

the evidence for your audience? If the point you are trying to convey is already widely understood (even if it is actually untrue), a point or two of fairly shaky information will do the trick. If, however, it's counterintuitive, then your evidence needs to be rock solid and copious.

Use evidence to move your audience in baby steps. Start with statements they can easily accept and avoid bold assertions ("everyone agrees" or "it is never true"). Your audience will follow you toward the conclusion, but you need to give them time. If you rush the process with one enormous leap into the counterintuitive dark, they will pull back and reject the whole argument.

Conclusion

To continue the analogy of a debate speech being like a journey, evidence is how you get your audience over the obstacles they might encounter along the route. If the evidence you use is believable, it is much easier for the listeners to follow their guide—in this case, you. If you ask them to wade through rivers and cut their way through brush, they're unlikely to believe that the destination is worth the effort or trust your skills as a guide. If their route is over wide bridges and along well-cut paths, they are unlikely to question anything else you may say. Don't be afraid to use your own judgment, just as you would test the path ahead for your tour party. If a piece of evidence surprised you, then it will probably come as news to them; if it struck you as unlikely, they may be slow to accept it as well.

One final thought about evidence—all of the tests suggested in this chapter for strengthening your own evidence can also be used to break down what the other side is using. Is their evidence out-of-date? Is it biased? Is it implausible? Is it irrelevant? Is the source untrustworthy? Is your evidence more up-to-date, from a larger study, or a more authoritative source? If the answer to all of those questions is "yes," you will usually win comfortably.

EXERCISES

- A. Select a debate from <http://idebate.org/motions> and identify the evidence the writer has used. Using a scale of one to five (five being highest), decide in your group whether the evidence used is:
- relevant