

Public Speaking and Debate 2

Attacks and POI

Attacks and POI

In this lesson, we will have a look at how you can improve your **attacks**.

We will cover the following:

- **What** to attack **when**
- **Language** used to formulate rebuttal attacks
- Formulating **POI** as attacks
- **Answering** POI



What to attack

To win a debate, it is absolutely **essential** that you **attack** your opponent whenever you can. Attacks make you look strong and undermine your opponent.

Always try to stay in the **attacking** role...

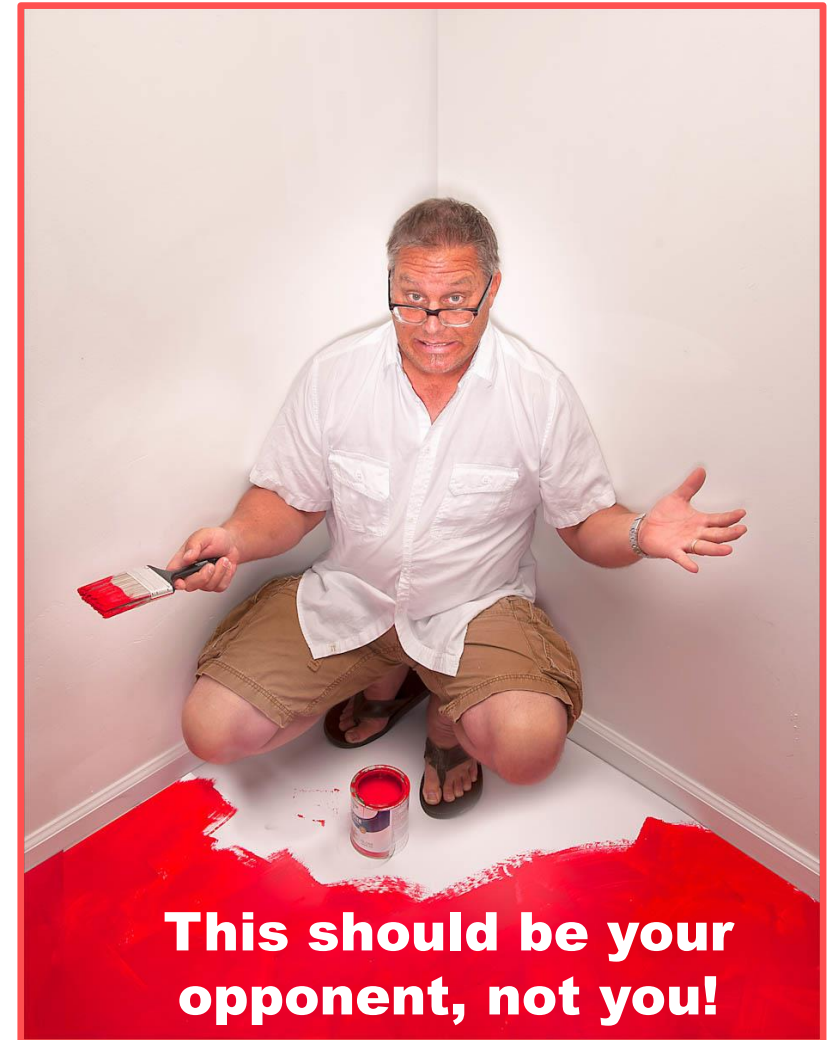


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To win a debate, it is absolutely **essential** that you **attack** your opponent whenever you can. Attacks make you look strong and undermine your opponent.

Always try to stay in the attacking role... Try to **avoid being forced into the defensive** and **don't use defensive language**.

Never make any excuses or apologies: avoid "I'm sorry", "I didn't know", and so on; instead say "that doesn't take away from the fact that...", "maybe so, but my evidence clearly shows that ..." or something similar).



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Difficult to attack:

- Claims backed up by **good** evidence and logic
- Evidence **not in your** area of expertise
- Evidence that takes some **time** to find or analyse

When to attack

Attacks are appropriate during **any phase of the debate**, and take the form of **rebuttals** or **POI** (questions).

- For a **rebuttal attack**, you **counter a claim** a previous speaker from the opposing house said **in your speech**.
- For a **POI attack**, you immediately attack something your opponent says by **raising a POI on the spot**. Note that POIs are **not just questions**; primarily think of them as attacks.



