



by  
Bill Davis

*A Collection of  
Debate and Individual Events Essays  
for High School Coaches and Students*

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Developing Communication Skills

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to Charles Fulcher, who got me into this mess.

Thanks, Coch!

## About The Author

Bill Davis was a terrible debater in high school, a slimy and lazy debater in college, and a disc jockey in his youth. He has now paid for his sins by sixteen years of teaching apparent clones of himself.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to James Copeland for allowing my columns to be a part of *The Rostrum* magazine. Special thanks to Diana Carlin of Clark Publishing, Inc. for helping make this book a reality.

# Introduction

by Mahlon Coop  
Blue Valley Northwest High School Debate

The way I had it figured, listening to Him over the years, I was Yang to Bill Davis's Ying. I made a big mistake.

I mean, if you ever had a question about debate theory, debate technique, or then, basic forensics stuff, anyone around here would have the good sense to say "ask Bill Davis, see what he says."

I kept supposing they would then say, "and then, oh, yeah, don't forget to ask Mahlon Coop too."

Well, that's the last time you will hear MY name in this book. And deservedly so. Even though Bill Davis once insisted on calling me his debate "guru," I have learned to discover that Bill Davis *knows it*.

What I seem to begin to sense is right, or lean toward, or am in a state of pondering, Bill Davis has apprehended, hands down, and found the language for — and damn him! He's clever and entertaining to boot. But the thing I really love/hate about this book, is that Bill Davis knows how to "Incremental You."

By that, I mean, there **has got** to be **one** essay in this book that "works" for either teacher or student of forensics or debate. (By the way, **don't** start reading this book at the beginning, scan the Table of Contents, create your own order based on interest or need, and see if I ain't right). And once that one essay brings you **the** insight suddenly, you will find another essay that "works", and then the wisdom of another collects around your consciousness. Suddenly, you find yourself feeding off this book, each essay a meal, each meal making you hungry for another. O, what a tasting.

I have never known a debate/forensics coach to take such an Aristotelian-analytical-breakdown approach to basic debate and forensics theory, then, separate the wheat from the chaff, and then, find such lively, understandable

ways to make it engaging, holistic, and Platonic, particularly to those (i.e. students) who must **do** something with the knowledge. The gulf between the normal Knowledge Textbook and the unique High School Mind of Application defies most ships and oil tankers I know. Much gets sunk, or lost, or worse, spills to cause damage beyond our abilities to assess in the movement of “our” particular wisdoms to “their” applications.

I get to speak from experience. I have witnessed many of Bill Davis’s student-debater-forensicators. After watching them, I’m convinced that Aristotle and Plato would have shook hands and then bought each other breakfast at Denny’s, and have eaten well.

Eat well. You cannot order wrongly no matter where you start in this book. Your only mistake will be in not becoming a repeat customer — because others most certainly will. This book moves beyond the wisdom of the debate/forensics chef, where knowledge becomes both food and a beautiful, learning wind-chime.



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## So let's analyze it. What are the elements of presence?

1. **Openness.** The presenter moves with a purpose that envelopes the entire room. The attitude is outward, not inward, concerned with their own problems. Take two musical performers. One takes the microphone gingerly, the other seems to pick it up as an afterthought, just before the cue. Meanwhile, the open performer looks at the audience. A smile crosses her lips. The audience leans forward, expecting a great performance. This means a feeling of
2. **Positive anticipation.** We can hardly wait for the presenter to speak, because they are eager to perform. There is nothing about them that suggests reluctance. They want that spotlight. They seem to reach for it because
3. **Nothing is tentative.** They are prepared and here they come!
4. **They move.** Now, you probably cannot walk during an oratory into the audience a la Donahue, but you can use the front of the room and especially you may use the attitude of your body. How much of your time do you spend standing straight up, with your shoulders still and the center of your body in your chest? That is static and eventually boring to your audience. MOVE! Lean to one side, bend at the waist, turn to the side. Gestures can actually cross the body, you know. We are not limited to the Classic Debater Chop. And speaking of chopping,
5. **They look good.** This is seemingly bad news to those of us who are aesthetically challenged. But looking good does not mean looking beautiful. It means for the gentlemen:

The clothes fit. They are pressed. The tie is tied correctly, the shoes are clean, the socks aren't left over from gym class, and the hair is not in the eyes. For the ladies:

The clothes fit. They are not causing you to bust out all over, if you catch my drift. The shoes are not causing you to wobble like a new born colt. Makeup is minimal, and most importantly, the hair does not obscure your most important element of your presence — your eyes. For all:

You look healthy. You look at the judge(s) and a miracle occurs.

