

- **Fundamental:** finding the contradictions in the logic of an argument.

In the same debate, on the other side:

Speaker for the opposition: 'Criminalising homophobic language will allow homophobes to present themselves as martyrs for free speech.'

Proposition: 'On a point of information.'

Speaker for the opposition: 'Yes please.'

Proposition: 'If an action causes harm to society, it should be criminalised, and we should not be deterred from fighting crime by the reaction of the criminals and those who would justify their actions.'

Notice also how a point of information can be presented either as a question (preferably a really hard one) or a statement (preferably a really convincing one). Notice, too, that one sentence is enough. The shorter the better. Save the elaboration of argument for your own speech. Back to football: a shot at goal is more likely to go in if it is fast, hard and on target. Make your points of information like that.

How to make a point of information work for you as a speaker

You must, of course, rebut the point. Simply ignoring it and carrying on with your speech is (still on football) like stepping back and letting the other side kick the ball into your goal. It should instead be like the goalkeeper catching the ball and immediately kicking it upfield to the striker, who will take it deep into the other side's half.

Respond quickly, crisply, and decisively. They tried to find flaws in your argument; find flaws in their point of information. Then go back to your argument. Even better - a really advanced skill - weave your rebuttal of their point of information into your own argument.

Let's see how that might work in practice.

Speaker for the proposition: 'Homophobic language on social media causes great distress to gay people, and this law would protect them from it.'

Opposition: 'On a point of information'

Speaker for the proposition: 'Yes please.'

Opposition: 'How will you deal with homophobes who post on anonymous, untraceable accounts?'

**Make your
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Speaker for the proposition: 'They may be untraceable for now, but once this proposition becomes law, the whole apparatus of law enforcement will be used to find technological means to trace them, catch them and prosecute them. The prospect of this happening will be enough to deter these hateful people whom the other side would protect on the grounds that it might be too much trouble to find a solution to a technical problem.'

See? You're taking the ball into their half by making it look as if their actions will protect homophobes.

Or ...

Speaker for the opposition: 'Criminalising homophobic language will allow homophobes to present themselves as martyrs for free speech.'

Proposition: 'On a point of information.'

Speaker for the opposition: 'Yes please.'

Proposition: 'If an action causes harm to society, it should be criminalised; we should not be deterred by the reaction of the criminals and those who would justify their actions.'

Speaker for the opposition: 'Much greater harm would be caused to society by the surge in popular support for homophobic bullies which this unnecessary law would bring about. A tolerant culture which allows everyone to express both their sexuality and their opinions is a far more effective sanction against prejudice than a heavy handed and unnecessary law.'

See? You're taking the ball into their half by making your defence of free speech work also as a defence of gay rights.

So, to sum up:

If you're listening:

- Make at least one point of information a minute
- Make them short and sharp
- Aim them at a weak point in the argument

If you're speaking:

- Take at least two points of information
- Rebut them fully but concisely
- Make your rebuttal lead back into your speech

**Take
the
ball
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