What to attack

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Difficult to attack:

- Claims backed up by **impeccable** evidence and logic > **Never**
- Evidence **not in your** area of expertise > **Never**
- Evidence that takes some **time** to find or analyse > **Never**

Attack

Attacks can take the following forms, in order of strength:

- **Pointing out flaws** (in either evidence or logic).
Pointing out a flaw in your opponent's evidence or reasoning will **instantly win** you the round.
- **Presenting counter-evidence**
Presenting evidence that **contradicts** the evidence of your opponents will **instantly win** you that round. Your opponent now has to prove your evidence is flawed, or else it's their word against yours, and you will win that if you show your evidence is from a respectable source.
- **Raising a counter-claim**
Raising a **counter-claim** backed up by irrefutable evidence **puts the ball in the court of your opponent**: your claim is now the truth until your opponent rebuts it.



Attack

Attack questions can take the following forms:

- **My opponent claims that ... but my evidence suggests that ... <explain>.**
Questions the validity of your opponent's claims based on presenting counter-evidence, -examples, or -claims.
- **My opponent concluded that ... but in my opinion this is not a logical conclusion.**
Questions the quality of your opponent's logic.
- **My opponent claims that Which information did they use to come to this conclusion?**
Questions whether your opponent has evidence or knowledge to back up a claim.
- **My opponent claims that ... Where did the information they used to conclude this come from?**
Questions the quality of your opponent's evidence.
Note: Only use it if the evidence or the source is questionable, otherwise this POI is too easy to answer.



What to attack

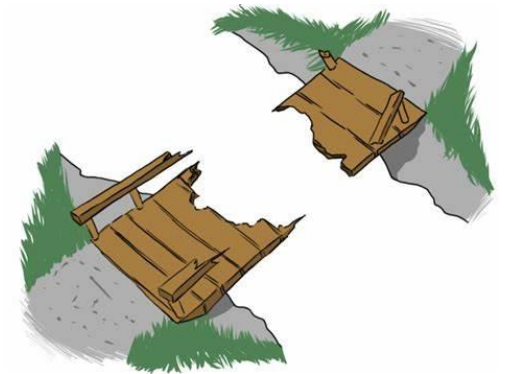
Now, let's have a more detailed look at each of the promising attacks:

- Claims **not backed up** by evidence
- **Refutable** evidence
- Evidence **not in your opponent's** area of expertise
- **Flawed** logic
- **Complex** logic
- **Bad explanations** by your opponent
- Claims that **don't link back** the motion

Attack

Claims **not backed up** by evidence

Opponent claims that are not connected to any evidence in your notes indicate they are **not backed up** properly. Note that this doesn't necessarily mean they are wrong, so be careful not to respond automatically by saying "it is not true".



Attack claims not backed up by evidence as follows:

1. Is the claim **obviously false** based on what you know?
 - > Raise a **counter-claim** based on evidence you have.
2. Is the claim **not obviously false**?
 - > Try to find **counter-evidence**;
 1. If you find it, raise a **counter-claim** based on what you found.
 2. If you don't find it, raise a **POI** during the next speech by the opposing team and ask them to explain how they came to the conclusion mentioned in the claim.
 3. If you find evidence that proves your opponent is right, **drop the attack**.

Attack

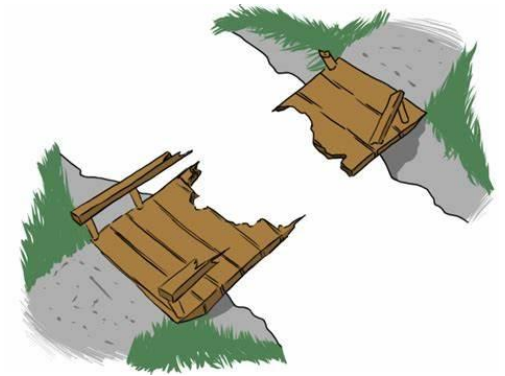
Claims not backed up by evidence

Examples:

(Motion: The agricultural sector should be forced to implement CO₂ capture technology.)

