

require them to grab a passing phrase and disagree with it, mostly to show the adjudicator that they're still awake. This approach couldn't be more wrong. Active listening isn't about ignoring your own role in the debate, it is the very heart of making your speech as persuasive and powerful as it can be.

So, relegate your desire to comment on one particular word or phrase to the same place as thinking about lunch and the essay. Instead, ask what the speaker is actually saying. If it's a teammate, what has she missed, how does this relate to your team's control of the debate in the mind of the adjudicator? If it's a comment from a member of the opposing team, why is she focusing on that particular issue? Is she saying something that's already been said? Has she run out of material? Why is she not addressing the salient point made earlier? Does she not understand it or was it not clear? Does it need further explanation or is she ignoring it because she doesn't have an answer?

WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING SAID?

The debater's job is to use logic to question whether what is being said—really being said—makes sense. Whenever another speaker makes a statement, it's worth asking yourself, "Really? Is that true? Is it relevant?" Most important, is the speaker saying something reasonable and logical or is he inviting his audience to follow him into happily accepting an assumption? A few phrases tend to be a clue that some sloppy thinking is coming up: "As everybody knows . . .," "It's obvious that . . .," "Nobody can deny that . . .," "Everyone agrees that . . ." Any statement using these introductions is quite likely to be followed by an unproved assumption. That's not always the case, but it's always worth listening for and inwardly questioning whether there is any proof whatsoever for what comes next.

Carefully listen to the transitions from one element of an argument to another. Are they really logical? Does B really follow from A? Am I only accepting what this person is saying because it's easier than thinking about it? At any point in a speech where the argument moves from one element to another, the actively listening brain should kick into gear and ask whether the speaker has really built a link or whether he's just hoping that nobody will notice that he's made a jump without any foundation.

As an active listener, be alert for the following:

- *Flaws in logic.* Has the speaker demonstrated a logical link between two things or is she asking you to accept their relationship because it seems obvious? Is she encouraging you to just accept, as you might in casual conversation, that A caused B simply because A happened first or that the two options she has presented are the only two available and are mutually exclusive?