You smile.

I cannot recommend anything that will instantly add to your success more than a genuine smile that establishes a spark of communication between you and the judge(s). Of course, in adversarial American education, this is somehow considered a ploy — kissing up. How very sad. Our opinions of people who smile are not merely influenced in the way that we like them — we feel comfortable with them, too. In smiling at a judge, you are defusing an awkward situation not only for you, but for the critic.

6. **They expect you to enjoy yourself.** This, ultimately, is the secret of all great performances, no matter what the event. Take this motto and post it in a prominent place, and recite it after attendance every day.

*The performance is for the benefit of the judge.*

Good things happen to people with presence. There is no reason why you should not experience these good things. Presence is for all year, not just birthdays and Christmas.

Sorry.

Fundamentals of the Argumentative  
Events  
or  
Your Baby is Just an Eyeball, and What's  
More, It's Blind!

(published 1996)

I am right and you are wrong.

That's reasonable, isn't it?

This brings us, very quickly, to the fundamentals of the argumentative events  
— policy, L-D, extemp and oratory.

There is only one that applies to all these events, but it is a necessary for any  
other step.

*Viewpoint.*

You learn viewpoint, and all the rest of it is just learning how to better  
express that viewpoint to judges.

This simple idea, however, deserves a long explanation.

Below is an Disembodied Eyeball (sincere apologies to Emerson). I know it  
doesn't much look like one, but that's YOUR viewpoint.



Notice that the Eyeball is seeing. This is difficult for a Disembodied Eyeball not attached to a brain, but we aren't here to be anal about it. The Eyeball sees some things, and not others. It sees the gorgeous stick figure on the street, and not the speeding car headed right at it. Perhaps the driver is distracted at seeing a lustful Eyeball.

Here is the problem. We've got reality, or The Truth if you will. But the limitations of being a simple individual in a complex world mean that we only see part of reality, and not all of it. We rely upon others to tell us what we do not know.

Those who see MORE of reality are at a great advantage over those who see less. If the Disembodied Eyeball can see both the gorgeous stick figure and the speeding car, then its chances of living to lust another day after abstract art are greatly increased.

Now, give the Disembodied Eyeball some shades. The scenery is still the same, but it LOOKS different.

Now, a well-prepared Disembodied Eyeball can see as much as it did before, but perhaps the meaning of what is seen is perhaps somewhat different. The Eyeball feels cool — Travoltaesque. It's baaaad. Therefore, the speeding car is no longer a problem. The Eyeball merely gives a “drop dead” glare and the car glides to a stop, merely nudging the plastic frames.

There is a point to this, I promise.

Now, write down the most important fact about life that you have discovered. You can make a joke of it, though perhaps it will lose some impact. Perhaps it is “Never eat at a cafe called ‘Mom’s’” or “Never play cards with a guy named ‘Doc’”. Now put these as the lenses of your Disembodied Eyeball. The Eyeball will interpret reality — the Truth — through these lenses. Therefore, the DE will not stride confidently into the cafe, expecting a good meal, or a gallery, for a sight for sore eyes. Disaster is avoided. Guys named Doc look elsewhere for their pigeons.

By now, I hope we can agree that this is a fairly accurate description of how we approach the world. It works, or it had better or we will suffer and die before our time.

Now, I approach the Disembodied Eyeball and request it's view of the world it sees. The eyeball, lacking a mouth, communicates with me (in a blink) "There is a car. There is a woman. There is a cafe." Stupid eyeball. I want to know what the Eyeball thinks about its environment. I know what I see. I even have a pretty good idea what Eyeball sees, but what I want is to know what Eyeball thinks about it.

Instead, to learn more about Truth, I want the DE to tell me about the lousy food at Mom's, and that the guy at the door named Doc is a card shark. It's what I cannot see from my own viewpoint, my own filters, that I want desperately to see.

We read fiction to see a different viewpoint from our own. Great literature affects us deeply because it gives us a different side of reality, or of Truth, than we knew before.

Have I convinced you that a viewpoint is critical in understanding the Truth? Assuming that no one in the world except Lush Rimshot has a corner on the Truth, we are most convinced of another's argument when it comes from a coherent viewpoint — that is rounded and consistent.

I'm sorry, but I've got to go back to my DE for a moment. If the Eyeball has blank spots (glaucoma?) then I am less likely to rely upon it to give a view that I can trust. I also, in judging a debate, an oration, or an extemp, recognize that the performer is wearing his shades — that even though everything that may be seen is indeed being seen, the performer is reporting only that which fits the viewpoint — the cool shades, if you will. The judge not only takes into account the shades, but is shocked when the performer has the courage to remove them. Taking off the shades and still being cool — that's STAR quality.