1. Using a **counter-claim** to attack a claim that is **obviously false** in a **rebuttal**:

“My opponent claims that CO₂ capture can be easily achieved on a global scale. However, according to the World Bank, 73% of the global agricultural output is produced by farms in developing countries, and a survey published by SDAU last year indicates that 80% of those cannot afford the equipment needed for CO₂ capture. This clearly indicates that **the cost of CO₂ capture prevents implementing it at a global scale.**”



2. Using a **POI** to attacking a claim that is **not obviously false** but hard to prove without having evidence ready:

“Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that CO₂ capture could significantly mitigate climate change. Can she explain **how farms in developing countries, which produce 73% of the global agricultural output, would be able to raise the capital needed to buy the equipment needed to implement CO₂ capture?**”

Attack

Refutable evidence



Refutable evidence is one of the following (in order of strength):

- **Not true**
- Published **too long ago** or **superseded** by new evidence
- From a source known to spread **lies** or **fake news**
- From a source **not respected** by the audience (judges)

If you suspect your opponent used refutable evidence:

- Do you have any **counter-evidence you can quote on the spot?** > Raise a **POI** immediately when your opponent present the refutable evidence. If they decline, use it in a rebuttal.
- If not? > **Research counter-evidence** that contradicts the evidence and present it in a **rebuttal**.
- Can't find counter-evidence quickly? > **Drop the attack**.

Attack

Refutable evidence



Example:

(Motion: To meet climate targets, all coal mines should be closed.)

“Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *the existence of anthropogenic global warming is not proven, based on remarks made by US Republican politicians. However, scientific evidence summarized on the NASA website proves that 97% of scientists agree that humans are causing global warming and climate change.* Can she explain why we should value the opinion of *a handful of US Republican politicians—who have a reputation for being more invested in their party's political agenda than in scientific truth—* over that of *97% of all scientists in the world?*”

Attack

Evidence **not** in your **opponent's** area of expertise

If you suspect your opponent used they have **no deep knowledge** about, immediately raise a **POI**. This will have the following effects:

- Your opponent's **flow** will be **interrupted**. This is worth it even if they can answer the question, and besides it gives you credits for raising the POI.
- Your opponent will be **forced to find evidence** to answer the question, and because it is outside their area of expertise it is not unlikely they will either **have difficulties answering** the question convincingly or give a **flawed answer**, which you can then attack with another POI or in a subsequent rebuttal.



Attack

Evidence **not** in your **opponent's** area of expertise

Example:

(Motion: The agricultural sector should be forced to implement CO₂ capture technology.)

“Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that CO₂ capture can be easily achieved on a global scale. Can she explain the basic technologies used for CO₂ capture, their cost, and how they can be easily implemented in smallholdings, which account for 84% of all farms in the world?”

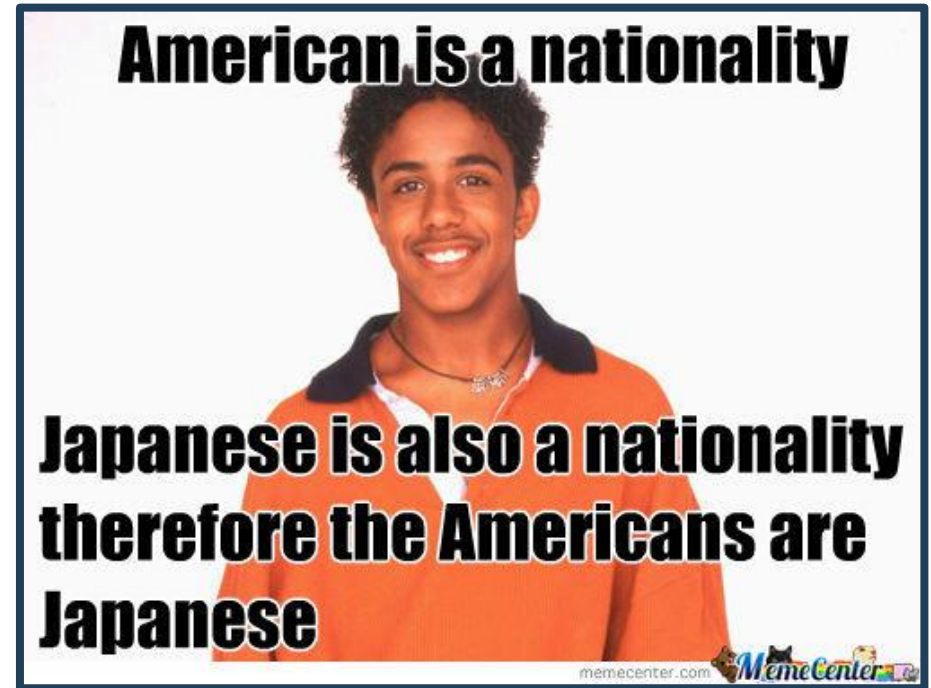


Attack

Flawed logic

If you suspect your opponent used flawed logic, raise a POI or use it in a rebuttal.

