

Identify, Construct, and Evaluate Arguments

From the perspective of the debater, all of the traits we've identified so far result in this final one. The capacity to actually break apart an argument, our own and other people's, and examine its component parts is the purpose of debate as a critical exercise. Arguments that appear to be true are comforting; those that actually are true are satisfying—it is this latter group that should be the focus of the endeavor.

How Is Critical Thinking Applied in Debate?

Debaters deploy their critical thinking skills in a number of ways, but most frequently they do so to examine their own case for weaknesses to avoid losing the battle of rebuttal and then to criticize their opponents' case to win it. Some questions that often concern debaters when examining a case are:

- Is this an answer to the question being asked or is it an answer to something that sounds similar but is quite different?
- Is my opponent actually responding to the point I've made or is he just seeking to sound informed, popular, or moral?
- Is this particular argument consistent with itself and with the other things that have been said on the same side of the debate?
- Is this point something that has been demonstrated as being true, or is it something that has been assumed to be true?

Typically in a debate, the Affirmative will be attempting to demonstrate that their proposal addresses a particular problem that is either stated or implied in the wording of the motion. The Affirmative's job is to demonstrate, beyond reasonable doubt, that their idea works; that it's consistent, realistic, practical, appropriate, sensible, moral, affordable, or whatever may be germane to their case. By contrast, the Opposition has the task of demonstrating that the proposal is unworkable, dangerous, unethical, impractical, destructive, unaffordable, impossible, irrelevant, unhelpful, or whatever may be appropriate to theirs. For that debate to take place, both teams need to remain absolutely focused on what is actually being discussed, rather than offering wide-ranging generalizations of what sounds right to the uncritical mind.

By applying the skills of critical thinking, debaters are able to address whether the proposed solution—as well as the objections to its implementation—relate to the problem