Offense – The Key to Winning Debates

Created by Josh Roberts

Why Aren't Debaters More Offensive?

Knowing that offense is what wins debates, it still shocks me to see how defensive debaters are when they approach their speeches. It's almost as if they're scared to take risks, and to a certain extent, that is true. Debaters are often afraid to commit to making offensive arguments because they know that it requires a significant time investment to fully develop one. They believe that this will tradeoff with their ability to make more arguments, and thus is not worth the time investment.

The other problem is that many debaters are just too lazy. They don't think about which arguments are strong and which arguments aren't, and part of this is due to a lack of research. Debaters don't believe that they need to commit to reading on the topic, so they're unaware of the potential arguments that they could be making to generate offense.

Moreover, some debaters fetishize the framework debate. They believe that they can win rounds by only answering the framework and trying to sever your offense's link to your standard. This strategy, however, is entirely defensive minded, and puts you in a terrible position since the affirmative now has to do very little to win reason to vote for them. Offensive arguments are a necessity, not a luxury. You should never be so comfortable with your case that you think that you can solely rely on that as your one source of offense. It's good to have a case that you can use as offense, but if it is the only place you plan on winning then you have set yourself up to lose.

The people that rely on that kind of strategy also never get comfortable with making a variety of arguments, or setting up a variety of offensive layers, so they just get comfortable cross-extending their arguments, and essentially negating the huge time advantage they have as the negative.

Finally, debaters do not understand what makes an argument offensive. Offense is not "a proactive reason to vote for you." Proactive means creating or controlling a situation by causing something to happen rather than responding to it after it has happened. Offense is a reason why your advocacy is better than your opponent's advocacy. An advocacy isn't just your case; it is anything that you support. For example, an advocacy could be a turn you make, or an interpretation you set up in the debate. Essentially, offense is just a net benefit for what you are defending.

The Problems With Insufficient Offense

A lack of offense in a debate leads to debaters wasting their time because they become repetitive. If you do not have a sufficient amount of unique offensive arguments then you will rely on constant cross-applications

of your case, making your opponent's life much easier. If this applies to you, it's something that you should work on because it means that you aren't leaving yourself multiple ways to win in your next speech. Moreover, it allows your opponent to not have to defend as many arguments because there is no harm to conceding arguments if they are not offensive.

Furthermore, if you are not generating enough offense, you are going to be buried by opponents who are making a solid amount of offensive arguments. When you're affirmative, you must be generating offense on the negative case every round. This is a necessity so that the negative cannot concede that their case no longer matters in the rebuttal and spend six minutes destroying your affirmative case. When you're negative, you must put as much pressure on the 1AR as possible. If you don't have offense in the debate, then you have given yourself no cushion for making mistakes. Offensive arguments allow you to recover from dropping or poorly engaging arguments.

Finally, if you are not generating enough offense, then you are going to lose a vast majority of close debates. It is much more difficult to evaluate debates where both debaters are going for minute, relatively unimportant defensive extensions against one another. In these instances, what either debater is defending becomes extremely unclear, and there is no advocacy that the judge can point to at the end of the round and say that was what they voted on.

Why Should You Be Generating Offense?

If you can diversify your strategy, that makes it much more difficult for your opponent to cover and answer your arguments in a responsive manner. The more offense you have in the debate, the more pressure there is for your opponent to cover arguments, and inevitably their going to undercover some of your offensive arguments, which you can exploit. With more offense comes more flexibility in later speeches. The more offensive arguments or advocacies that you have, the easier it is for you to win because in later speeches you have different routes that you can take to win.

A caveat is that your offense needs to be strong, well-developed offense, which requires a solid time investment, but the return is that no debate is close if you're going for strong offense. Strong offense also requires an aggressive mindset where you are in attack mode. This mentality of attacking your opponent will have positive returns in every other aspect of the debate. For example, you will use cross-examination more aggressively, which will allow you to set up offensive rebuttals.

