

The Proposition speaker should have said: Affluent nations themselves benefit from taking more refugees [part of the case]. Refugees often flood into neighbouring countries that face many of the same problems; this destabilises these countries, causing regional instability that often affects the affluent countries' political and economic interests [argument]. For example, the Kosovo Albanians fleeing into Macedonia in 2000 threatened to overwhelm that country and spark a civil war which could have involved Greece and directly affected NATO interests, meaning Europe helped its own regional stability by taking some of those refugees [example linked to argument].

The Proposition speaker could then provide another example making the same point, then move to a second argument supporting this part of the case (regional stability is not the only self-interest affluent nations have in taking more refugees; doing so adds to those nations' diversity and multiculturalism, which is an element in their success) followed by an example in turn.

Debates without arguments become a hotchpotch of examples. What is important is not the number of examples, but the analysis of them.

In a debate on the motion 'This House would keep out of other people's wars', the Proposition team said that peacekeeping missions had exacerbated problems in Rwanda and Kosovo. The Opposition replied that peacekeeping ventures had assisted the situations in East Timor and Eritrea. Both teams resorted to citing examples without attaching them to arguments. What they needed to do was to provide reasons why intervening (here, by way of peacekeeping) in other people's wars was detrimental or advantageous (multinational peacekeeping forces suffered from cumbersome command structures which prevented their being effective when threatened; once enough nations committed to a multinational force it could deter local and neighbouring military threats due to its firepower and international standing). The examples that supported such arguments would then follow.

Examples alone can never win a debate. There will always be examples for and against the motion. The strength of the arguments that seek to explain the examples will therefore be more important.

(c) Examples

Arguments require logic and reason, and need to be supported by examples. The problem of the speaker who lists a series of examples without providing any argument is matched by that of the speaker who offers a variety of arguments, but with no supporting evidence. Without proof, arguments are reduced to assertions and generalisations.

The best examples are those that the ordinary intelligent person (hopefully most audience members!) will have heard of. These are facts, events and occurrences that have been widely reported in the media. A common usage example will have much more immediate credibility than an obscure statistic from an unknown author.

This is not to suggest that general knowledge is the only source of good evidence. Research will produce useful facts, figures and examples that can be introduced into a debate. But such specific material works best when it complements or provides detail for something that is commonly known or understood. Personal anecdotes (stories involving the speaker) are to be avoided; impartiality and credibility are dubious when arguing for a particular side of the motion.