

accepted (at least by the audience) and there should be neither well-known exceptions to that principle nor another countervailing principle that might offset it. In a debate over banning smoking in public, for example, the claim that smoking should be banned can be connected to the evidence that passive smoke causes cancer by the warrant that bystanders have a right to be protected from actions they have not chosen. Where necessary, you could provide other examples of how this principle works in practice—licensing or regulating the use of hazardous materials because of their impact on third parties, for example—but the general principle that people have the right to harm themselves but not others could also be used without the need for examples.

One final element to be aware of in using warrants is that sometimes they are self-evident—so much so that debaters can spend time looking for one when they don't really need it. To take a simple example: Stella bought and drank some orange juice (evidence), therefore, Stella likes orange juice (claim). There is simply no need to add: "We usually purchase and consume products that we like" (warrant), it's taken for granted. However, in more complex situations, such an assumed warrant may be open to challenge, and, as we shall see in Chapter 7, the active listener will be alert to such unspoken warrants and question them. At the risk of overextending this example, perhaps the store only sells orange juice or that was the only thing that Stella could afford. Warrants that seem self-evident can usually be left for the adjudicator to accept without the need to spell them out—but the opposing team would do well to check whether the warrant is as obvious as it appears.

Claims

In everyday speech, a claim could be described as "the point you're trying to make." It's a statement about how the world might or should be that is open to challenge and toward which the debater, using evidence and warrant, has attempted to lead her audience. When making a claim, do not overreach. Let's return to our example about government expenditure on large IT projects. You are unlikely to persuade anyone but the most partisan of observers that all governments, everywhere in the world, will always overspend on every project involving any degree of computer integration from now until the end of time. You, therefore, should avoid suggesting that public bodies should never undertake capital IT projects, that all such projects should be left to the private sector, or that we should go back to using the abacus and slide rule.

Of course, this claim has been deliberately exaggerated. Speaking in absolute terms—"it is always true that . . . there is no situation in which. . . everybody agrees . . ." and so on—may seem like a good idea during a speech, but, in most situations, making an absolute statement is likely to be both wrong and reckless, wrong in terms of accurately describing