

Golden Rules of Case Writing

There are several golden rules that every debater should follow when writing cases.

- 1) Make sure that the definitions you choose aren't biased as to disallow competitive equity. There is no clear standard for what provides fair ground; people can always argue that some definition deprives someone of some ground. The best idea is always to use the clearest and fairest definition you can think of, which will usually prevent abuse claims (and give you some edge in any abuse arguments that do arise).
- 2) Clarify the value. If the value isn't clear then the link from the criterion to the value won't be either.
- 3) Always have multiple justifications for your criterion. Multiple justifications ensure that you have less to defend in order to win, and your opponent has more layers of argumentation that she has to beat. This gives you a strategic advantage before ever walking into the round.
- 4) Always use the fewest words possible in order to convey your ideas. Word economy leaves room for more justifications, more argumentation, and clearer presentation.
- 5) Every sentence in your case should mean something.
- 6) Do not name-drop philosophers. If you are expressing an idea that isn't yours, as with a quotation, you should of course cite the author. However, cards and evidence must contain an internal warrant, or justification, for the argument. Don't simply state, "John Locke says X." No one cares what John Locke thinks unless you tell us *why* we should believe it. Empirical justifications are different; see #7.
- 7) If you have a fact to present, a study to validate, or an empirical trend to indicate, use evidence. Only experts are qualified to make empirical claims. For example, you want to say "we should promote democracy because democratic nations are significantly less likely to commit rights violations against their own people". There are several analytical justifications, but nothing beats hard evidence.

Lynn-Jones elucidates with a study done by RJ Rummel: , Sean M. "Why the United States Should Spread Democracy." Discussion Paper 98-07, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, March 1998. (http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=ISP&ctype=paper&item_id=245) **Rummel's qualifications:** RUDOLPH J. RUMMEL, b, 1932, BA and MA from the University of Hawaii (1959, 1961); Ph.D. in Political Science (Northwestern University, 1963); Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Omicron Delta Kappa. Taught at Indiana University (1963), Yale (1964-66),

University of Hawaii (1966-1995); now Professor Emeritus of Political Science, University of Hawaii. Received numerous grants from NSF, ARPA, and the United States Peace Research Institute. Frequently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (see [here](#)). Received the Susan Strange Award of the International Studies Association for having intellectually most challenged the field in 1999. And received the Lifetime Achievement Award 2003 from the Conflict Processes Section, American Political Science Association.

Rummel finds that democracies-by which he means liberal democracies-between 1900 and 1987 saw only 0.14% of their populations (on average) die annually in internal violence. The corresponding figure for authoritarian regimes was 0.59% and for totalitarian regimes 1.48%. Rummel also finds that citizens of liberal democracies are far less likely to die at the hands of their governments. Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of genocides and mass murders of civilians in the twentieth century. **The states that have killed millions of their citizens all have been authoritarian or totalitarian: the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Nazi Germany, Nationalist China, Imperial Japan, and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. Democracies have virtually never massacred their own citizens on a large scale.**

- 8) Always fully source your evidence. Include the author, title, and everything else that is important. State your author's qualification; a Nobel Prize-winning Harvard professor, in an article published in the Yale Law Review, is more credible than many other sources.
- 9) Always include a thesis statement. It clarifies your position and helps you evaluate the clarity of your case. If you can't come up with a thesis position, then your case isn't clear.
- 10) Justify *everything* you say – every claim needs a warrant. Using explanatory words like “because” or “this is true for X reason” is a good way to signify that you are explaining and warranting your arguments correctly.

Once the first draft is done...

- 11) When you go to a tournament and hear something useful, don't be afraid it add it to your position. Information is everywhere. Use everything you can to your advantage, including your opponents' research. Research the authors of good evidence you hear. Ask your opponent after the round for the correct spelling.
- 12) Spend time watching the best debaters in elimination rounds. Observe their techniques, research their authors, and prepare to beat them when you have to face their arguments.
- 13) Once you have both of your cases done – and I know this may sound crazy – debate yourself. It's a technique I learned from David Wolfish (TOC Winner, 2005) and I've utilized it often. It's a very under-used preparation technique and it

helps you see flaws in your own cases before the round. This is particularly helpful when your team is small.

- 14) Block out your case; think of as many arguments against your case as possible and then try to preempt any of them by adding a few sentences to your case.
- 15) Consider the audience. Even if you only want to have one case on each side (something I did my entire career as a debater), you still must have a few versions of it for flow judges and lay judges. This isn't hard at all; have extra evidence in the case for flow judges and remove some for lay judges.
- 16) Consider which arguments in case are the strongest, and plan to defend them and make them voting issues from the start. Clear voting issues are often key to winning close rounds; they are your last chance to pitch your argument to the judge.
- 17) Know your position. Be familiar with the spikes, the offense, and the defense. Know everything you can about your case.

Final Thoughts: Most debaters will not do all of the work outlined above. That said, with this guideline in hand, you can easily beat the vast majority of debaters. I guarantee it. All it takes is a little strategy and a little work. This handout is an advantage on any circuit. Follow my directions and you will learn more, think faster, and develop the most solid position on your circuit. Good luck!

- Josh

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