is then tempered by limitations either they or others impose on them i.e. their desire to do so.

Then move on; if the policy/topic is about implementation determine if the group has the necessary skills and resources to implement. If it's about rights, do they believe in/support rights in general and this right in particular? Basically try and measure and then show the group's skills, abilities and beliefs in the topic/policy.

Weigh up the equation: desire and impediments. Are they willing and able to do what is necessary?

## **Perception**

***How groups of people and countries are perceived by other groups and countries. The view others hold of you can influence their policies and actions toward you.***

Identify the group (s) whose views/beliefs the policy or topic is going to effect.

Show what view was before. Then explain why change happens and what it changes into.

Show how perception is going to change how people view whatever the issue is. i.e. show how view/perception of the issue will be established or will change.

Explain why this change is good/bad

Explain why we should care that the change has happened (e.g. value of reputation in this instance; obligations being fulfilled etc)

## **Government Mandate**

***A Government Mandate is the obligation a government has to use the power granted to it by the electorate to deal with certain issues.***

Govt mandate assumes a legitimate government so establish that the govt is legitimate first.

A legitimate govt has tacit (implied) obligations in different arenas like health, education etc.

If the govt was elected on a specific ticket (policy or issue e.g. safety, health, education or economic reform) then the obligations in that area become explicit. There is greater need/importance to do them.

Show that the obligation being discussed is legitimate and more necessary than other suggestions or solutions.

Show that the policy or topic fulfils the obligation (that it actually works to deal with the issue)

Just because there is a govt mandate, it doesn't mean that the govt is solely responsible. Dependent on skills; resources, the nature of the problem or issue etc, the govt may need help from others like business, civil society etc.

## **Morality**

***Determining what is right or wrong.***

One cannot assume something is good or bad, right or wrong even if it is a commonly held view.

Morals are determined when society makes value judgements about what is right/wrong.

One has to show or prove good/bad, right/wrong based on 2 areas:

- o People's beliefs
- o How important those beliefs are to a group/groups.

People either believe that there is a universal set of morals that apply to everyone or that there are different sets of morals for different cultural groups. Depending on which view they hold, (universal or culturally specific), it will influence/shape the value they give to certain morals.

Universal morals are often felt to be too restrictive and limited whereas the diversity of cultural morals is often felt to create conflict (many other views are also held regarding these issues). You must show why the position for/against universal/cultural morals should be respected and/or supported.

## Supply and Demand

### *How the market fulfils needs.*

The price of a good is determined by the costs of making the good (resources, skills) and producers of the good adding a mark up for profit. Price decreases when

- the costs of production (costs of materials/labour etc) drop,
- when competition between producers of the good forces them to decrease their mark up or
- when the effects of specialising in producing a good on a large scale decreases price (either through efficiency, innovation or economies of scale).

Prices may decrease but they cannot decrease below the cost of production. There also has to be a financial incentive for the producers of the good (unless they don't care about profit/they are motivated by reasons other than profit).

Demand is created and shaped by the things people need, believe they need or want and further shaped by price.

If there is sufficient demand, people/producers will generally supply it if they can benefit.

## 5. POIS

Firstly, you all need to offer more POIs. You need to aim for 5-10 in EVERY speech. Often you are almost non-existent until after you've spoken. That's an ovary kick worthy statistic. So ask more and if you're worried, because you're working on your own speech, then pre-write a few or get someone else to tell you some that you can get up and offer as well. There are three aspects to POIs: **Accepting, Answering and Giving**.

### Accepting

Please stop saying "no thank you sir/ma'am" mid-speech. I'd prefer it if you just waved them down when you're speaking. If you're at a natural break in your speech (i.e. the end of a conclusion etc.) then you can say "no thank you".

Don't allow them to interrupt your flow especially because many of you struggle to reassert your head of steam when interrupted like that; and you're at your best when you've got up a head of steam.

If you are going to accept a POI and are mid-sentence than just hold a finger up as if to say "wait", finish your point clearly and then accept the POI.

Often when you've told someone that you'll be with them in a minute, you then rush through the rest of your matter as if you're feeling bad about keeping them waiting. And the problem is that many of you tend to swallow the last sentence or two as you're already turning; and those sentences are usually where you draw the conclusion.

