



6.11 Finding Flaws in Briefs

This activity both develops and builds advanced evidence evaluation and brief writing skills. Students will review a set of briefs that contain common errors, identify the errors, and think of ways to use the flaws to counter the original argument. This activity will encourage students to review opponent's evidence critically and to avoid making logical mistakes in their own briefs. Students should be familiar with using evidence in rounds and with the argument that you choose to use in for this exercise before completing this assignment.

Time Allotment

Take-home assignment or 25-30 minute in-class activity.

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:

- practice identifying common problems in briefs and argument construction.
- develop critical reading skills.
- develop skill in constructing logical, well-briefed arguments.

Materials and Preparation

Create a few pages of briefs that contain various types of flaws, and make one copy for each student in your class. They will function as a worksheet for the activity. The briefs can be on an affirmative or negative position that the class has recently discussed, or that you wish to introduce to the class. Or, they can be on a subject unrelated to the resolution. Also include well-briefed cards. Possible flaws may include:

- Exaggeration in tag lines.
- Improperly (or misleadingly) tagged cards.
- Irrelevant evidence.
- Shells or frontlines that contain missing elements, contradictions, or double-turns.
- Incomplete citations.
- Outdated evidence (especially in disadvantage uniqueness cards).
- Any problems that you have observed in briefs prepared by members of the class.

Method

Students can complete this activity as an independent homework assignment or an in-class small group activity. First, pass out the briefs to the students. Each student (or group) should:

- read over the briefs.
- identify any problems with individual cards by noting the flaws in the margins.
- write 1-2 things that they would say in a debate round if the opposing team used these briefs, given the flaws they have found. Using a separate sheet of paper, students should create a model flow by listing each flawed card by number and tag followed by counter-arguments that use the flaws to refute the original card.



After students have completed the activity, come back together as a whole group. Discuss each card one by one as a class and discuss the flaws in the briefs and the possible responses to the flawed cards.

At the end of the discussion, collect each student's briefs for comment and / or evaluation.

Variation:

Instead of having students read intentionally flawed briefs, use briefs that students have written as part of a briefing assignment and have a peer evaluation session. Have students trade briefs with a partner, and have each student read the briefs for the errors listed above, indicating errors and writing responses as described above. As follow-up, students should use the peer feedback to improve their briefs. If this peer evaluation is going to be serious and productive, students should be held accountable for their evaluations. Each pair of students should submit two original briefs, two peer evaluations, and two revised briefs.