Debate 101:
10 Steps to Successful Debating

1968 -
1990
Debater &
Coach

KSU DEBATER—Before he left for the National Debate Tournament in Stockton, Calif., this weekend, Ed Schiappa, 1631 Leavenworth, discussed strategies with his debate coach Vernon Barnes. In the background are trophies won in past tournaments. However, this is the first time a K-State team has qualified for the National Debate Tournament. Sixty-four teams will compete. Schiappa's contest teammate is John Burtis, of Shawnee Mission. APRIL 1975

Life After Debate
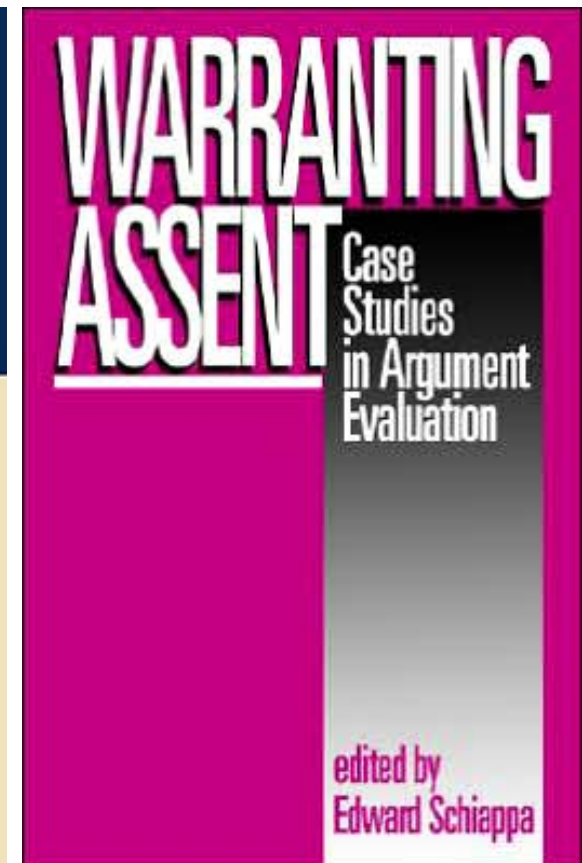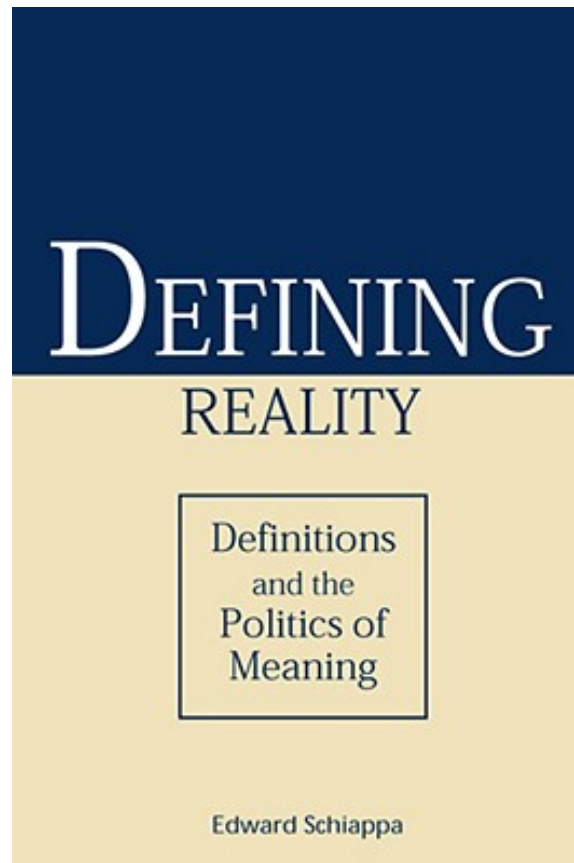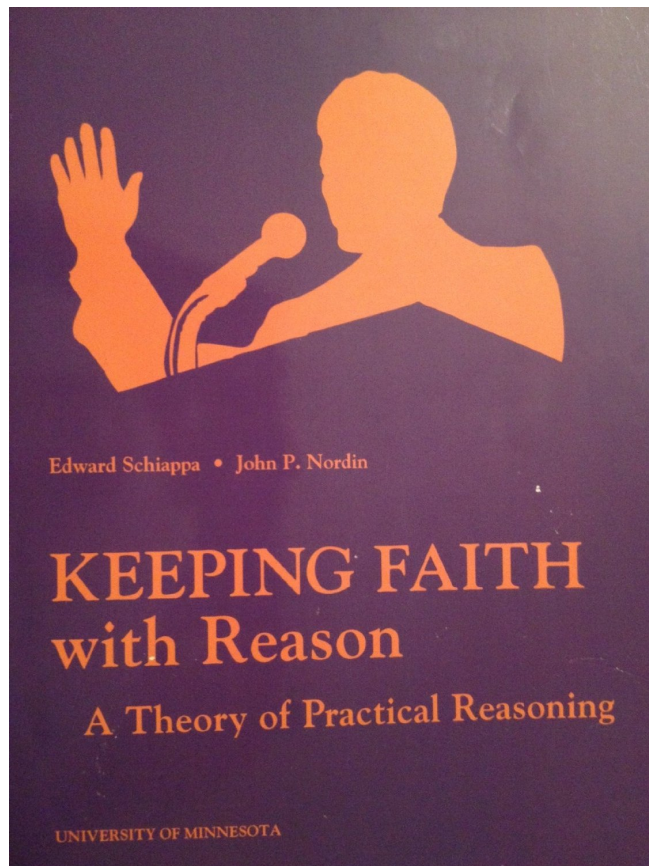
Step 1: Analyze the *type* of proposition you are debating

