

problem that the motion is addressing, and focus rigorously on that one problem; here, it's the environmental damage that single-use plastic causes. Otherwise, you undermine the strength of your own case.

It's possible to make the same mistake when you're the opposition, by identifying a problem with the proposition which is not relevant to the motion. So, for example, a speaker opposing the motion 'This house would introduce a 20 mile per hour speed limit in cities' might say:

'This will take up a lot of police time arresting people who break the speed limit, and those police won't be able to prevent knife crime, and knife crime will go up.'

Any law is going to need to be enforced, and that is going to take up some resources. The only question is whether it is a good law; this is what the opposition needs to address.

If your opponent is guilty of **misidentifying the problem**, point out that the problem they have identified, while real, is not relevant to the motion, and steer the argument back to the main problem.

'It may be the case that water bottles would work better in your lunch room than plastic cups. However, while making plastic cups illegal might solve that problem, it would create other, much bigger problems, such as ...'

'Enforcing the speed limit will take up some resources. However, those resources will be well spent, because of the benefits the new law will bring. These are ...'

To sum up:

- If you are the proposition, find the essential problem the action of the motion is trying to solve and focus on that.
- If you are the opposition, find the essential problem the action of the motion will cause and focus on that.
- If your opponent misses the essential problem, point out (not least to the judges) what they have done, and return to the essential problem.

Find the essential problem

11 Misidentified solution

This is the sister, as it were, of the misidentified problem. It supports the action of the motion by attributing to it benefits which are either irrelevant or trivial, when the speaker should be focusing on the essential, substantial benefits. It's a bad argument that can only really be made by the proposition.

So, for example, speaking in favour of the motion: 'This house would make voting in General Elections compulsory':

'If voting was compulsory, there would be more votes to count, and more people would be needed to count them. This would provide extra income to the counters, which would boost the economy.'

What's wrong with this? It misses the essential, substantial point of the motion, which is about the benefits to the democratic process of making voting compulsory. As well as being irrelevant to the development of democracy, the benefits of the extra employment for counters would be trivial; elections usually only take place once every five years, and counting only takes place over one night, so the income generated would be very small.

How should you respond to the misidentified solution if you are the opposition?

One thing you should not do is mirror the misidentified solution with a misidentified problem of your own. In the compulsory voting example, that would mean complaining about the cost to the taxpayer of printing extra ballot papers / hiring extra counters. This would trap you in the same error of irrelevance and triviality.

Instead, point out how the solution the proposition have given is irrelevant and / or trivial. Do this briefly and briskly, though. As soon as possible, steer the debate back to the essential solution implied in the motion, and show how it is flawed. If you spend too long attacking weak arguments, you will not show your own strength; but if you are unafraid to attack your opponent at their strongest point, you will be able to demonstrate the strength of your own arguments to the judges.

So, you might say:

'The benefit of extra employment for vote counters would be extremely small, as that employment would only be available on

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