- Can you **name** the fallacy **on the spot** and **explain** why and how your opponent committed it? > Raise a **POI**, point out the fallacy and ask them to give evidence why they didn't commit it.
- If not? > Point out the fallacy in a subsequent **rebuttal** after thinking about it.
- Do you find it **hard to explain** the flaw? > **Drop the attack.**



Attack

Flawed logic

Examples: (Motion: To meet climate targets, all coal mines should be closed.)

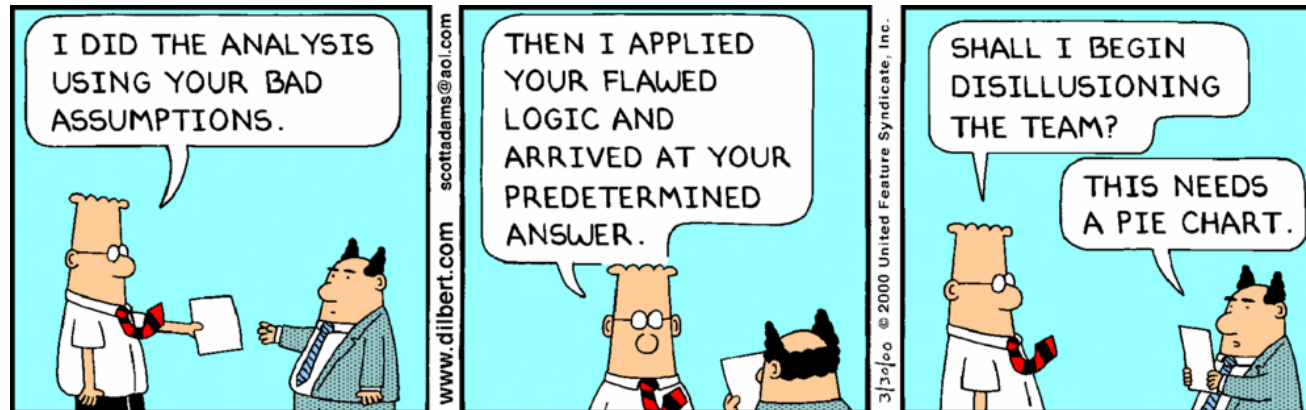
1. **POI** (point out **flaw**): “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *closing our coal mines would lead to an instant collapse of the economy due to the high cost of alternative energy sources and coal miners losing their jobs*. This is obviously a **slippery slope argument**. *There could be some economic fall-out but predicting economic collapse is far-fetched*. Can she explain her reasoning?”
2. **Rebut** (point out **flaw** and raise **counter-claim**): “In her speech, my opponent claimed that *closing our coal mines would lead to an instant collapse of the economy due to the high cost of alternative energy sources and coal miners losing their jobs*. This is obviously a **slippery slope argument**. According to eia.gov, the cost of power generation is less than 10% of the GDP, and a small initial increase would not have a major impact on the economy. On top of that, I already provided evidence for the fact that alternative energy sources are getting cheaper and already competitive to coal. Finally, coal miners can be retrained and re-employed in new industries, as corroborated by a case study carried out by the World Bank in the Netherlands. Obviously, **in the long run, closing our coal mines will not crash the economy; on the contrary, it will benefit from cheaper energy and a labour force with skills befitting a modern economic environment.**”

Attack

Complex logic

If your opponent uses complex logic to back up a claim, immediately raise a **POI** and point out the explanation is difficult to follow; then ask them to explain it again. This will have the following effects:

- Your opponent's **flow** will be **interrupted**. This is worth it even if they can answer the question, and besides it gives you credits for raising the POI.
- There's a good chance they will find it **difficult** explaining it again in different words, which makes them look weak; also, they might even contradict themselves.



Attack

Complex logic

Example:

(Motion: The agricultural sector should be forced to implement CO₂ capture technology.)