- Claims are the starting point of argument.

- Different Types of Claims entail different obligations and require different types of support.

- Compare "You should believe X" to "Everyone believes X."

Deconstructing Argument: Types of Claims

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- Policy: We should or should not do X.

Your Topics:

http://tinyurl.com/cebsbx3

- Topic A, B: Humans will eventually grant civil rights to robots. ***Future Fact***

- Topic C, D: Robots should be developed to replace humans in the performance of dull, dirty and dangerous jobs, even if such development means that many humans will lose their jobs. ***Policy***

- Topic E, F: People should grant robots the ability to autonomously discharge deadly weapons. *Policy*

- Topic G: Deliberative robot architectures are more likely than reactive robot architectures to enable reliable performance of real-world tasks. *Fact*

Topic H: The robotics community **should curtail** its research activities in order to prevent the emergence of robots that are as capable as humans. *Policy*

Topic I: Given two proposals with comparable peer reviews, U.S. funding agencies **should favor** proposals for research on embodied intelligence over proposals for research on disembodied intelligence. *Policy*

Topic J: Stipulating that robots will someday achieve a level of consciousness comparable to that of humans: Research involving such robots **should proceed** under the supervision of an Institutional Review Board analogous to the IRBs that oversee human subjects research. *Policy*

Step 2: Define Relevant Terms

- Provide definitions of key terms *if* there is risk of misunderstanding.

- For policy claims, you can operationally define terms with a specific proposal.

- Do not try to be tricky or evasive. Normally Pro side (or "Affirmative") has right to define, but Con (or "Negative") can challenge if definitions are unfair.

Step 3: Organize & Number

- Debate is an analytical process. It is persuasion through *reasoning*. Aristotle named 3 kinds of persuasive appeals: Ethos, Pathos, Logos. You = Logos.

- Your responsibility to advance clear, supported arguments to support your side. Numbering/outlining is key.

Step 4: Go with the Flow

- "Flowing" is debate terminology for taking notes of debate interaction.
- Divide your note pad into 4 columns:
- Pro ➔ Con ➔ Pro ➔ Con
- Flowing is just a way of tracking how arguments "flow" in the debate: What is said (or not said) in response to what.

Debate Flow

- Allows your audience to track the interaction between the debaters.
- Allows you to note which of your arguments have been answered, which have been "dropped."

Sample Flow (partial)

Step 5: Know Your Speaker Duties

- 6 minutes (3+3) Pro side presentation
- 6 minutes (3+3) Con side presentation
- 4 minutes Pro side's rebuttal
- 4 minutes Con side's rebuttal
- 4 minutes Q&A and audience vote

Constructives

- 6 minutes (3+3) Pro side presentation.

Pro debaters should divide up their case, not repeat each other.

- 6 minutes (3+3) Con side presentation

Con debaters should *both* present their own objections to the proposition *and* answer the Pro arguments.

