# Crystallization: Winning for Dummies

*Created by Josh Roberts*

*Abstract: Every debater's goal, at the end of the debate, is to have presented reasons convincing the judge to vote for his/her side. This, inherently, demands that debaters be able to communicate their ideas in a manner that judges are able to understand and re-explain when they are giving their reason for decision. Unfortunately, the art of crystallization has been lost on debaters, making rounds for judges much harder to decide, and even costing debaters rounds that they probably should have won. This article intends to equip you with the tools to make sure that you don't lose another round due to an inability to crystallize.*

## The Biggest Mistakes Made In Regards To Crystallization

### What Crystallization Isn't

Somehow it's crept into our way of thinking that crystallization means that we just summarize the arguments that have already been made. Debaters think that as long as they aren't re-reading their evidence word for word, and just explaining it in a shorter manner, that they have crystallized the round. Crystallization isn't the rewording and reformulation of an argument you introduced in the first speech. If this is how you are approaching crystallization, then you are putting yourself at a disadvantage because you are doing nothing to adapt to what your opponent is saying, and how they're interacting their arguments with yours, letting them bend and define your argument in their favor.

### My Judge is Flowing So I Don't Need to Crystallize

Wrong. Just because the judge is writing down everything that you're saying does not mean that your obligation to clean up the round via crystallization is gone. Even if the judge is following every argument in the round, you still have a self-interested reason to crystallize, and that reason is that crystallization makes the round so much more decisive in your favor. If, at the end of the debate, you have laid out very clear issues that take into account everything that has happened in the debate, and not just your initial argument, you will have made it very easy for the judge to decide to vote for you—assuming you are winning the arguments you claim to be winning.

## The Big Picture: What Crystallization Is All About

### What is Crystallization?

Crystallization is the process of gathering your argument in relation to the arguments your opponent has made regarding that argument, and explaining how they interact with one another in a coherent manner so

the judge knows what your argument is, what your opponent's argument is, and why you are still winning the debate.

What does this require on your part? *Clarity.*

Part of ensuring that your speeches are maintaining a high quality of clarity is making sure that you are not getting sucked into the minutia of the debate. Often it is all too tempting to immediately start going down the flow and answering individual arguments. This is a very myopic view of the debate round, and one that is going to hurt you at the end of the debate when you may have 20 arguments, but none of them have been developed into a clear, coherent story that the judge can use to formulate a reason to vote for you.

You should be thinking about your crystallization as a story. Don't worry so much about the technical aspects of an argument during this time; you will get to that in a minute. Instead, be thinking about how you would explain what has taken place in the debate round to someone who hadn't seen any of the round, but wanted a short summary. Effective crystallization requires that you take into account what you have said as well as what your opponent has said. If you ignore the arguments your opponents make when you're crystallizing the round, then you are allowing them the opportunity to re-explain their arguments however they want in relation to yours, thus allowing them to make their arguments a lot stronger than they may actually be.

Even if you are under the impression that the round is so out of hand that there is no way that you could possibly lose, you should always crystallize. At the very least, it will do wonders for your speaker points, as judges notice that you are making the round even easier for them to evaluate.

**The Decision Calculus: How To Tell the Judge You Have Won**

One of the most important things you can do with regard to crystallization is establish a hierarchy, or order of operations. Every argument you make does not hold equal weight in the round, and you will look foolish if you explain it like that to the judge. You need to establish a decision calculus for the judge that lets the judge know how s/he should evaluate the arguments left at the end of the debate, and in what order.

For example, if you're arguing that the negative is doing something theoretically illegitimate, and that concerns of fairness precede substantive (topic related) issues, then you should explain to the judge how that factors into their decision-making process! Don't just throw it in at the end of your speech as one of your five voting issues because then you aren't capitalizing on the importance and strategic value of each and every argument.

This requires issue selection. Issue selection, briefly explained (but explained to a much greater extent in the paper devoted to issue selection) is not about picking specific arguments to explain, but rather which strategy you plan on taking. It's not about one play; it's about an entire series of plays.

Crystallization is also the point in the debate where you attempt to shield yourself from the arguments that you know, or think you might be, behind on. Crystallization allows you to step back from the line-by-line and just explain to the judge that you understand that your opponent may be beating you on a few arguments, but if you are able to interact your arguments with your opponent's and establish the order of operations, you can save yourself. However, if you take crystallization for granted and just list five voting issues, you've

given up your ability to defend yourself and left yourself vulnerable to your opponent dominating you on the issues you are losing.

*Weighing*

The next step in setting up the decision calculus involves weighing your arguments with your opponent's arguments. Essentially this is just an extension of the point earlier that you need to establish an order of operations, but it's also different in the sense that you are going to have some arguments that function on the same level (i.e., two substantive arguments linking back to either your framework or your opponent's). In this instance, during crystallization, you MUST weigh your arguments against your opponent's so that the judge has some way of prioritizing arguments. The more work you do for the judge during the crystallization process, the less work they have to do to reach a decision in your favor.

## Voting Issues

It is commonly thought that voting issues always belong at the end of your speech, where you just list three arguments that you think you're winning and slap the phrase "voting issue" in front of them. This is a very disadvantageous way of approaching voting issues, since it undermines all of the work you've done to crystallize the round already. Instead, as you are crystallizing your arguments, comparing them to your opponent's arguments, and setting up a hierarchy for the judge to use to evaluate the round, you should also be explaining why the arguments you just crystallized are reasons to vote for you (aka, voting issues).

If you give voting issues throughout the round, this will do one of a few things for you. First, it will ensure that you actually give voting issues, something a surprisingly large number of debaters fail to do. Second, it will make your voting issues look so much more compelling, since they will contain a comparison to an argument that your opponent may very well use as his or her voting issue, thus requiring him or her to also do some comparison. If s/he doesn't do that comparison, then, assuming you did everything correctly, you should be very happy because the judge is almost certainly going to think your argument is the strongest one.

You should never take voting issues for granted, and you should never assume that you're necessarily winning every single argument that you make a voting issue. You want to give yourself multiple ways to win just in case you and the judge do not see eye to eye, which happens an incredibly large number of times.

So how should you structure your voting issues? The first part of the voting issue needs to explain why you have access to the argument you are extending. This means that you explain that none of your opponent's arguments preclude you from winning off of that argument. Arguments that might preclude your argument are defensive take-outs or theory, for example. The next part of your voting issue is why you are winning the argument on the flow. Explain that your opponent has either dropped your argument, or that their defensive responses to your argument are not sufficient to answer it.

Finally, you need to explain the implication or significance of winning that argument. This is one of the most important steps that people often leave out. You may be winning an argument, but if you haven't explained WHY the judge should care about it, then it's virtually useless. Explaining the significance of your argument also mandates that you link that argument back to the standard so there is a framework the judge has under which your argument is relevant.

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**Conclusion**

All in all, crystallization is not a very difficult concept to master. It requires an understanding of your arguments, and a willingness to step back from the flow and just explain arguments. There are a few technical things you need to do within crystallization, as explained earlier, but the debaters who are best at it are able to mask those technical things behind a wall of clarity and conciseness. If you want to win more debates, you're going to have to give your judge a very easy way out. Crystallization is one of the best ways to do so, as it allows you to frame your arguments in comparison to the rest of the debate, and explain with certainty, why your argument is the best.

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