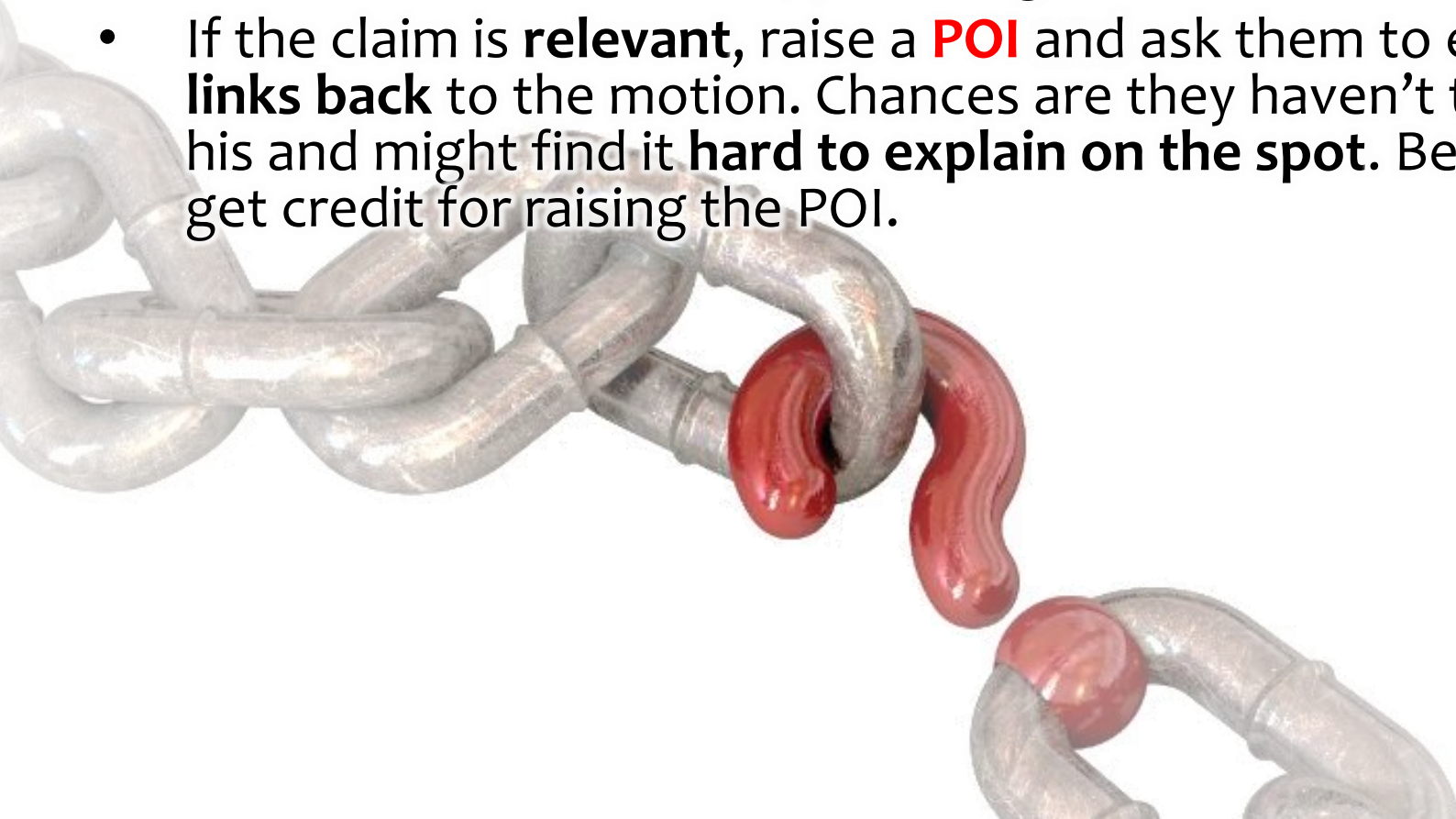
“Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that CO₂ capture can be easily achieved on a global scale, but her reasoning is difficult to follow. Can she explain step by step how CO₂ capture technology can be easily implemented in farms across the world, including those in developing countries?”

Attack

Claims that **don't link back** the motion

If your opponent makes a claim but doesn't explain how it links back to the motion:

- If the claim is **irrelevant**, raise a **POI** and ask them to explain **how it is relevant** to the motion. They will not be able to do this, and **their claim is wasted**. Besides, you will get credit for raising the POI.
- If the claim is **relevant**, raise a **POI** and ask them to explain **how it links back** to the motion. Chances are they haven't thought about this and might find it **hard to explain on the spot**. Besides, you will get credit for raising the POI.



