

Learn to Refute

The Five Devices of Refutation

Can you win an argument and lose the audience because of not knowing how to refute?

Public speaking involves refutation. Your ability with this skill is an essential aspect of persuasive public speech. Mastering this skill could give you an unfair advantage over other speakers.

This is because refutation is not typically taught in basic public speaking.

To refute a proposition or argument, there are two ways to use the five special devices. Rather than viewing it as attacking the opponent, use a kind and reasoning manner. It will help win an argument and more importantly win the audience.

Remember the old saying about winning the battle and losing the war. It is important to know the difference between winning an argument and winning an audience.

Learning how to refute is an important aspect of Speechmastery. The five special devices can fall into two general uses.

Two Ways to Refute

General Refutation challenges the proposition as a whole or in its entirety.

Special Refutation challenges details, proofs, reasoning or arguments.

To refute successfully requires critical thinking skill. Your effectiveness of these devices is enhanced by the one presenting the opposing viewpoint failing to follow the rules of sound argumentation.

To Test the Opposing View

Use these questions to test the opposing view points as well as your own. Are there any openings for them to refute what you are saying? Are there any flaws in their presentation? Consider these questions...

- Have undefined, misleading or ambiguous terms, explanations, or references been used?
- Are the definitions used accurate and up to date?
- Are claims being made with out proof or evidence?
- Do the claims meet the truth tests?

This is just a brief look at openings where it is possible to refute a proposition or argument.

The Five Devices of Refutation

There are five ways or devices to refute an argument.

- Turning the Tables
- Reducing to an Absurdity
- Dilemma
- Residues
- Enforcing the Consequences

Now let's look at some of the ways it is possible to refute an argument.

Turning the Tables

This requires adopting the opposing argument and turning it so as to use it against him. It takes an argument and rather than supporting the opponent, uses it to bolster the position of the one refuting.

Reducing to an Absurdity

This tool requires taking up the argument of the opposing viewpoint as if it were true and then showing that it leads to an absurdity.

Dilemma

This can take on three forms. It is possible to take the opposing viewpoint and reduce it into two alternatives and then disprove each of the two positions.

It is also possible to take the argument and make it into two alternatives that neither can be the answer.

A third way is to make it into two alternatives which include a greater and lesser evil, of which the audience will choose the lesser.

Example. In trying to propose a new paved road to replace a dirt road, the **Dilemma** might be used this way against the opponents. Their main objection is the additional \$180 per year in property taxes it will bring for each and every resident.

"We can put a road in and increase everyone's taxes by 50 cents per day for the privilege of using this new road or we can leave it to consider the future in hopes of the economy getting better.

In the mean time, the cost of maintenance of a dirt road and the wear and tear and maintenance on our cars will continue to increase. The future cost of the road will also increase."

"So for less than a weekly trip to the car wash, we can have a clean dry road and reduce the dust in our homes along our new road or continue to replace springs and shocks and clean the dust and think about it tomorrow when it will cost more."

Residues

Residues are like a dilemma only the proposition is divided into all of its possibilities and then eliminate the false or undesirable outcomes. The only true or the best is left standing.

Enforcing the Consequences

Similar to reducing to an absurdity, it takes an argument and shows that if carried out to its logical conclusion it is undesirable or illogical.

Perhaps my favorite tool, I like using this with those who follow the eastern philosophy and religions that teach you need bad to appreciate the good, pain to enjoy pleasure.

If you carry that thought to its logical conclusion, it would be like this guy I saw hitting his head against a wall. I asked why he was doing that. He said because it felt so much better when he didn't and he wanted to appreciate that feeling of not hurting.

But don't stop there. You would need to die to fully appreciate life. But how could you appreciate it if you're dead. Even if you believe you went into some other life form, you could still no longer enjoy the life you have right now. It would be an entirely different life if it were true.

So not only is the philosophy or belief illogical, it doesn't withstand some of the most basic truth tests let alone, the best truth test of all, common sense.

I do not need to have pain to know the joy of feeling great. I do not need heartache to appreciate the wonder of being in love. I don't have to grow old and have aches and pain to enjoy my youth.

It may sound like something smart to repeat, but there is no scientific evidence let alone evidence in the Bible that such a belief is a truth. It is just a philosophy. It is not true.

There you have it, five special devices to aid you in your ability to refute.

On your way to Speechmastery, use them to win arguments and audiences. Don't use them to belittle or win fights.

Refutation Why do you need to know how to use this skill? Included you will find an emotionally charged example of how refutation works and the two types.

Argumentation What is it and why do public speakers need this skill?