

Annan is an excellent secretary-general of the United Nations” is an example of a simple value proposition. In this proposition a person, Kofi Annan, is the “object” and debaters are expected to argue about whether he should be evaluated as an “excellent” secretary-general. Another example of a simple value proposition is “Croatia is beautiful.” Here, the object is a place, Croatia, and the value that is the basis of the proposition is “beautiful.” An example using an institution as the object is “NATO is no longer useful.” “The U.S. war in Iraq is unjust” is an example of a simple value proposition using an action as an object. All of these examples have two things in common: they name a simple object and they ask the debaters to evaluate that object.

COMBINING CLAIMS TO SUPPORT A SIMPLE VALUE PROPOSITION

As noted earlier, you can support a value proposition by combining other kinds of claims. Perhaps the most straightforward method of supporting a value proposition is to combine three kinds of claims: descriptive, relational, and evaluative. Specifically, a value proposition can be supported by accomplishing the following: (1) *describe* one or more features of the object of evaluation, (2) *relate* those features to some effect, and (3) *evaluate* those effects.² In the next few sections, we describe each of these three elements of supporting a value proposition. Our description will use two propositions to illustrate this process: “Affirmative action is a negative action,”³ and “Socialized medicine is good medicine.”

Describe one or more features of the object of evaluation. Describing is different, although sometimes only subtly different, from defining. As we mentioned earlier, in many resolutions debaters still need to define terms for the sake of clarity. In this section, we are saying that the debaters need to provide a *descriptive* argument that should be directed toward particular features of the object of evaluation.

What exactly is a feature of an object? A feature is a characteristic, a component, or an element of something else. For example, people can have both physical and psychological features. A person’s physical features include height, weight, skin color, etc.; a psychological feature might be introversion or extroversion, a tendency toward honesty or deceit, or intelligence or lack thereof. Places have features as well. One of Croatia’s features is beaches; a feature of Romania is mountains; a feature of the Czech Republic is the Charles River. Institutions also have features. A feature of the institution of democracy is the right to vote; a feature of the British Parliament is its two houses. We can describe actions, like places and institutions, by their features. War is characterized by violence; a military draft is characterized by conscription; a feature of the Kyoto Protocol is emission permits.

In most cases, you will not have time to describe every feature of the object you are evaluating. Furthermore, every feature of an object will not be relevant to the evaluation. For example, the color of a person’s hair is unlikely to be relevant to evaluating her qualifications for holding a particular job. When describing features of an object of evaluation, you need to examine the object and decide which feature or features are most likely involved for purposes of the particular evaluation.