

Clash and Final Speeches

Final speakers can use the points of clash in a debate to frame their speeches. Rather than rehearsing what each speaker said, they aim to draw out those parts of the debate that relate directly to the areas of clash and demonstrate how their side had the better arguments on these points. Both speakers may agree on what the areas of clash were, but they will use those common areas to advocate for their side.

The areas of clash may be obvious; if the two sides have been attacking two or three points repeatedly, then speakers will focus on those. However, sometimes the debate will have moved through many issues, and the final speakers must identify what those points of clash have been. This process requires the speakers to go back to the origins of the two sides' cases: What did they identify as the problem, what did they say was the point of contention, what perspective is each side expecting the adjudicator to accept as the dominant one? How did each side answer these questions—and did they answer them effectively?

Good final speakers consider all of the issues raised and then find one theme that crystallizes those into a standard against which the points of clash can be assessed. Once she has that analysis of what divides the two sides, she must sell that assessment to the adjudicator. If she can convince the adjudicator that the whole debate can be reduced to a single question or concern over which the two sides clashed and that her side has the better answer, her team will win.

Conclusion

Debaters are often tempted to present a case so modest, so full of arguments that are safe and demonstrably true that nobody could possibly disagree with it. Doing so defeats the purpose of debating; after all, the aim is to test the value of an idea by attacking it from both sides and seeing what works and what doesn't. It's important not to let your desire to win get in the way of actually doing your job.

Clash is the interesting bit of debate and, over the long term, far more useful than any number of victories or defeats. The process of critiquing ideas and questioning assumptions about the world around us, developing a process of thought that questions and criticizes sloppy thinking and assertions of the mundane, lies at the heart of why we should use debate as a tool. Debate is a process that should encourage us to pursue ideas because they work rather than because they are safe. It allows practitioners not only to