

3. *Trustworthy*. As mentioned earlier, where your evidence comes from plays a powerful role in the likelihood of your audience accepting it. If they recognize and accept the source—"Harvard," "the UN," "the Red Cross"—as impartial, they will take your evidence more seriously and will believe it to be true without the need for more work on your part. This is particularly true with statistics. An old joke has it that 87.6% of statistics are made up on the spot—and there's more than a degree of truth in that. Giving a source is an important way of showing that your information is real. The more respected and trusted the source, the better. This also applies to opinions or quotations—what a professor of history says about wars in Asia is more authoritative than the opinion of a football coach. However, if the debate is on sports in schools, then the coach's opinion is going to be a lot more useful to you.

With the exception of the most basic data, almost all information contains some degree of bias; your job is to assess how much. If you're putting forward evidence, think about where it came from and ask yourself, "Does this person have anything to gain from me believing this?" That's not to say that such evidence is never useful—inevitably one side of the debate will take evidence from one set of experts and the other side from another set. The point is that both sides should be using experts.

4. *Believable*. In many ways, this is both the hardest and most important of the four tests, and it's toward this goal that the other three are driving. Evidence, no matter how solid, relevant, comprehensible, and well-sourced, still has to be believable. Let's take an example from an actual debate:

Motion: This House Would Send Another Manned Mission to the Moon.

Position: Opposition

Argument: There is no more science to be done on the moon.

Evidence: Several articles from respected journals and the opinions of well-known cosmologists and astronomers—all of whom said there was no point in going back to the moon, there was no interesting science to be done there, short of building an observatory on the other side to look out into space. The moon itself is just a lump of fairly uninteresting rock.

Result: Nobody believed it. It's true, the evidence is completely solid, but in a room full of intelligent people who were not astronomers, nobody believed it and assumed the evidence had been made up.

When you find yourself in a situation like this, your only solution is to pile on the evidence. You need to move your audience from what they currently think is true to what is actually the case. Here, your own judgment comes into play; how much of a stretch is accepting