

Soft Interaction—Clash

“Clash” is the term given to the points of disagreement between the two sides of a debate. It is where the debate happens, where the cases meet. The best speeches and the most artfully structured cases are worth nothing if they don’t interact with what’s happening on the other side.

As we’ve seen, the opening speaker, in presenting the definition, sets up the structure that the debate should follow. This chapter takes us through what happens after the definition has been given. It briefly reviews the role of the First Negative speaker before looking in detail at how clash can continue throughout the debate. It then explains how to identify clash. Finally, it will explore how final speakers should use clash.

Setting Up Clash

In setting out the definition, the First Affirmative aims to present more than a list of arguments. She aims to set out a narrative, a believable and functioning model that can both be understood by a reasonable person and can persuade him of its merits. In turn, the Negative takes the basic framework set up by the First Affirmative speaker but offers another narrative. In short, the Negative lays out the areas of clash.

The Negative doesn’t have to present a completely new way of solving the problem, although in some formats they may offer a counter-case. And, as we shall see, they should not negate everything the Affirmative has put forward. Instead, clash should be a meeting of the interesting bits of each case, the points where there is genuine disagreement.