Champion Press

Public Forum Debate Comprehensive Flexbook

Sample Chapter

This packet includes a complete chapter as a sample of the Competitive Series Public Forum Debate Flexbook! The combination textbook and workbook includes everything students need to know to compete in Public Forum Debate at the high school level.

As you'll see in this sample, every chapter includes explanations of concepts paired with application activities, exercises and drills, review questions, discussion prompts, and more. Many chapters include videos and other content that helps students understand the material.

The Public Forum Debate Comprehensive Flexbook includes lessons on:

- Public Speaking Skills
- Argumentation Structure
- Intricacies of Research
- Rules & Norms
- Case Writing
- Refutation and Defense
- Judge Adaptation
- Advanced Strategies

The Flexbook model allows students to complete activities within the book as they learn new speech and debate skills. This edition is the result of contributions from 10 nationally acclaimed debate educators with 100+ years of combined classroom experience.

If you have any questions, please contact us at Team@TheChampionPress.com

Chapter 8: Ready to R.I.O.T.

Core Question: How do I effectively refute an argument?

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Understand logical fallacies
- ✓ Utilize different types of responses
- ✓ Apply refutation to real-world arguments

The difference between a speech and a debate is the clash of arguments. Let's learn how to respond to your opponent's arguments and reinforce your own.

Refutation is the practice of disagreeing with an argument in a structured way to diminish its believability or impact.

8.1 Logical Fallacies

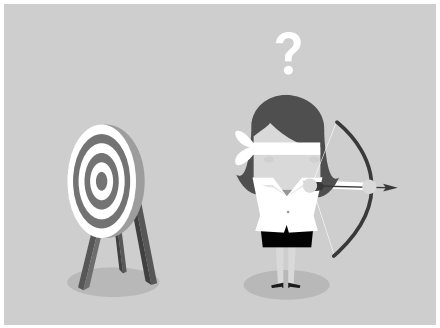
While arguments can have a variety of flaws, understanding logical fallacies will prepare you to respond to basic issues with your opponent's arguments and avoid those same issues yourself.

About Logical Fallacies

A ***logical fallacy*** is a statement that seems convincing or true but actually relies on faulty reasoning and arrives at an untrue conclusion.

A logical fallacy is like a trap in your argument that, when spotted, can derail your entire point. Logical fallacies can make an argument invalid, unsound, or weak, and they're more common than you might think. You'll find them in everyday conversations, political speeches, advertisements, and, yes, even debates.

While some logical fallacies are used unintentionally, others are employed deliberately to mislead or manipulate. Either way, knowing how to spot and counter them is a crucial skill in debating.



Key Logical Fallacies

There are many types of logical fallacies, each with its own unique way of clouding reasoning. Some might appeal to emotion rather than facts, others might use flawed logic to draw incorrect conclusions, while others might attack the person making the argument instead of addressing the argument itself.

Here are a few of the most common logical fallacies:

Ad Hominem Fallacy

An ***Ad Hominem fallacy*** occurs when someone attacks the person making the argument rather than the argument itself. This tactic is used to deflect attention away from the substance of the debate, effectively sidestepping the need to engage with the argument's merits. It's a fallacy because the character or attributes of a person have no bearing on the truth or falsity of the proposition they're putting forward.

Example: "You can't know anything about this topic, you're only 15 years old!"

Appeal to Authority

An ***Appeal to Authority fallacy*** is when someone relies heavily on the opinion of an 'expert' instead of presenting factual evidence. While experts can provide valuable insights, they can also be wrong. A robust argument must present factual evidence to support a claim. Without scrutiny, an argument might rely on incorrect or biased information.

Example: "According to a well-known professor, this policy is the best one."

Straw Man Fallacy

A ***Straw Man fallacy*** involves distorting, exaggerating, or oversimplifying an argument, leaving it open to attack if you dig a little deeper. This is a fallacy because it misrepresents the opponent's position and sidesteps engaging with the actual argument, which leads to unproductive debates.

Example: "My opponent suggests we should conserve water; clearly, they want us to stop bathing!"

Hasty Generalization

Hasty Generalization is a fallacy that involves making a broad claim based on limited or insufficient evidence. Such an argument is a fallacy because it draws conclusions from insufficient data, and the claim may not represent the wider group or reality accurately.

Example: "I asked five of my friends, and they all agreed with me. Therefore, everyone must agree with me."

False Dichotomy

A ***False Dichotomy fallacy*** is when someone presents an argument as having only two options when in fact, there could be more. This fallacy is misleading because it oversimplifies complex issues, potentially omitting other viable options or solutions.

Example: "Either we implement this policy, or our society will collapse."

Slippery Slope

A ***Slippery Slope fallacy*** is when someone argues that a small action will lead to more significant, often negative, actions without providing evidence that these events will occur. It's a fallacy because it bases the argument on speculation and fear, rather than solid evidence or logical reasoning.

Example: "If we allow students to use calculators in schools, soon they won't be able to do any mental math!"

