

- *Critique.* An effective critique (sometimes called “kritik”) of an argument points out a major flaw in the argument itself. It allows you to accept all the facts and evidence that have been presented and focus instead on the assumptions that underlie them.

To take a fairly common example: the motion is THW Reduce Taxation, and the Affirmative team has built a case around the idea that reducing taxation encourages economic growth. The Negative team could question that idea if they choose to, but it is difficult to challenge. A stronger approach might be to accept that reducing taxes would encourage economic growth but to challenge whether that should be an end in itself, raising the prospect of the impact that economic growth can have on the environment or that encouraging companies that are simply chasing the cheapest place to do business is likely to offer only a transient benefit—particularly in developed nations. Or, they might argue, it is better to have a comparatively high rate of taxation but use such funds to ensure a highly educated workforce and a state that provides an efficient place to do business in terms of infrastructure and laws.

- *Disadvantages.* This type of rebuttal, usually used by the Negative, points out that the proposed plan causes more, or bigger, problems than it solves. Highlighting the disadvantages of a plan allows you to accept much of the positive reasoning in your opponent’s argument and, when confronted with tightly argued cases, relieves you of the burden of having to dispute arguments that are clearly true.

When developing a disadvantage, speakers ask questions such as: What has the previous speaker not said? What would their otherwise sensible proposal cost? What other priorities would need to be neglected? In a foreign policy debate, what would the implications be for other countries in the region?

Typically, debaters using disadvantages will place the problem under discussion in a wider context. By doing so, they can often demonstrate that the Affirmative hasn’t really understood the issue and is looking at it too narrowly. Consequently, the Affirmative’s approach will either make the underlying problem worse or create new ones. For example, while a war would solve an immediate problem, the outcome is likely to be a long, protracted, and bloody occupation, regional instability, the threat of terrorist reprisals, and many deaths on both sides.

- *Contradictions.* Attacking contradictions is an absolute staple of rebuttal. Building a case is a complex exercise and relies on having several arguments put forward by different speakers based on many pieces of evidence all pointing toward the same conclusion. It’s not surprising, therefore, that arguments can often get tangled up in delivery. While you may sympathize, make sure to point out these contradictions to the adjudicator. Take advantage of one speaker contradicting what another on her team has