

Declaration of Human Rights, from the preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence, or by quoting a statement from a health care expert.

The most common argumentative inadequacy is the *unwarranted claim*—a debater merely makes a claim without attempting any type of support. Suppose a debater attacks the national health insurance proposal by declaring that “the cost of a national health insurance system would cause the U.S. deficit to skyrocket.” This is a claim, but it is not an argument because there is neither data nor warrant.

Sometimes a debater will offer data and claim but omit the warrant. Suppose the debater reads evidence that the U.S. deficit now stands at \$8.9 trillion and then makes the claim that “the cost of a national health insurance system would cause the U.S. deficit to skyrocket.” Now the statement has data and claim, but the warrant is missing—there is nothing connecting the currently sizable U.S. deficit to a claim that national health insurance will make this deficit substantially worse. Accordingly, the statement does not meet the definition of an argument.

Occasionally a debater will present data without offering either a warrant or a claim—the debater simply presents an “interesting fact.” Suppose in our national health insurance debate, a student reads a piece of evidence showing that Hillary Clinton, when she was first lady, proposed national health insurance in 1994. This data may well be accurate, but it doesn’t lead anywhere. There is no argument unless the data is connected to a claim through a warrant.

IS-UGHT GAP

Many beginning debaters make the mistake of assuming that effective argument consists entirely of stacking up “the facts.” The problem is that facts by themselves don’t lead anywhere. Suppose I am trying to prove that the United States federal government should restrict possession of handguns. I could approach this task by citing dozens of “facts” concerning the number of handgun owners, the number of accidental deaths of children, the number of murders committed with handguns, the text of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, statements about a citizen’s right to self-defense, and so on. Would amassing these facts ever answer the question of whether handgun ownership should be restricted? Would we say that if one side has ten facts and the other side has only eight then the side with the greater number of facts should win? Responsible decision-makers would never make judgments in this way. Facts mean nothing without a system for weighing or evaluating them. This requires the injection of one or more value premises. We must have a way to decide whether the risk of accidental death or gun-related murders is outweighed by the Constitutional right of self defense.