Circular Argument

A ***Circular Argument fallacy*** is when someone's argument is simply restating what they're trying to prove. It's a fallacy because it doesn't provide new evidence or reasoning to support the claim, making the argument unproductive and hollow.

Example: "I'm trustworthy because I always tell the truth."

Perfectionist Fallacy

A ***Perfectionist fallacy*** dismisses a solution because it fails to solve the issue entirely or isn't perfect. It's a fallacy because it creates an unrealistic standard for acceptance, which often hampers progress and neglects the potential benefits of partial solutions.

Example: "We shouldn't invest in renewable energy because it can't fix climate change right now."

These are just some of the fallacies you may notice during a competitive debate round. If you're interested, you can research other fallacies to learn more ways to address flaws in argument logic.

Strategies for Addressing Logical Fallacies

Countering fallacies is a skill that you will improve over time. Here are some tips to help you respond to common fallacies.

1. **Recognize the fallacy:** Use your knowledge to identify the fallacy at play.
2. **Call it out:** Politely point out the fallacy in your opponent's argument and explain why it's problematic.
3. **Reframe the argument:** Redirect the conversation back to the topic and provide a valid counter-argument.

Champ's Work: Identifying Logical Fallacies

I heard a few things in debates and I think they might be logical fallacies. Can you identify which logical fallacy applies to each?

1. "If we allow smartphones to be used in the classroom, next thing we know, students will stop listening to teachers and only look at their screens."

   Logical Fallacy: _____

2. "Either we eliminate standardized testing entirely, or our students will never truly learn critical thinking skills."

   Logical Fallacy: _____

3. "Our opponents propose a policy of increased funding for public schools. I guess they want us to pour all our taxes into education and let everything else in our society collapse!"

   Logical Fallacy: _____

4. "Why should we bother with school recycling programs when they don't stop global warming?"

   Logical Fallacy: _____

5. "Our policy proposal is the best because it's the most effective."

   Logical Fallacy: _____

6. "You're either with us, or you're against us."

   Logical Fallacy: _____

7. "Based on the interviews we conducted with students from our school, it's clear that teenagers across the nation want a later school start time."

   Logical Fallacy: _____

Concept Checkpoint

1. What is a logical fallacy, and why is it crucial to identify them in a debate?
2. How can understanding logical fallacies enhance the quality of your arguments in a debate?
3. What are some strategies you can employ to counteract logical fallacies in your opponent's argument during a debate?
4. Outside of debate, where are some places to look out for logical fallacies?

8.2 Responding to Arguments

If you've ever watched a debate on TV, you may have thought, "they're each just saying what they want, not addressing each other's arguments." In competitive debate, judges might complain that a debate was "like two ships passing in the night." That phrase suggests there was little engagement or comparative analysis done by either team.

Let's learn how to clash in debates with rebuttals and responses so that you're always prepared to address your opponent's arguments.

As you progress in your debate career, you will notice that both the logic and evidence of your opponent's arguments become stronger. While more complex arguments require more voluminous and complex responses, the basics of refutation will serve you well throughout your career.

Types of Responses

Let's start from the basics. There are a few ways to think about responses, and one of the simplest is R.I.O.T.

R - Reduce

I - Indict

O - Outweigh

T - Turn

Let's explore these types of responses.

Reducing

Reducing or mitigating arguments is the practice of undermining the scope of an impact to make the argument less relevant.

Imagine discussing wanting a new PlayStation 5 with your parents. They might claim that $500 is too expensive. If you responded by saying, "but I really want it," they probably wouldn't be convinced.

But if you informed them about a sale that would save $100, that might change their minds.

In that singular instance, you countered the argument by reducing the impact. While this strategy can be an effective tool when weighing arguments, it might not be entirely convincing if you don't address the underlying evidence.

Let's look at the example topic *Resolved: Compulsory voting should be implemented in the United States.*

Your opponent has made an argument that says poverty will decrease by 20% because of more representative policymaking. You might respond with a piece of evidence that shows poverty will only decrease by 10%. You've effectively reduced your opponent's impact, but 10% is still better than nothing. Your opponent can still hold up that statistic as a valid point.

Other forms of refutation might be more effective.

Indicting

Indicting involves discrediting the source or quality of your opponent's evidence.

Suppose you're negotiating with your parents again, and they say that they read in a blog post that the Playstation 5 might be harmful to your mental health. You might point out that the blog post is not a credible source and doesn't reference any scientific studies. If you prove that the blog post is not to be believed, you've effectively indicted the argument.

Returning to the compulsory voting topic, if your opponent argues that compulsory voting increases civic participation, citing an opinion article from a local newspaper, you can indict their argument by questioning the credibility and relevance of the source. Is the author an expert in political science or sociology? Does the article provide any substantial data or research to back up its claim?

Outweighing

Outweighing means demonstrating that your point has a greater impact or importance compared to your opponent's argument.

Now your parents say that even $400 is too steep a price to pay for a PlayStation 5. They're clearly not budging based on the price decrease. So you might argue that using the Playstation will help you relax, which will help you focus more on school. Your grades will improve, and you will get a better scholarship for college, which then saves your parents money in the long term. The long-term savings might outweigh their argument about short-term costs.

