Construction of an Effective Argument
By James Hoggatt

Parts of an Effective Argument:

1. **The Claim:** The claim is the “tagline” or the point that you are trying to make in an argument. It is the easiest part of the argument to construct because it is what immediately comes to mind when you create the argument. However, an effective claim has a few different aspects:
   a. **Accessibility:** Every debate round has a judge, and that judge comes with his or her own unique baggage, beliefs, and preferences. Making your claims as accessible to the widest amount of the judging pool will make it easier for the judge to connect to the case itself.
   b. **Affirms or Negates standing alone:** While there are many great and interesting arguments that exist on a topic, each individual claim needs to be able to stand alone as a reason to either Affirm or Negate the resolution. If you lost all other points in the round, you should feel comfortable that by winning this point, you can do the debating to outweigh all that the opponent has won.
   c. **Clarity:** Ideally your claim/tag line will be clear of complex language or terminology. When judges hear an argument for the first time, they immediately either understand the point, or they do not. You want them to be following you from the first sentence of the contention.

2. **The Warrant:** The warrant is the evidence and analysis that proves the claim is true. In the case, every claim that forms a contention should ideally have a piece of academic evidence to back up the claim. However, when responding to arguments made by the opponent, analytical arguments referencing historical, social, or philosophical concepts or events are sufficient to be considered a legitimate warrant however, researching counter evidence for common positions on the resolution is ideal. An ideal warrant have a few parts:
   a. **Legitimacy:** A cited piece of evidence needs to come from a source that has academic legitimacy or an analytic argument needs to reference a concept that is understood, and not exceedingly vague or obscure. This goes a long way to making it a memorable argument for the judge.
   b. **Concise:** An ideal warrant will be concise and will explain the truth behind the warrant in an easily understood way that takes the least amount of time. This is many times achieved by cutting the piece of evidence down to an appropriate size.

3. **The Impact:** The impact is the essential, “Why should I care?” of the argument. When working on an argument, you should always ask yourself or your debater that very question when discussing the impact. This is why the
judge should vote for your position and gives you the perfect time to channel some passion and strength into your speech. A powerful impact general has some key aspects:

a. **The ability to be envisioned:** The language and structure of your impact should help your judge to imagine the consequences of your argument. If you are arguing that voting for the affirmative is going to disenfranchise minorities, use language that helps them imagine that scenario such as, “Voting for the affirmative, ensures that groups like Latinos, African Americans, and the poor are locked out of polling booths because of their skin color and economic position.” This type of active language transforms the impact from a clinical assessment of the consequences to something that is active and powerful.

b. **The ability to ideologically connect to the impact:** A well-structured impact will be something that can connect to the largest swath of judges possible. Impacting to a philosophical concept such as Rawl's Veil of Ignorance alone is generally not enough to answer the “Why should I care?” of the argument. Instead, impact to what the philosophical concept is concerned about—in the case of Rawl's that would be equality and fairness.

c. **Memorable:** Be passionate about your impacts and their implications. An impact that can be envisioned and is easily connected too is made even stronger by the presence of passion, anger, or strength in the voice and presentation of the point. Do not be afraid to be passionate—just because this is an academic activity doesn’t mean it has to be cold and clinical.

**Bringing it All Together:**

1. **The Separate Page Technique:**
   
a. **Review:** Write the Claim, The Warrant, and The Impact on separate pieces of paper. Print these pages out and go to the coach or another opponent and ask them to make sure these things logically follow the above components of each section. Doing this helps ensure the argument is actually solid and strong as opposed to simply appearing strong because the student is a good writer or the reader is more familiar with the topic than the average judge.

b. **Combine into a Contention:** After getting approval from a second or even third set of eyes combine the argument into a contention by adding analysis after the impact connecting it back to your value/criterion then add connecting sentences between the parts of the argument as needed.

c. **Read it Aloud:** After ensuring the structural integrity and strength of the argument and turning it from an argument into a contention read it aloud to ensure that it sounds compelling and that it can be read in the amount of time that is reasonable for the case. Edit as needed, and then you are ready to debate with your contention.