**Intro:**
The word rebuttal takes its origin a 19th century Old French verb *boter*, meaning to butt. Which might lead you to think that early debaters aimed to make their opposition the butt of their jokes, not a bad tactic at all, if done tastefully.

Most of you would know by now that the real art of debating is preparation at short notice, and impromptu response, and so, in the true spirit of debating I found out at about 6pm yesterday that I had to give this speech today and late last night at my computer, I attempted to compile the best guide to great rebuttal in debating history. It was probably a big ask but what I came up with goes some of the way. And I must say it was a great opportunity for me to consolidate my rebuttal knowledge.

Rebuttal is what makes debating different from public speaking, its what gets our blood pumping, its why our parents encourage us to debate with each other, instead of them. Its why right now, I wish someone would randomly disagree with me, so I could rebut what you have to say. So please, if you disagree with anything I say, raise it with me afterwards or now if you have the guts and id be happy to discuss it with you.

*(My Intro):*
School, coach, state team, SADA vice-pres, AUDS chief admin, winners, Westers

To earn my method marks with you all I will now signpost what I will be talking about. Firstly I will talk about rebuttal in general and what should be the subject of rebuttal, secondly I will run through some specific rebuttal techniques and thirdly I will give you some tips for structuring rebuttal.

1. **What is rebuttal and what should the subject of rebuttal be?**

Rebuttal is a response to the oppositions case in attempt to knock it down and push your own case. So intuitively what we do when we first try rebuttal is to listen to the opposition and disagree with what they have said. In retrospect however this can be counter intuitive. I would suggest, that what you should be rebutting in order of priority is firstly the opposition’s case, then the opposition’s arguments, and finally individual points and examples.

So when I say rebut their case first what do I mean. This can be hard. But basically you have to find the central thrust of their argument and knock it down. A good way to do this which you would have been told is to rebut the team line as generally and hopefully is their general thrust. But often in senior debating there is no team line as a coherent team case makes it unnecessary and really kinda annoying. So what do you do then? The answer is, ask yourself what you would need to prove if you were on that team, and have they done that? And the clear implication of this, for those of you who are still awake, is that the most effective rebuttal, and remember this one, is often **not what they have said, but what they haven’t said**. And that in my opinion is the best place to start. Before you criticise their individual arguments, make a general attack that shows the opposition has fallen short of meeting their standard of proof.
For example if the topic was that voting should be compulsory. 1st aff would come out and say that it leads to representative and equal democracy yada yada yada, so don’t come out and start talking about donkey votes, a point specific rebuttal, come out and say that the 1st aff did not establish when something needs to be compulsory. Ask when can you impinge on the civil liabilities of an individual and make them do something? This is something they haven’t addressed and such rebuttal can knock the stilts out from under them.

Something really quite fun to take this one step further, and I must advise you should be pretty confident in your logic and understanding what the topic requires of the opposition before you do this, is, to challenge them. A personal favourite of mine. So to extend the last example I would actually say as 1st neg, we challenge to opposition, to explain to us when something needs to be compulsory. This means that when their next speaker comes up, if they don’t address this point their case gets weaker and weaker. This is also a superb tactic to employ when it comes to answering Points of Information for those of you in A-grade. For example if you are in the middle of your rebuttal on that topic and you are saying they haven’t set up when something should be compulsory and they offer a POI instead of saying yes say, tell us why? Its kinda cheeky but perfectly allowed and will take almost all the thrust out of what they were going to say.

It is after picking these general holes that you rebut specific arguments and then last individual points like factual inaccuracies. Always avoid the he said we say, she said we say approach, it just sounds like bad gossip. Talk about their failure as a team, the adjudicator will love it.

2. Specific rebuttal techniques

So now that you know about case rebuttal you still need to hear something about how to rebut arguments. And you may have heard some examples before such as: Show their argument is illogical, irrelevant, contradictory, insignificant, or has an error of fact.

I would like to focus on logic for a bit because at the end of the day all response and argument in a debate is based on it. A basic logical argument needs two things to be true, a valid premise or premises and valid reasoning. If you can knock down the premise or the reasoning you are doing well. And with logic it sometimes help to think in the abstract, for example if I said Sydney is far from Adelaide, which is true, Adelaide is far from Perth then as most of you know Sydney is far from Perth, but this argument isn’t logical as Sydney could be right next to Perth.

A great way to tackle rebuttal using logic is to show that different premises can reach the same conclusion or that the same premises can reach a different conclusion. This is what I like to call shedding doubt on an issue.