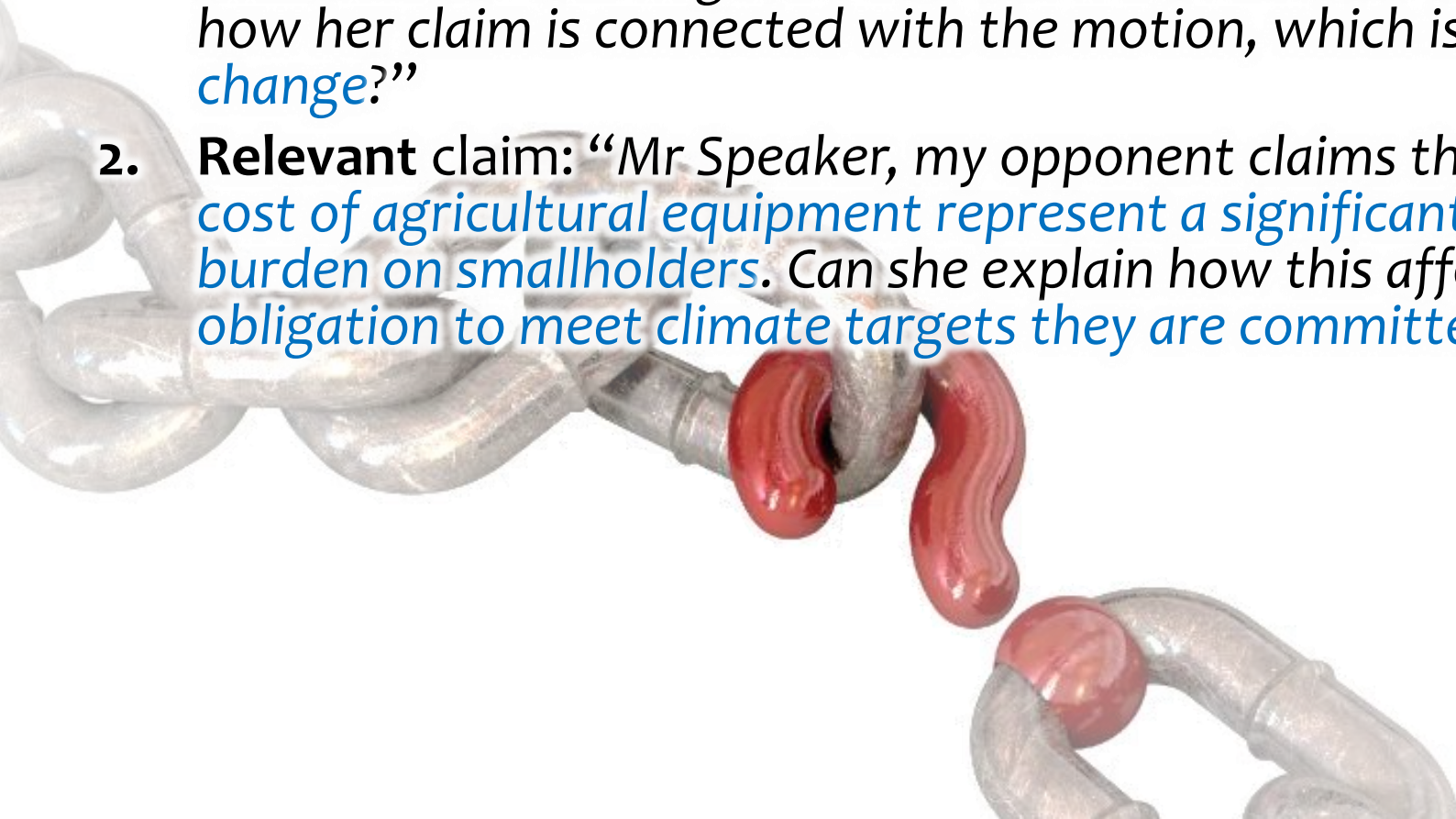
Attack

Flawed logic

Examples:

(Motion: The agricultural sector should be forced to implement CO₂ capture technology.)

1. **Irrelevant** claim: “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *the cost of repairing agricultural equipment is a significant financial burden for smallholders*. This might be true but it is irrelevant. Can she explain how her claim is connected with the motion, which is about *climate change*?”
2. **Relevant** claim: “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *the rising cost of agricultural equipment represent a significant financial burden on smallholders*. Can she explain how this affects *China's obligation to meet climate targets they are committed to achieve*?”



