

Policy- How To Master The "Even-If" Statement

One of the most powerful argumentative strategies available to debaters is actually one of the simplest. We will explore the nature and significance of the even-if clause, demonstrating how it can be used to trap opponents and give multiple options when it comes to pulling out the arguments needed to win. For this exercise, I will borrow one of the if-then examples from my previous articles, the one about value to life.

Consider the following two statements. The entirety of the first statement is incorporated as the premise of the second statement, as follows:

- 1) There is no solvency (P1)--they do not save any lives (C1).
- 2) Even if they save lives (P2a), there is no value to life in the world of the aff (P2b), so those lives have already been rendered meaningless (C2).

The first statement assumes the premise (P1) is true. If the premise (P1) is demonstrated as untrue, then it follows that the conclusion (C1) is likewise false. The second statement, on the other hand, does not presuppose the validity of the conclusion (C1). The premise (P2a) is actually binary. In other words, it functions equally well regardless of whether (C1) is true or false (though, do not confuse this with the double-bind, which, while also strategic, is a different type of binary claim). Hence, if we assume that the premise (P2b) is valid, there are actually two possible conclusions:

(P2a) is false--they do not save lives, so they do not solve.

(P2a) is true--they save lives, but they are meaningless anyway.

Why is this valuable? Even-if clauses create redundancy. They assert that a particular claim functions independently of the validity of a second (or third, or fourth...) claim. Redundancy is especially effective as a debate tool because it forces opponents to overcome multiple layers of argumentation in order to access a singular argument. If at any point they fail to breach just one of an opponent's redundant argument, they have lost 100% of their access to their own argument.

For our example above, our opponent has to win two things to beat back the redundancy: that the plan saves lives and that those lives are worth saving. If he wins that the plan saves lives but loses that those lives have value, he loses his entire impact. If he wins that lives have intrinsic value but fails to win that the plan can solve, he still loses his entire impact. Only by beating back both redundant statements can he access his own arguments.

When should a debater deploy even-if statements? The best place is during the rebuttals. This is because they are technically not new arguments. Rather, these statements simply take existing arguments and explain how they relate to each other in the debate, which is perfectly acceptable. Moreover, bringing them in any earlier in the debate may give away a strategy to the opponents. If a debater can hide redundancy until later in the debate, they may get the opposition to undercover one of their redundant arguments. If the opposition does, slam them. If they do not, debaters are still ahead for the reasons we have discussed.

Judges love even-if statements. Why? It gives them multiple outs when it comes to evaluating a debate. In especially close rounds, where strong warrants clash and there are no round-killer concessions made by either side, even-if statements can often carry the day. Debaters must learn how to deploy them and, most importantly, how to communicate them to the judge. Redundant arguments are actually fairly common, but debaters must convey their status using even-if statements. If they do not, they run the risk of the judge failing to catch on.