To give you an example of using different premises to reach the same conclusion, take the debate that HIV positive workers should have to tell their employers of their status.
The affirmative may argue that this will allow employers to be aware of changes in their employees’ productivity due to the illness. Good rebuttal for the negative is to take the affirmative’s end point, which is good employee productivity and say the employer will notice the employees productivity whether their condition is known or not. If they become aware because of this they can dismiss their employee but there is no need for them to know before hand.

An example of using the same premise to reach different conclusions can be found in the topic that couples should be banned from adopting children overseas? Both teams may state that it is a very expensive process, and the affirmative may argue that it leads to commodification of children and a perception from their adoptive parents that they are a financial investment. The negative may respond to say that the expense in fact leads to a stronger commitment to the child. And most of you can probably see a third method here, that the premise of the expense on the affirmative can be justified as an end by the negative, who may say the expense is a result of the international administration and bureaucracy involved in the process.

It is always good to knock the credibility of the opposition by pointing out any assertion and misrepresentation of your case. Fact – far out stat, 96% of people eat cold weet bix, 38% of stats are made up, try to diminish their credibility as probably wont know or be able to check the stat. PRACTICALITY REBURTTAL – wheres your model, how exactly is it gona happen, another challenge here. Slippery Slope, Dangerous Precedent, Bad Messages.

Another effective rebuttal technique is to not only show why it’s wrong then show the opposite is actually true. I call this the BRENDA VTN TECHNIQUE because I know a guy that uses it every time with a devastating effect. When he finishes any rebuttal point he will take it one step further and prove his own case on the same point. Often this is assisted by a relaxed analytical manner, a really refreshing break from the aggressive adversarial style. I stress the importance of rebuttal manner. A team dynamic with an aggressive 1st point of contact and more removed third works wonders. Or the other way.

Examples also are one of the most powerful rebuttal tools. In particular they are a spectacular way to start a speech, especially if the opposition has not raised that example. If we go back to the nuclear power debate, coming out and rebutting the argument of risk of nuclear disaster may be done by explaining why it is a safe process. But it would be far more powerful to start your speech with something like France has operated over 60 nuclear power plants for 40 years without a glitch in an areas 1/7th the size of Australia. Or something like that.

3. As I promised earlier, some tips for structuring rebuttal and practicalities of it all

The practicality of writing and organising your rebuttal is one of the most important things. The by far and way best way to do it is as the opposition speaker is talking, write down their key points and themes on a sheet of paper. When your speaker stands up, use
their speech as time to group the points into themes, cross out unnecessary points, and work out how to present rebuttal for that speaker. The most important thing is a ‘signposting card’, which you put at the front of all the cards.

We all know it is hard to get your rebuttal volume up to the appropriate amounts when you are starting out. One way which doesn’t directly help you get more rebuttal out but will save you method marks is what I like to call the **adjustable summary**. In my opinion there are 3 types of summary one that just restates the team case, one that states the case and the speaker arguments, and one that reiterates the speaker arguments as well. The middle one is the best. Ideally it will run from 30seconds to a minute. But if you find you haven’t hit the first warning bell yet and you are already on your summary then you can reiterate your speaker points to pad out time. Similarly if you are running overtime you need to cut your summary.

Be careful when rebutting definitional issues. Don’t get caught up on slight definition issues when there is more to focus on. And don’t be too afraid of getting nasty, I know you are all great non-offensive, giving members of your community but the debating arena is one place you can get away with it. Adjudicators seem to love aggression – as long as you reinforce your aggression with detail, you will look witty and you can’t lose. In all my best speeches I have slammed my opponents at least thrice, usually don’t get personal but if you can use them as the window to crushing their argument, on knock them down on you way past go for it

I should also make brief mention of speaker specific rebuttal roles. The **First Speaker/ First point of contact** — The most important aspect of a first speaker’s rebuttal is the way they address the opposition’s case. They set the response to the rest of the debate. Second speaker has the hard job skill of balancing a complete case response with their own matter but not in a 3rd style. It is a personal and timing choice as to whether you signpost, I’ve done ripper 2nd speeches both ways. The **Third Speaker** must employ a thematic rebuttal structure, categorizing their rebuttal into three or so main attacks. The writing on a sheet of paper method helps with this immensely.

**Conclusion**

That pretty much brings me to the end of my speech. Just remember, rebut what hasn’t been said, case first, challenge, structure your rebuttal and vary your manner to suit.

**George Georgiadis**