



How to Evaluate a Debate

Speeches have four general purposes

To Inform
To Persuade
To Inspire
To Entertain

The debate speech is entirely about **persuasion** - it is a specific appeal to a particular point of view set against another's.

A normal speech can be assessed by looking at content, structure and delivery.

These still apply but are often defined by how the debate is arranged. The debate organiser chooses the topic (content), how the debate is run (structure) and sometimes what people can do (delivery).

The Three Appeals

Evaluating a debate also needs to be looked at through the argument appeals:

Logos - reason through the quality of the argument in the speech

Pathos – connection with audience's emotions

Ethos – strength of the speaker's personality or character

There is emphasis on logos, the reasoning of an argument, but no-one wins a debate by this alone because people require emotion to do something. The character of person matters because of credibility and sense of honesty. It is the balance of these that win the debate; the harness of emotion and ethics to reason. Be very careful here. Appeals to emotion (pathos) and appeals to authority (ethos) on their own are [thinking fallacies](#) (weaknesses in thinking)



Example:

A party is putting forward the argument to increase taxes to fund a policy that will reduce child poverty.

Pathos: If we don't spend the money, all the children will suffer. (Emotional but manipulative because there is no reason. This is appeal to emotion)

Ethos: We've been working in child welfare for 20 years and know what we are doing. (This is an appeal to authority but no evidence)

Logos: Research compiled by analysts suggests effective results. (Factual but no emotional reason to support people you don't know)

In combination: The evidence shows that this policy offers the best prospect to maximise child welfare for the benefit of wider society. Our party will ensure that right people are in place to ensure the money is spent wisely.

It is often [thinking fallacies](#) that undermine an argument by reducing its strength. The more that a speaker uses fallacies to justify an argument, the weaker it will be. So evaluating how convincing a debater is starts with key reasoning fallacies. Here are the most common ones you hear are:

Appeal to emotion – Manipulation of emotion “think of the children...”

Ad Hominem – attack the character of your opponent

Appeal to Authority – Using an authority figure instead of an argument “God says so...”

Strawman – Misrepresenting someone's argument

Bandwagon – everybody does it so it must be right

Slippery Slope – if we allow A to happen, then Z will follow

Loaded Question – a question that closes off responses

You may note that they are mostly expressions of pathos, ethos or logos. For example, strawman is a perversion of logos; appeal to emotion is 100% undiluted pathos; appeal to authority is 100% undiluted ethos.



strawman

Misrepresenting someone's argument to make it easier to attack.



false cause

Presuming that a real or perceived relationship between things means that one is the cause of the other.



appeal to emotion

Manipulating an emotional response in place of a valid or compelling argument.



the fallacy fallacy

Presuming that because a claim has been poorly argued, or a fallacy has been made, that it is necessarily wrong.



slippery slope

Asserting that if we allow A to happen, then Z will consequently happen too, therefore A should not happen.



ad hominem

Attacking your opponent's character or personal traits instead of engaging with their argument.



tu quoque

Avoiding having to engage with criticism by turning it back on the accuser - answering criticism with criticism.



personal incredulity

Saying that because one finds something difficult to understand that it's therefore not true.



special pleading

Moving the goalposts or making up exceptions when a claim is shown to be false.



loaded question

Asking a question that has an assumption built into it so that it can't be answered without appearing guilty.



burden of proof

Saying that the burden of proof lies not with the person making the claim, but with someone else to disprove.



ambiguity

Using double meanings or ambiguities of language to mislead or misrepresent the truth.



the gambler's fallacy

Believing that 'runs' occur to statistically independent phenomena such as roulette wheel spins.



bandwagon

Appealing to popularity or the fact that many people do something as an attempted form of validation.



no true scotsman

Making what could be called an appeal to purity as a way to dismiss relevant criticisms or flaws of an argument.



genetic

Judging something good or bad on the basis of where it comes from, or from whom it comes.



black-or-white

Where two alternative states are presented as the only possibilities, when in fact more possibilities exist.



begging the question

A circular argument in which the conclusion is included in the premise.



the texas sharpshooter

Cherry-picking data clusters to suit an argument, or finding a pattern to fit a presumption.



middle ground

Saying that a compromise, or middle point, between two extremes is the truth.



appeal to authority

Using the opinion or position of an authority figure, or institution of authority, in place of an actual argument.



composition /division

Assuming that what's true about one part of something has to be applied to all, or other, parts of it.



appeal to nature

Making the argument that because something is 'natural' it is therefore valid, justified, inevitable, or ideal.



anecdotal

Using personal experience or an isolated example instead of a valid argument, especially to dismiss statistics.