As you probably figured out several paragraphs before, the debater is the Disembodied Eyeball for the judge. The judge asks the Debater Eyeball to give her a view of what the debater sees. The better job the debater does in presenting that viewpoint, the more persuasive the position. The shades are the filters that the debater uses to report the "reality" of what is real — the Truth. The truly outstanding debater doesn't even seem to wear shades at all.

The same applies to all the “argumentative” events, including oratory and extemp. The judge often reacts to the blind spots of the argument — the “aw c’mon kid, don’t you know this?” comment that contestants often mistake for bias. It is actually a completely legitimate protest from a person who is unwilling to be led by a person she considers “blind.” Wouldn’t you do the same?

Let’s take an example from each genre. In policy debate, a negative looks for a viewpoint to express the negative view of the world.

### Example I. Policy

#### **Affirmative case**

#### **Negative position**

A reasonable Chinese leader **MUST** react violently-NOW!

I. Taiwan is oppressed by the One China Policy.

This is the solemn word of U.S. gov’t.

II. Taiwan will eventually attempt to breakaway, with or without U.S. help, the result being world war! BOOM!

Any perceived favoritism of Taiwan requires a pre-emptive response, a la Pearl Harbor. If you want war, remember we will be struck first.

Plan: Recognize Taiwan now!

In the China topic, the viewpoint of the Reasonable Chinese Leader is many times the strongest, most believable view.

Solvency — the weak PRC will have to accept Taiwan’s independence as a fait accompli. (OOOHH, big words!)  
The weak PRC will fight a war to the death — guaranteed

## Example II. Lincoln-Douglas

Aff. case on Resolved: that the rights of the accused are more important than the rights of the victim. Here I will take the viewpoint of the prosecutor.

**Negative position** – society is bound together with ties of confidence. Without the view that we are secure against desertion by society that we consent to be governed.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| I. The presumption of innocence is the basis of justice. It is the most important right of the accused. | The conviction is the most important result of the criminal justice system. The greatest blows to confidence in government have been the failure to convict. |
| II. Without presumption of innocence the government will be too powerful.                               | The government is already bound by powerful shackles of tight budgets and limited resources.   |
| III. Ultimately, we will all be victims in a system that ignores the presumption of innocence.          | A system that is publicly foiled in protecting its law-abiding citizens cannot stand.  |

### Implications for debaters

1. The deadliest mistake for any debater are contradictions. Look for them, and create them as decision rules. By the analogy above, no judge will be willing to follow an advocate who does not see clearly.
2. Affirmatives must establish a clear viewpoint early in the 1AC, and justify this viewpoint as superior. The opening observation should establish it, perhaps as a decision rule.
3. Rebuttals are all about viewpoints. Entire sets of arguments may be rejected simply by showing the viewpoints that create them are somehow contradictory, untrue, severely limited or unethical.
4. Any debate strategy that ultimately limits viewpoint is going to be counterproductive. The viewpoint is only as good as the consistency it expresses. Viewpoint should never be anonymous (Ehrlich in '95!). Viewpoint should never be hard to understand, else a deadly blind spot remains.

## Implications for Orators

1. How about using your introduction to clearly indicate viewpoint? A common introduction is the story. The wise orator would use the same viewpoint throughout the speech.
2. Early in the speech, time must be wisely used to establish the clarity of the viewpoint, even to the extent of convincing the judge that the viewpoint is in some way clearly superior than any other. Only then can the judge relax into the flow of the speech and enjoy the argument. Speaking of viewpoint, make yourself take the viewpoint of the judge. Is doing any less showing respect to the occasion?

## Implications for Extempers

1. The trend towards multiple citations can be either a boon or a blessing. When an extemper does the “two sides of this issue” approach, and then ends with a mugwump response (O.K., how about wishy-washy?) then the judge truly has not gained anything from the speech.
2. But a completely biased approach possibly offends more than the same in any other event. The extemper should not have an investment in an answer, and a too narrow answer is not appropriate. Look, Lush would not get good rankings in extemp rounds, purely because of his virulent viewpoint.
3. Bias of sources is very important in extemp. Many of the citations come from very biased sources, and some judges do realize that *Insight on the News* is published by the Moonies. This is a definite blank spot in the Eyeball. I suggest an extemper should comment on the bias of his sources, because that fact certainly affects the judge.

It may seem that I have gone a long way to make an apparently simple point, except that failure to develop viewpoint is the primary reason why you are failing to impress your judges. If that doesn't bother you, you wouldn't be reading this! Or is that just my viewpoint?