You will also find that you are using your prep time more efficiently to focus on the weakest part of your opponent's position. In turn, your refutation will be more positional because you will have a more strategic focus in mind. All in all, a mindset of attack will increase your overall debate skills, and make you much more perceptually dominant.

Generating Offense: A How To

General Rules

Generating offense requires understanding the intricacies of the link chain in any given argument. From this, you need to isolate each component of the link chain and begin attacking those arguments at their

foundation. If you have the ability to generate enough offense under your opponent's framework, then you can concede your opponent's framework and get right to the point.

Advanced Rules for Generating Offense

There is an inextricable relationship between uniqueness and the link. The uniqueness is the explanation of the status quo prior to the link being triggered. Every step in the link chain before the terminal, or final, impact has an implicit or explicit uniqueness claim attached to it. If you do not control uniqueness, then you are severely undermining your ability to generate offense. You should constantly be asking yourself how the actions you or your opponent take would affect what is happening now.

Advanced Turns

To turn an argument, you must state the opposite of what your opponent said and argue that what your opponent said is actually support for your side. When you are making turns, you want to clearly label what kind of turn it is and the specific link, internal link, or impact that it applies to. Too often debaters just read evidence as link turns but never explain how it interacts with the link that they are turning, allowing their opponent to explain their arguments to circumvent the turn. The more precise that you are, the harder it is for your opponent to claim that your argument is non-responsive. Furthermore, if you are precise, the less likely it is that you will double turn yourself because you will know exactly how your arguments function and interact with one another.

When you are turning your opponent's case, you want to find the weakest part of the link chain and latch onto it. Latching onto it entails making turns that have multiple, deep warrants. For the most part these turns will rely on you reading evidence in response to your opponent's case.

A term you will hear in relation to generating offense is "straight turn." All this means is that you are turning an argument without making any defensive responses to it.

Link Turns

Link turns are usually the best, most efficient way to destroy a case since you concede a vast majority of the link story and don't have to worry about weighing impacts. Winning a link turn means that you win exclusive access to the terminal impact. If your opponent is reading an argument with a very big terminal impact, you should almost always go for a link turn.

Internal Link Turns

Internal link turns are another way that you can take out your opponent's advocacy. Similar to a link turn, if you win an internal link turn then you also win exclusive access to your opponent's terminal impact. However, with an internal link turn you MUST weigh the internal links against one another, which requires a form of impact comparison that is not necessary for the link-turn strategy. Instances where it may be strategic to go for internal link turns are when you are unprepared for debating uniqueness or if you don't have strong warrants for the link turn.

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Impact Turns

Impact turns can be a strategic option when you are unprepared on the link debate and your opponent's impact analysis is weak. A vast majority of the time you will see impact turns deployed by debaters making critical arguments because these kind of arguments are going to be much more consistent with their overall advocacy. Another situation in which the impact turn might be the most strategic option is if the counter-intuitive nature of your argument will catch your opponent off guard, giving you a chance to exploit their weak impact analysis.

Disadvantages

Disadvantages are an external source of offense that does not necessarily rely on turning links or impacts. These arguments, instead, rely on a new link that your opponent's advocacy triggers. To learn more about these kinds of arguments, you can read the other papers written about debating and writing disadvantages.

Theory

Theory is one great way that you can generate solid offense. If there is an interpretation that you are prepared to defend and your opponent violates that interpretation, then you have an easy way to make an offensive argument that comes prior to the rest of substance.

Conclusion

If you want to win debates, don't be lazy. Do research, think about the intricacies of links, and have a strategic positional focus. Don't be afraid to accept your opponent's standard and focus solely on turning your opponent's advocacy and generating external layers of offense. Precision is key. If you can make very precise link turns, you will make it much harder on your opponent. If you rely on defense to win debates, you are selling yourself short. A commitment to making offensive arguments is a commitment that brings solid returns in the form of wins.