

Debate - Structuring Your Argument

MANTRA: Deliberative argument is not about truth, it's about choices. Those choices become your offense and defense.

OFFENSE

- I. Set your goals
 - a. What do you want out of the argument?
 - b. What are your goals for your audience? Do you want to change their mood, their mind, and their willingness to carry out what you want?
- II. Control the tense
 - a. Do you want to fix blame? -> use past tense (threatens punishment)
 - b. Do you want to define who meets or abuses your common values? -> use present tense
 - c. Do you want your audience to make a choice? -> use future tense (rhetoric of decision making – promises a payoff)
- III. Soften them up
 - a. Argument by character** (Aristotle called this the most important appeal)
 - i. rhetorical decorum – the art of fitting in
 1. act the way your audience expects you to act – not necessarily like your audience
 - a. voice control
 - b. gestures
 - c. clothing – dress slightly above your rank
 - d. timing
 - e. manners
 - ii. three essential qualities of a persuasive ethos
 1. virtue – you adapt to what your audience values
 2. practical wisdom – the instinct to make the right decision on every occasion
 - a. show off your experience
 - i. experience usually trumps book learning
 - b. bend the rules
 - i. if the rules don't apply, don't apply them
 - c. seem to take the middle course
 3. selflessness – only have the audience's best interests at heart
 - a. either act wholly objective (act as though you felt compelled to reach your conclusion, despite your own desires)
 - b. or nobly self-sacrificing (act as if the choice will help your audience more than you)
 - b. Argument by logic
 - i. the most powerful tool -> concession: using the opponent's argument to your own advantage (more Jedi-knight than Rambo)
 - c. Argument by emotion
 - i. sympathize – align yourself with your listener's emotions. It doesn't mean you have to share the mood, but you are trying to shift the mood.

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- ii. tell a story
 - 1. the more vivid, the more it seems like a real experience
 - 2. gives your audience a vicarious experience
 - 3. works for every emotion
 - iii. use self-control
 - 1. don't throw a tantrum
 - 2. use passive voice (it implies that the action happened on its own)
 - iv. some common emotions
 - 1. humor – very persuasive but very rarely motivates action
 - 2. sorrow, shame, humility – often prevents action altogether
 - 3. joy, love, esteem, compassion – work better at motivating
 - 4. the most effective?
 - a. anger
 - b. patriotism – when the group is threatened
 - c. emulation – an emotional response to a role model
- IV. Control the argument
- a. Deductive logic
 - i. begins with a premise and applies it to a specific case to reach a conclusion
 - 1. Declaration of Independence
 - a. premise = all men are created equal
 - b. case = King George III has violated those unalienable rights
 - b. Inductive logic
 - i. takes specific cases and uses them to prove/form a premise
 - 1. facts
 - 2. comparison
 - 3. story
 - ii. best to use when you're not sure if your audience shares your position

DEFENSE

- I. Spot fallacies
 - a. false comparison – two things are similar so they must be the same
 - b. bad example – hasty generalization
 - c. ignorance as proof – lack of examples proves that something doesn't exist
 - d. begging the question – the proof and the conclusion are the same thing
 - e. equivocating
 - f. ad hominem – making personal attacks on opponents that are irrelevant to the argument
 - g. red herring – something that distracts the audience
 - h. slippery slope – one choice leads to a dire series of events
- II. Call a foul
- III. Know whom to trust