Evidence Basics

Guide for Penn for Youth Debate Lesson Plan 3

As discussed in Lesson Plan 2, it is important that debaters use credible sources when researching and that they learn how to store evidence in a way that can be easily accessed during a round. Learning how to research efficiently and effectively is a great portable skill that students can carry with them even past debate.
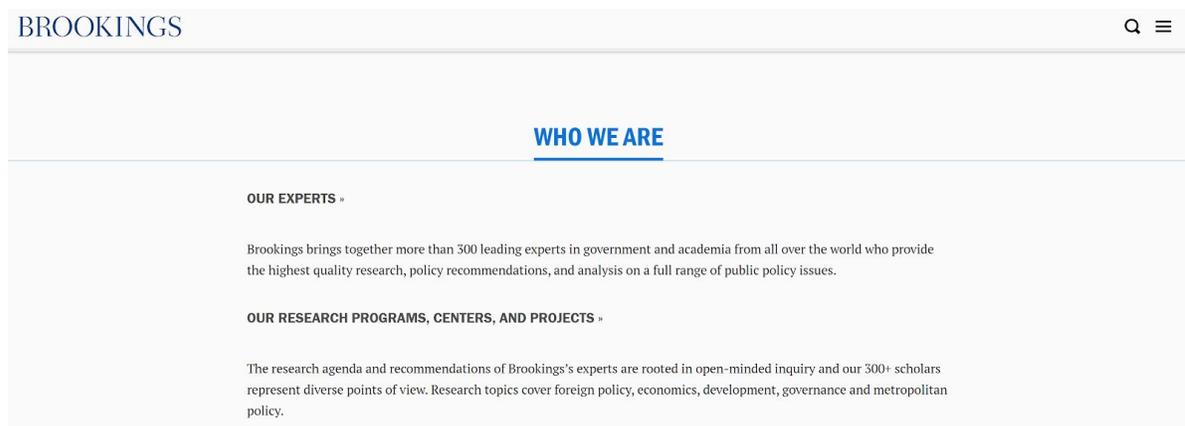
This lesson plan will focus on:
- Evaluating sources
- Cutting cards

Evaluating sources

How can you tell if a source is reliable? There are a few ways of checking the credibility of sources. Keep in mind that a source is not necessarily credible just because you've heard its name before! For example, CNN and Fox are mainstream news outlets that are not considered credible sources in debate because of their tendency for political bias. The best way to make sure you are using good evidence is to evaluate the credibility of your sources.
- Most sources have an "About" page. It is a promising sign if they mention research and expertise. For example, in the picture below from the Brookings Institution, notice the focus on the work of scholars.

- Google the source to find out more about its history and methods! You can also learn more about what the source specializes in this way! For the example below, note words like "data journalism" as well as the widespread circulation of the source. This establishes credibility! You can reference sources' Wikipedia pages

or search up the name of the source along with the words "bias" or "credibility" (e.g. "Wall Street Journal bias") to see what people say about the credibility of the source.

The Economist

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For the profession, see Economist. For other uses, see The Economist (disambiguation).

The Economist is an international weekly newspaper printed in magazine-format and published digitally that focuses on current affairs, international business, politics, and technology. Based in London, England, the newspaper is owned by The Economist Group, with core editorial offices in the United States, as well as across major cities in continental Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In August 2015, Pearson sold its 50% stake in the newspaper to the Italian Agnelli family's investment company, Exor, for £469 million (US$531 million) and the paper re-acquired the remaining shares for £182 million ($206 million). In 2019, their average global print circulation was over 909,476, while combined with their digital presence, runs to over 1.6 million. Across their social media platforms, it reaches an audience of 35 million, as of 2016. The newspaper has a prominent focus on data journalism and analysis over original reporting, to both criticism and acclaim.