So: slow down. Finish your point calmly and audibly and then turn to take the POI. And highlight in your case the areas where you're happiest to take POIs; usually the areas you are strategically or analytically strongest and then try and take POIs at those points.

### Answering

If, in asking the POI, the person isn't very clear, they battle to verbalise it correctly (as is the case with many development speakers) or because they've suddenly come over all nervous because of your steely look and come-hither smile (remember we talked about this in the style guide) then don't cut them off until you're at least sure of what they're trying to get at or if they've gone over the 15s limit.

Then rephrase what they asked/challenged on for the adjudicators (i.e. so what you're saying is...) and then answer the POI. And make sure to draw the conclusion/answer of the POI back to what it means for your BOP/case.

If you want to respond to the POI later (when it clashes directly with your matter) do not just say that and then highlight it at the appropriate spot of substantive. You must do that AND also give a very brief answer to it. i.e. "That clashes directly with my matter sir and I'll highlight it when I deal with it but in short the answer is no because of a lack of competition." Then highlight it when your matter deals with it in greater detail.

## **Giving**

The attributes of a good POI is that it's 1) clear, 2) strategic and 3) engaging. So, write the POI down before you say it or even once you're standing and waiting for the speaker to finish and get to you. If you write it down it will come out clearly, far quicker and far more confident. I don't expect you to be able to do this every time but if you can its worth a go.

Next, try and phrase the POI in strategic terms. Make it not just about pointing out a flaw in the argument they're making but rather how their case doesn't stand if you make the flaw.

I.e. "The eradication of poverty issue only stands if you can prove that child labour will be absorbed by the market which it won't because the jobs just don't exist at the current minimum wage levels."

See? Hit the issue first and then the actual point.

Don't worry that they'll cut you down before you can finish. That will only count against them if you were going to be under the 15s cut-off. But always try and highlight the issue first and then the matter hit.

If your POI is directed in response to a contentious point that's been going back and forth between the two teams and they're mangling it, not understanding it or straw-manning then address the POI to the chair

i.e. "Master Chair, the opposition keeps straw-manning us today by saying X and what they need to do is deal with issue Y."

**Impose** clarity on the adjudicators and the other team. Also, it often throws the speaker off when you do that.

Finally, don't be afraid to bring up a POI about something that they're not talking about at that moment. Just phrase it cleverly and never say, "Sorry sir, just going back to what you said earlier". That makes it feel like you shouldn't be doing it.

Rather go with something like, "That's all very nice Sir, but what you need to deal with is the issue of..."

Just make sure that the POI is strategically important. If it's a tiny little cheap shot at their policy then you've just wasted the opportunity. Go for the big contentious issues of the debate that they maybe glossed over, avoided specifically or ignored completely.

## 6. Style

It's best to consider „Style“ as being made up of five distinct pillars. While adjudicators won't be basing your mark for style on an analysis of each of the individual pillars they will be viewing the package as a whole and basing your mark on that.

The following is a breakdown of each pillar and then suggestions for ways to improve your ability to fulfil that pillar. That's not to say that these suggestions are the be all and end all of good style. They're simply there to guide your thinking and to make available a few options that you can use when working on your style.

The most important thing to remember is that you need to be comfortable to have good style. So by all means try the suggestions out and then decide what works best for you. The benefit to view each pillar as an individual piece of a puzzle means that you can isolate one pillar or two pillars to work on per training.

The five pillars are:

- 1) **Audibility:** Is a speaker easily understood? Does the speaker speak too quickly or quietly (speaking too loudly is just as bad)? Does the speaker “swallow” their words?
- 2) **Engagement:** Does the speaker successfully use their body language, facial expressions and tone of voice (properly conveying emotion, avoiding monotone) in order to capture and retain the audience's attention.
- 3) **Conviction:** Does the speaker look like they believe what they are saying?
- 4) **Authority:** Could one believe that the speaker is confident that they know what they are talking about and have mastered what they are saying?
- 5) **Connection:** Is the speaker aware of the audience and the need to win them over. This means avoiding alienating people with insults and offensive language or coming across as unlikeable in general.

\*Note: There can be an overlap of actions amongst the different pillars i.e. eye contact is important for Engagement, Connection and Authority.

My stock standard answer when people ask me what they need to do to improve their style is to just tell them to be themselves. It's easy to tell when people are putting on a persona and adjudicators do not like it. Style basically comes down to the question of how confident you are with yourself.