Answering a POI



Answering a POI during a debate is **slightly different from answering questions** after a speech.

- You don't want to **delay** your answer too much, because the time comes off your speaking time, giving you less time to make your case.
- However, you don't want to answer **too quickly** either because you might open yourself up to attack.



Answering a POI



When your opponent raises a **POI**:

1. If you are in the middle of a sentence, **decline** or say “**in a minute**”. If you are ready, **accept** the POI. After accepting, you cannot decline anymore, so you have to answer no matter what the question is.
2. **After you opponent asks their question, pause a few seconds** to give yourself time to think.
3. If the question is **clear**, **don't summarise** the question. If the question is **complicated**, **rephrase** the question and **try to weaken the attack** by introducing a subtle strawman argument (don't overdo it though: Your opponent cannot say if they agree with your 'summary', but they can rebut it later and if they do, you'll lose that argument).
4. **Answer the question** (to the speaker of the house, not your opponent). Note that your opponent should not interrupt you, and if they try to raise another POI if they are not satisfied with your answer, you can just decline it. Try to end with a good **response** or **counter-claim** and leave it at that.

Answering a POI



What you should say if you **don't know** the answer to a question asked in POI:

- Note that you probably thought about the subject matter carefully, so a question you can't answer is likely to be either **irrelevant** or a **red herring**. If so, just **point this out**, and try end with one of your own argument that *is* relevant.
- If your opponent asks you about something that is **not in your area of expertise**, don't admit this but **try to answer it as best you can** and then immediately launch a counter-attack by making a **counter-claim**. Never admit weakness or make excuses in a debate!
- If your opponent makes predictions about the **future**, say you don't have a crystal ball. If you have evidence you already used, **repeat your claim** about the present situation and why it is likely to go the way you already pointed out. If you have evidence you have not yet used, present that and make a **new claim** about the present situation and where you think it is likely to go.

Answering a POI



Patterns:

- **Irrelevant:** “Mr Speaker, the question asked by my opponent is not relevant to the motion, which is about <Explain why it is not relevant.>”
- **Red herring:** “Mr Speaker, the question asked by my opponent is a red herring. The motion is about ... and we are not here tonight to discuss the difficulties associated with”
- **Prediction, with used evidence:** “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims <your claim> will fail in the future. Maybe they have a crystal ball, but I don’t, and the evidence I presented earlier clearly indicates that ...”
- **Prediction, with new evidence:** “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims <your claim> will fail in the future. Maybe they have a crystal ball, but I don’t, and going by <evidence> published by <source>, it is safe to assume that ...”

Answering a POI



Examples:

(Motion: The agricultural sector should be forced to implement CO₂ capture technology.)

- **Irrelevant:** “Mr Speaker, the question asked by my opponent is not relevant to the motion, which is about *climate change*. It is safe to assume that as agriculture becomes more and more sustainable, farmers must find a way to adapt and keep it profitable. So economics should not be a primary concern for this discussion.”
- **Red herring:** “Mr Speaker, the question asked by my opponent is a red herring. The motion is about *climate change* and we are not here tonight to discuss *the social implications of retraining miners*.”
- **Prediction, with used evidence:** “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *CO₂ capture will not make a difference* in the future. Maybe they have a crystal ball, but I don’t, and the evidence I presented earlier clearly indicates that *the mitigating effect of CO₂ capture are likely to be significant enough to prevent glaciers from disappearing completely*.”
- **Prediction, with new evidence:** “Mr Speaker, my opponent claims that *miraculous new technology will reduce emissions* in the future. Maybe they have a crystal ball, but I don’t, and going by *a new study* published in *Nature*, it is safe to assume that *the current trend of CO₂ emissions increasing rather than declining is likely to continue for the next decade*.”

Summary

To win a debate, it is absolutely **essential** that you **attack** your opponent whenever you can. Attacks make you look strong and undermine your opponent.

Attacks are appropriate during **any phase of the debate**, and take the form of **rebuttals** or **POI** (questions).

Attacks can take the following **forms**, in order of strength:

- Pointing out **flaws**

- Presenting **counter-evidence**

- Raising a **counter-claim**

When **answering a POI**, **never admit weaknesses** or **make excuses**. Answer as best as you can and **try to end with a counter-claim** if you can.