Back to our debate topic. If your opponent argues that compulsory voting will increase voter turnout, you might respond by saying that compulsory voting infringes on individual freedoms and autonomy. You argue that protecting fundamental rights is more important than boosting voter turnout. This is an attempt to outweigh your opponent's argument.

You can outweigh an argument using a few different common metrics.

Magnitude refers to the overall strength of an impact. On the compulsory voting topic, you could argue that strengthening democracy outweighs protecting individual liberty because the strength of the democracy has a larger overall impact on society–and is even key to protecting individual freedom. You can compare intangible impacts like democracy vs. liberty or tangible impacts like two competing statistics.

Scope refers to the number of stakeholders an argument impacts. On the compulsory voting topic, you could argue that affirming and strengthening democracy outweighs concerns about individual liberty because everyone benefits from democracy, while compulsory voting infringes on the individual liberty of only a minority of Americans. The difference between magnitude and scope is that magnitude addresses how much the impact is felt and scope addresses how widely the impact is felt.

Timeframe refers to how soon an impact comes to fruition. On the compulsory voting topic, you could argue that negating and protecting individual liberty outweighs affirming and defending democracy because strengthening American democracy could take decades, while simply negating the resolution will preserve individual liberty today.

Probability refers to how likely it is for an impact to occur. On the compulsory voting topic, you could argue that preserving individual liberty outweighs strengthening democracy on probability because negating definitely prevents the infringement of liberty, while affirming is not guaranteed to strengthen democracy.

Outweighing arguments requires thorough, easy-to-comprehend explanations that will convince your audience of the comparison you're attempting to make. It is an effective tool, but be careful not to under-explain your stance.

Turning

Turning is the practice of taking an opponent's argument and twisting it to support your side.

For example, let's go back to your conversation with your parents about the PlayStation 5. Your parents might argue that investing in the game console would lead to you spending more time indoors. However, you could turn this argument by stating that the PlayStation 5 offers a wide array of fitness and sports games that can actually encourage physical activity and improve coordination. You can further support this by mentioning that the use of these games can help you achieve your daily physical activity requirements even when the weather outside is unfavorable.

In this way, what was initially presented as a negative effect (more time indoors) has been turned into a positive effect (maintaining physical activity), supporting your case.

In a debate context, suppose your opponent argues that compulsory voting ensures all citizens' voices are heard. You could turn this argument by stating that compulsory voting might force uninformed or disinterested individuals to vote, potentially leading to poor political decisions. By doing this, you've turned their argument to support your stance against compulsory voting.

Turning can be the most impactful form of refutation because you're using your opponent's evidence in your own favor, and they will likely avoid indicting their own evidence. That said, this strategy only applies to a limited selection of arguments, and you'll find that the other methods of refutation are more common.

Most responses to arguments can be categorized as one of the four R.I.O.T. responses. Next, we'll explore how to apply these methods to a debate round to address your opponent's arguments.

Champ's Work: Basic Refutation

Let's practice some refutation strategies! Imagine you and your friend are discussing the start time of your classes. You're arguing that the start time should be 8:00am and your friend says school should start at 10:00am. They mention a study that shows improved grades at one school in Canada that tried a later start time. They also say that everyone will get more sleep, which is good for health, and can get more done in the morning if school starts later.

Can you come up with four counter arguments?

Reduce: _____

Indict: _____

Outweigh: _____

Turn: _____

Concept Checkpoint

1. What is the meaning of "two ships passing in the night" in the context of a debate, and how can you avoid this situation?

2. Explain the R.I.O.T. model for responding to arguments in a debate. What does each letter stand for, and how is each strategy employed?

3. When might you use each type of response in a debate, and what are the potential benefits and drawbacks of each?

Chapter 8 Review

Applying Key Ideas

Want to practice your skills? Here are a few exercises to help you improve:

1. Consider a recent argument you had. Which logical fallacies were involved? Could you have used any of the R.I.O.T. strategies in your refutation?

2. Look up a recent public debate (e.g., political debates, social media debates). Identify any logical fallacies used and discuss how the debaters addressed them.

3. Create hypothetical arguments for a topic of your choice and try to refute them using each of the R.I.O.T. strategies.

4. Have a partner read out different arguments on a topic found in Appendix B, and try to come up with responses to their arguments.

5. Find an article about any topic and practice identifying the problems with the arguments made in the article.

6. Return to the arguments you generated for a case in Chapter 7. What responses to your case can you come up with using the R.I.O.T. method?

Discussing Key Concepts

Here are some key concepts to discuss that will help you better understand what you've learned:

1. How can understanding logical fallacies improve the quality of your debate?

2. When might each of the R.I.O.T. strategies be most effectively used? Are there situations where one might be preferable over the others?

3. How might the principles of refutation apply outside of formal debates, such as in personal conversations or discussions at work/school?

4. Do you think logical fallacies are more often used intentionally or unintentionally? Why do you think this is the case?