

How to Argue Effectively

Author Unknown (frequently attributed to Dave Barry)

I argue very well. Ask any of my remaining friends. I can win an argument on any topic, against any opponent. People know this and steer clear of me at parties. Often, as a sign of their great respect, they don't even invite me. You too can win arguments. Simply follow these rules:

1. Drink liquor.

Suppose you are at a party and some hotshot intellectual is expounding on the economy of Peru, a subject you know nothing about. If you're drinking some health-fanatic drink like grapefruit juice, you'll hang back, afraid to display your ignorance, while the hotshot enthalls your date. But if you drink several large martinis, you'll discover you have **STRONG VIEWS** about the Peruvian economy. You'll be a **WEALTH** of information. You'll argue forcefully, offering searing insights and possibly upsetting furniture. People will be impressed. Some may leave the room.

2. Make things up.

Suppose, in the Peruvian economy argument, you are trying to prove that Peruvians are underpaid, a position you base solely on the fact that **YOU** are underpaid, and you'll be damned if you're going to let a bunch of Peruvians be better off. **DON'T** say: "I think Peruvians are underpaid." Say instead: "The average Peruvian's salary in 1981 dollars adjusted for the revised tax base is \$1,452.81 per annum, which is \$836.07 before the mean gross poverty level."

Note: Always make up exact figures.

If an opponent asks you where you got your information, make **THAT** up too. Say: "This information comes from Dr. Hovel T. Moon's study for the Buford Commission published on May 9, 1982. Didn't you read it?" Say this in the same tone of voice you would use to say, "You left your soiled underwear in my bathroom."

3. Use meaningless but weighty-sounding words and phrases.

Memorize this list:

- Let me put it this way
- In terms of
- Vis-a-vis
- Per se
- As it were
- Qua
- So to speak

You should also memorize some Latin abbreviations such as "Q.E.D.", "e.g.", and "i.e." These are all short for "I speak Latin, and you don't."

Here's how to use these words and phrases. Suppose you want to say, "Peruvians would like to order appetizers more often, but they don't have enough money." You never win arguments talking like that. But you **WILL** win if you say, "Let me put it this way. In terms of appetizers vis-a-vis Peruvians qua Peruvians, they would like to order them more often, so to speak, but they do not have enough money per se, as it were. Q.E.D."

Only a fool would challenge that statement.

4. Use snappy and irrelevant comebacks.

You need an arsenal of all-purpose irrelevant phrases to fire back at your opponents when they make valid points. The best are:

- You're begging the question.
- You're being defensive.
- Don't compare apples to oranges.
- What are your parameters?

This last one is especially valuable. Nobody (other than engineers and policy wonks) has the vaguest idea what "parameters" means.

Don't forget the classic: YOU'RE SO LINEAR.

Here's how to use your comebacks:

You say:

As Abraham Lincoln said in 1873...

Your opponent says:

Lincoln died in 1865.

You say:

You're begging the question.

- or -

You say:

Liberians, like most Asians...

Your opponent says:

Liberia is in Africa.

You say:

You're being defensive.

5. Compare your opponent to Adolf Hitler.

This is your heavy artillery, for when your opponent is obviously right and you are spectacularly wrong. Bring Hitler up subtly. Say, "That sounds suspiciously like something Adolf Hitler might say," or "You certainly do remind me of Adolf Hitler."

So that's it. You now know how to out-argue anybody. Do not try to pull any of this on people who generally carry weapons.