Rebuttal Speeches

- 4 minutes Pro side's rebuttal
- 4 minutes Con side's rebuttal

Can have one speaker or divide up time, but argumentatively, important both to *extend* your original arguments & *reply/ rebut* those of your opponents.

Step 6: *Construct* Your Case

- A "case" is simply your set of arguments pro or contra the proposition / topic.
- Should be organized into numbered points; each point should be supported by reasoning and evidence.

Forms of Reasoning

- Though the topics about which we argue may be infinite, the ways in which we think and reason are not.

- There are recurring *forms of reasoning* that are found in almost all contexts.

- Humanity's reasoning is formally similar, whether Scientists, Doctors, Lawyers, Art Critics, Teachers, Mechanics, Engineers, or Relatives are arguing.

We will review a few briefly…

- Argument by Example: X is ex. of Y.
  Fallacy: Hasty Generalization
- Argument by Analogy: X is like Y.
  Fallacy: False Analogy
- Argument from Authority: X is an Expert on Y
  Fallacies: False Authority, Tradition
- Argument From Definition: X is subset of Y.
  Fallacy: Disputed Premise in Syllogism

Evidence

- Quality of evidence is key: Whether quoting expert opinion, or data provided by researchers, be sure to explain why your source is credible.
- Resolving an evidential dispute is a valuable skill: Explain why your source is superior to your opponent's.

Step 7: *Rebut* your Opponent

- Rebuttal speeches require double duty: You need to defend your case but also reply to your opponents.

- Various ways to reply, but the two most common are to *Refute* their point as false; or *Admit* their point but claim it doesn't support their overall case.

Step 8: Provide Criteria

- By "criteria," we mean a *way to resolve the issue*. A *heuristic* for argument analysis & resolution.

- **Factual Claims**: Historical precedent, agreement of experts, thought experiments, "weight of the evidence." Both Pro & Con can offer these.

Policy Case Approaches

- Two primary approaches:
- Problem ➔ Solution

  Show a *need* that your policy meets.

- Comparative Advantages:

  Show how your policy offers a better situation than we have without it.

Contra / Negative Approaches

- Policy is not really Needed.
- Policy does not really provide the advantages or meet the needs claimed.
- Policy would cause *disadvantages* that would outweigh any good the policy might provide.

Step 9: Recognize the Role of Values

- All policy propositions involve underlying values.

- There are many ethical and value-oriented theories & norms. The challenge is getting on the same page.

- Review these notes (following pages) for ideas for how to advance & defend the values your policy involves.

Ethical Theories

Deontological Theory. Best-known example would be Kant's Categorical Imperative:

- Universalizability (hence "absolutes")

- Treat People as Means not Ends

Utilitarian, a.k.a. Situation Ethics

Argues that all that matters are consequences: Cost-Benefit Analysis.

The most ethical actions are those that produce the greatest "utility" (pleasure, interests, etc.). Most famed advocates: Jeremy Bentham & John Stuart Mill.

Social Contract Theory

- Nations or institutions provide certain "goods" in return for certain obligations.
- Dates back to Hobbes & Rousseau if not all the way back to Pericles & Athens and Biblical notion of covenant.
- John Rawls the most influential of 20th Century Social Contract Theorists.

Resolving Value Conflicts

- Let's start with the idea of two specific values in conflict: Privacy v. Safety.

- How do we justify one over the other?

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3) One value is more important than the other, due to magnitude, frequency, or precedent.

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3) Move to a Third Value System that avoids or transcends the two in conflict.

Most Important Value

- Commitment to Shared Goals. Without shared goals of some sort, argument is unlikely to succeed.

- Possible Shared Goals include: Truth, Best Solution Possible, Maximizing Consensus.

Step 10: See Debate as a Means to Truth

- Since the ancient Greeks started to formalize the process of philosophical discussion known as *dialegesthai*, we have understood dialogue & debate as a *cooperative* exercise in seeking the truth.

- Give it your best shot, but be prepared to let you mind be changed!

Resources

- Edward Schiappa & John P. Nordin, *Argumentation: Keeping Faith with Reason* (Pearson, 2013). (Free Online Class Resource)

- J.M. Makau & D.L. Marty, *Cooperative Argumentation: A Model for Deliberative Community* (Waveland Press, 2001).

- S.K. Foss & K.A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*, 3rd ed. (Waveland Press, 2011).