# Week 3: Advanced argumentation — impact calculus

A powerful communicator is a master at addressing *all* audiences. Conservative or liberal, informed or unaware, passionate or disinterested — a communicator cannot pick their audience's background, but a communicator *can* use tools of persuasion that impact *all* audiences. At the core of communication is a fundamental question: how do you persuade someone that doesn't agree with you?
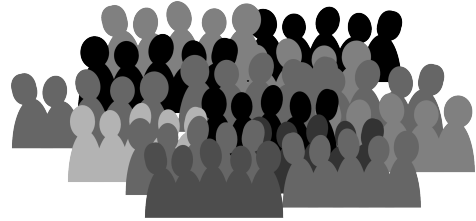
Debaters intuitively reach to disprove each argument the opposing team creates. After all, if the opponent said it, they *must* disagree. However, this implies that the opposing team is wrong on every point. That is not only unlikely, it is unpersuasive — debaters who attempt to disprove everything come across as contrarian and unreasonable.

Debaters can alternatively compromise by accepting parts of the opposing arguments as true but presenting their own side as *ultimately* correct. This presents the audience with a compelling perspective: a reasonable debater who accepts opposing information, understands it, but disagrees with the conclusion on reasonable grounds. **This is the art of compromise: conceding what your opponent got correct, but explaining why the judge should still vote for you.**

In debate, this artful form of compromise is called impact calculus. Debaters assign weight and value to opposing arguments and compare them side by side. Rather than directly refuting an argument, debaters can persuade the audience to prefer one over the other because it is more important. This process happens during the final point in four point refutation and takes one of two main forms.

Option 1: Turn your opponent's impact to work for you.

Turning an impact allows debaters to accept the entirety of an opposing argument and simply re-interpret the impact as a *good* thing. The more the impact weighs, the better for the team turning the impact. A well-executed turn is incredibly persuasive to an audience.

Example: The negative team is correct judge! If we pass our plan, Russia will funnel more refugees to the EU. The negative team presented that fact as "weaponizing migration." But the entire point of our plan is to shift the paradigm away from refugees being an expensive inconvenience and into people who deserve dignity and respect. The fact that the EU will get opportunities to help more refugees because of Russia's actions *is a fundamentally good thing.* Vote affirmative.

Option 2: Assign weight to opposing arguments and outweigh the opposing position.

In debate, there are four conventional "weights" that could be assigned to an argument.

Weight 1: Likelihood. How likely is the impact to happen?

Example: "It is highly unlikely that the affirmative plan would cause nuclear war. However, it is *highly* likely that it would decrease tax burdens for middle and lower class American citizens."

Weight 2: Severity. How much would the impact affect people?

Example: "The affirmative advantage of fiscal savings is, of course, good… but it risks killing American citizens by removing rigorous testing requirements from pharmaceutical companies."

**Weight 3: Timeframe.** How soon would each impact happen?

Example: "While the affirmative plan may result in savings after 25 years, it would begin harming the bottom line for lower-class citizens *immediately* upon being implemented."

Weight 4: Reversibility. Can the impact ever be undone?

Example: "The affirmative plan will cost money, but we can always build more capital and recoup costs. However, the people who die due to malnutrition can never be recovered. We should accept the recoverable cost of money in exchange for irreplaceable lives."

Debaters can assign one (or more) weights to their arguments and the relevant refutation. By comparing overall weight of each position to the audience, debaters can compelling say "even if my opponent is correct and their impact happens, it is far outweighed by the affirmative impact."
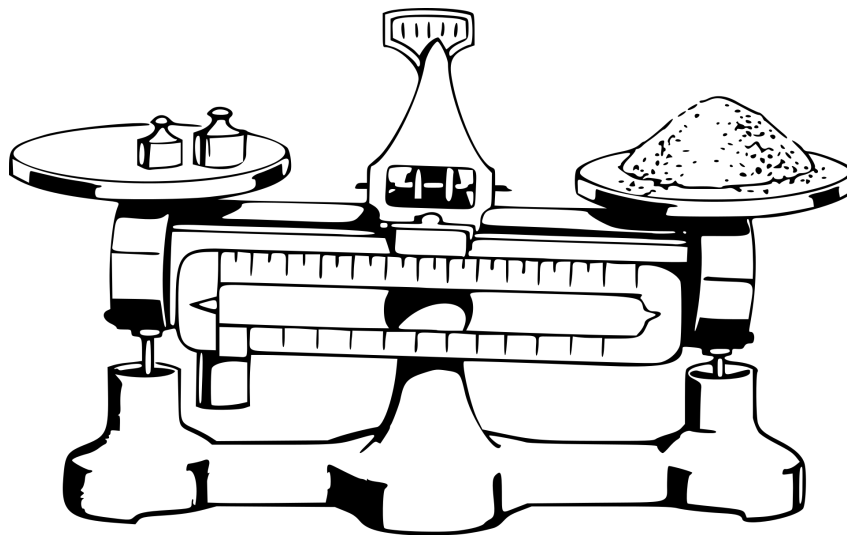
Impact calculus can be prepared

Although talented communicators can perform impact calculus on the fly, preparation never hurts. Impact calculus can be pre-written into negative briefs underneath evidence to bolster negative arguments. It can also be included in affirmative hit sheets to drive home affirmative refutation. Debaters should avoiding reading pre-written impact calculus like a robot, but the process of brainstorming and fine-tuning its wording has a tangible impact on delivery in the round. After tournaments, debaters can reference back to their written impact calculus and assess what worked and what didn't.