What counts as an unreliable source?
- Blogs and opinion pieces are not considered good sources in debate. These can be detected by URLs that end in wordpress.com or blogspot.com. Further, these titles tend to be loaded and/or contain opinions rather than facts and objective statements.

Mother Jones

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- If you do not recognize the name, and Google does not have much information about it, it is best not to use it.
- Bad user interface and website design may indicate that the source lacks credibility because they have not developed their site.
- News sources that are known to lean to one side or another politically are generally frowned upon in debate.

To help, here are some examples of good sources! Remember, use sources as a data point for your argument and try not to simply repeat their claim! This is to say use sources as a rationale for saying something as opposed to just using their claim. Keep in mind that these are just a few examples of good sources and are far from a full list!

- Research publications and journals (best if peer-reviewed)
- News journals
    - Wall Street Journal
    - New York Times
    - Bloomberg
    - Reuters
    - The Economist
    - The Guardian
    - Brookings Institution
- Foreign policy sources
    - Foreign Policy
    - Foreign Affairs
    - Council on Foreign Relations
- Credible search engines
    - https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/think_tank_search
    - Google Scholar

Cutting cards

In debate, the term **card** usually refers to evidence used to support one of your main arguments, or warrants. It is a way of storing evidence. For example, if a statistic is pulled from a study conducted by Jerome Fisher, the debater could refer to their evidence as the "Fisher card." The term "cutting cards" is simply jargon for preparing a very simple way to access this evidence in round. This proves to be helpful when pieces of evidence come into question – debaters may have experienced this in round when an opponent asks to see where exactly you obtained a certain statistic or quote.

Cards exist primarily for your own use (though your opponents may also ask to see your evidence), so *there is no required format*. However, there are certain elements that you should make sure are included.
1. Include the full source/citation at the top of each card (including the author(s), date of publication, publishing organization, name of the article, and link if applicable)
2. Include the entire paragraph that contains the quote/statistic used
3. Underline and bold the quote/statistic used
4. If you foresee using this card in round (i.e. outside of your initial case), you can:
    a. Excessively reduce the font of everything else

b. Isolate the evidence such that you can read the underlined and bolded portion in a coherent sentence

Below are two examples of cards. Cards do not have to be formatted in this way, but many debaters choose this format or something very similar!

Increasing Investment

Mitchell '14, CATO Institute (Daniel J. Mitchell, Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, "The Overwhelming Case Against Capital Gains Taxation", *Forbes*, 7 November 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielmitchell/2014/11/07/the-overwhelming-case-against-capital-gains-taxation/#19b1509a3b0a)

Then the authors analyze the impact of capital gains taxes on the "user cost" of capital investment. Capital gains taxes make capital investments more expensive and therefore less investment occurs. Several studies have investigated the link between the supply and cost of venture capital financing and capital gains taxation, and found theoretical and empirical evidence suggesting a direct causality between a lower tax rate and a greater supply of venture capital. Kevin Milligan, Jack Mintz, and Thomas Wilson (1999) sought to estimate the sensitivity of investment to changes in the user cost of capital and found that **decreasing capital gains taxes by 4.0 percentage points leads to a 1.0 to 2.0 percent increase in investment.**

Mitchell '14, CATO Institute (Daniel J. Mitchell, Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, "The Overwhelming Case Against Capital Gains Taxation", *Forbes*, 7 November 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielmitchell/2014/11/07/the-overwhelming-case-against-capital-gains-taxation/#19b1509a3b0a)

Next, they investigate the impact on entrepreneurship. **Capital gains tax**es reduce the return that entrepreneurs and investors receive from the sale of a business. This **diminishes the reward for entrepreneurial risk-taking and reduces the number of entrepreneurs and the investors that support them. The result is lower levels of economic growth and job creation** Analysing the stock of venture capital and tax rates on capital gains from 1972 to 1994, Gompers and Lerner found that **a one percentage point increase in the rate of the capital gains tax was associated with a 3.8 percent reduction in venture capital funding.**