## **Audibility**

This is one of the key aspects in order for a speech to be received. Speak too softly and nobody will hear. Speak too loudly and you'll be considered to abrasive. Too flabby and people won't get everything you were meant to say.

Unless you are specifically using a vocal trick to convey something, you want to pitch the volume of your speech at a conversational level. So think about how you normally talk. Yes, sometimes we get louder or softer depending on what point we're trying to convey but usually we talk at a specific and comfortable volume. You want that volume.

My suggestion is that you (if possible) test the venue out beforehand. So if you're prepping in the venue then have a little test. Stand at the desk you'll be using and deliver a few lines to one of your team members standing where the adjudicators will be sitting until you're certain that you're used to the volume that is needed.

If you can't do this test beforehand then get your non-speaking team members to sit either inline with the adjudicators OR near the back of the room and then indicate to you whether you need to turn the volume up or down a bit. Volume modulation is incredibly important to making sure that the adjudicators can actually hear the awesome speech that you've prepared so make sure you work on it.

Flabby speaking is when your sentences don't end crisply and clearly. A number of you often trail off some sentences near the end so that the last five or six words become inaudible. The most annoying thing is that many of you do this when you're wrapping up points/arguments. This usually happens because as you approach the end of your point you lean down to look at your page and round your shoulders. Now you're talking to the desk and not to any people. Don't do it or we are going to have issues.

Alternatively you do it when you have asked a speaker to hold his POI until you've finished as if you're trying to hurry because you're embarrassed to have kept them waiting. Let them wait! Finish off your point while looking at the adjudicators and then turn to them. Make sure you don't rush. That floor is yours during your speech and you don't let anyone boss you about on it.

Finally, some of you just need to slow down. You speak too fast and it doesn't matter how audible you are, nobody will take a thing from you. Again, use prompters from your team members to indicate when you need to slow down or pick up speed. And breathe. Take deep breaths or sips of water after you finish making the conclusions of major points or while listening to POIs. It really is easy as long as you're disciplined about it.



## **Engagement**

Here we're looking at how successful you are at engaging the audience and opposition i.e. how do you interact with them during the debate. For the most part it's about using body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tone and pitch of voice and deliberate hand actions to make it feel like you're actively and purposefully interacting with all the different groups in the room.

**Hands** The general idea here is that you need to relax. Most people tend to have an emotive hand, the hand they point and gesture with. You need to try and get to a situation in which you use both hands relatively evenly. So you want to actively point at your team/your team's side when referring to arguments you've either made or which you're proving for your side to win.

You want to point at the opposition (point is probably a bad word, gesture is better) when you're referring to points they've made; point at specific speakers when referring to the points they made specifically. If you're referring to yourself and points you have made or are going to make do the little double handed point at yourself (or use one if you'd like) or a little adjustment of your tie; as long as it's something that brings the audience's attention to you when you're talking about yourself.

**Body position** is important too. When you have the floor you want to fill that space as much as possible so that the adjudicators have no choice but to focus on you. You do this with your presence and body position is just one aspect of presence. Generally you want to keep your chest exposed to the audience and the adjudicators in particular. The only time your chest should be obscured is when you're making deliberate hand actions, like pointing at yourself, which would obscure their view and then it's only a momentary action.

To keep your chest exposed and broad you want to make sure that you're keeping your shoulders straight and back. So no slouching, leaning down or keeping your arms crossed/folded in front of you which just rounds your shoulders inwards. My rule of thumb is to take a couple of deep breaths (the kind that lift your shoulders as you fill your lungs and where your torso lengthens because it feels almost like your stomach is being sucked in) just before I start, at every conclusion/premise/pause (so where I asked you to highlight for the Denny Crane game) and during any breaks like POI's. This will not only realign your chest but also give you a bit more „oomph“ when you launch into your next sentence.

**Arms** I like to have my speech structured in such a way that I have points ranked by numbers, so: “There are three conclusions that can be drawn from this” or “there are two groups of people to consider”.

Doing this allows me to create work for my hands. So I can either highlight the point with one finger/two fingers as I go through them or do what you were doing two weeks ago where you counted the points off on one hand (using the other hand to point to each finger). If you're doing the latter make sure that your hands aren't too low or too high. They should be around about that area where that strip of abs is just above your belly button. When you're not counting down things your arms should be at your side, one hand can be in a pocket (whatever you feel comfortable with) or both hands can be visible.

