

Refutation

Refutation, in its simplest terms is the disproving of an argument. Sometimes arguments of opposing view points need to be cleared before it is possible to get on with the message of a speech. Sometimes they need to be answered after the speech. Refutation is one of the best tools for this job.

Some arguments will surface like perennial stones brought up by winter's frost. Farmers remove these from their field every spring. A little clearing and the ground is ready for the seasons crops to grow. When speaking, it may be necessary to deal with occasional rock like arguments so the thought you plant can likewise grow.

In other cases, the arguments needing to be cleared are like the fields of Delaware County in upstate New York. The farmers describe the fields as having 2 stones for every dirt. There will be numerous prejudices and biases to be cleared away. At the least, they need to be acknowledged.

A farmer may have an occasional tree stump. The stump requires navigating the tractor around to plow the field. It is a nuisance unless you either dig it up or use dynamite to remove it.

Dynamite may be great for tree stumps but it has no place in public speaking. On the other hand, tact can move mountains. With out tact, you will close the minds of listeners and any chance of persuading is over at least for the rest of your speech.

So how do you tactfully refute the beliefs or arguments of an opposing viewpoint?

Knowledge First

Knowledge of your proposition is important. Also important is the knowledge of the opposing view point. Knowing what objections might be lobbed at you will allow you to cover them in your speech.

First and foremost, knowledge of your side of the argument is of primary concern. If a treasury agent is undergoing training in counterfeit money detection, he doesn't study counterfeits. He studies the real thing. When he sees the counterfeit, he will know it.

He will study some common telltale signs to make it easy to teach the average person. But his focus is on Knowing what is real.

Know what is real and what kind of refutation will reach the minds and listening style of the listeners. As always, it requires knowing the audience.

Also focus the knowledge on the key points and not trivialities, minor points and insignificant details. It is the main points that make or allow for the breaking of an argument.

Know the principles of good argumentation.

Questions to test the argument

Are the terms used ambiguous, undefined, or misleading?

Are the definitions correct?

Are there proof for assertions?

Is there evidence for any broad or general statements?

A Refutation Example

To demonstrate...In discussing **Bloodless Medicine**, in the question session after a lecture, invariably a doctor will say something to the effect that all he knows is he has had patients who refused blood and died and or he has given blood and kept patients alive. This is a broad and sweeping statement. The evidence he is providing is his experience in practice.

His experience is true as far as it has taken him. Remember, I want to win him and all in the room.

So my **refutation will first** agree with his statement that those patients who were given blood would have indeed possibly died. The blood may have saved those lives.

Evidence based Medicine however (and here I would include any of a few hundred journal article references) has proven that if properly treated patients who avoid blood transfusions actually have a lower morbidity and mortality. So those patients who got blood and died (the ones he didn't mention), they too could be saved with this new modality.

So we have a dilemma. Do nothing and let a patient die. Give them blood and save their life.

My lecture is proposing a third option. Use state of the art treatment modalities and not only save their life, but do so respecting their choice of treatment (most bloodless patients ask for it) and reduce their risk and shortening hospital stay.

As a matter of fact, (Now to drive home the point) there are no high level studies that show that Blood Transfusions save lives. All the knowledge is purely anecdotal. All the high level studies have shown the opposite. The more blood given, the higher the morbidity and mortality and the less to no blood the higher the survival rate and lower risk and shorter the hospital stay. This even takes into account those patients where 90% blood loss has been experienced.

From 1904 to the present, there have been no high level studies that prove blood transfusions save lives.

Properly treated, evidence shows those avoiding blood transfusions have an increased chance of survival. (Here my challenger will want to see my evidence. It will require showing several studies where the blood counts of patients dropped to an ominous range of 1.8-2.8. Studies have shown those receiving 10 or more units have a 50-50 chance of survival. Bloodless patients have a higher survival rate if properly treated. Closer to 80%)

Two Types of Refutation

General Refutation has a purpose of refuting or disproving the opposing viewpoint as a whole or in its totality. Avoid the attack mentality. Effective in debate, it can wreak havoc in trying to persuade or motivate.

Specific Refutation on the other hand wants to disprove the details, proof or argument of the opposing viewpoint. Use with great care.

If the belief is closely held and cherished, it may cause more harm than help to attack it head on. Rather take the tack of explaining why you find it hard to accept the belief. Your open to the possibility if proven but as of yet, you have not been able to get beyond the refutation you will provide.

As you refute the various opinions you face, make sure what is in your hands is a tool and not a weapon. Words can kill, hurt and maim. The goal of Speechmastery is be so skillful with the use of words so as to build up and heal. Use refutation wisely.

Would you like to learn more on this topic?

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

Refute two ways and the five special devices.