Rule of thumb here, if they're just lazing about, is that you want your elbows slightly bent (right angle at the most) and your forearms should be angled out as if they were shaping a „V“ with your body as the point. So they're open slightly to make it seem like you're open to the audience. Think of it this way: you want to show the adjudicators/audience the inside of your forearms and wrist; soft vulnerable spots which make them think that you're comfortable enough with them to allow them to see those points. Finally, when answering a POI you want to make sure that you face the askee but also the adjudicators. You want to put your body at an obtuse angle almost as if your body is the pinnacle of a triangle joining the adjudicators and opposition. Look at the askee. Make eye contact with them and hold it. In a conflict situation people don't like making and sustaining eye contact; it's unnerving.

Best case scenario they fluff the POI, worst case you look like you're engaging with them. If, as the POI goes along, and you don't agree with it, shake your head. It's unnerving and annoying for them. Then when you do answer the POI make sure that you share your attention with both the adjudicators/audience and the askee.

**Eye contact:** Make sure you make eye contact (and hold it for a bit) with whichever adjudicator is looking up at the time, especially when you're drawing conclusions. But spread it around amongst the adjudicators if you can. Focus on one your entire speech and they're going to think you're either weird or enamoured with them. At other times during the speech look at members of the audience. Not at the wall above their heads or at their feet; make eye contact with them. Also make eye contact with the opposition/specific speakers when you're doing your rebuttal/telling them what they failed to do/what they need to do.

**Facial expressions and ticks:** You'll find that you're more expressive when you're making eye contact but the main idea here is that you want to reinforce your points with your face. So make little nods when you're saying something that is good/drawing conclusions. Little shakes of the head when you're saying something is wrong/rebutting etc.

## **Conviction and Authority**

These two pillars share a lot in common and are heavily reliant upon one another. If people believe that you care about what you're saying or that you believe in what you're saying then they're more likely to believe that you're an authority on it within the context of the debate.

These pillars are concerned with whether or not people listening to you believe that you genuinely care/believe in what you're saying. Often these are the hardest pillars for debaters to fulfil because a lot of the topics you do you either won't care about or are patently against and so it becomes hard to „fake“. But it doesn't have to be.

Within these debates you will find areas that do matter to you; that you do have an opinion about whether it's free speech or security or poverty. These become your marker areas.

Highlight them in your speech and when you get to them show a little passion or emotion. Speak from the heart rather than the page. That conviction/belief will be easy to see and will then rub off on the other points you say whether or not you do actually believe in them. Alternatively the adjudicators will not your passion on those areas and they'll then often subconsciously spread that passion over the rest of your speech. Bottom-line: you need to sell what you're saying!

Another way to sell what you're saying is to drop in a few examples or statistics. You don't need to do an entire case study but a few examples or statistics does wonders for making people believe that you actually know something about the topic.

## **Connection**

Even the best speakers can be undone here. At the end of the day the adjudicators will always be hesitant handing a debate to people they don't like. That doesn't mean they have to like you but it does mean that they can't hate you or be irritated by you. You don't want to offend people with poor jokes or particularly rude language even if they aren't the butt of the joke/subject of the language.

You don't make fun of people because they have a funny accent or clearly don't understand a concept. You don't be rude to people (this is one of the reasons we tell you not to cut a person off in a POI unless they go over the 15s limit – and then when you do you always tell them nicely that you're cutting them off because they're over time). You don't scream and shout at people, swear at them, flip them the bird or anything like that. You don't roll your eyes or make it seem like you think they're an idiot. You be polite. You can still be passionate and polite so don't feel like you're detriminting yourself.

The disclaimer here is that there is a difference between being rude and having banter. Sometimes you'll go up against people you know fairly well and the debate will turn into one of those back and forth, give and take affairs. There is a little less decorum, jokes are made, people are teased. That's fine provided both teams are into it. The adjudicators can plainly see when both sides are friends and are having a bit of fun.

But when one side is largely unresponsive to the jokes then it probably means that a line has been crossed. And if that happens in a debate, if you say something that is construed as an insult then apologise immediately. It will make you seem less of a douche.