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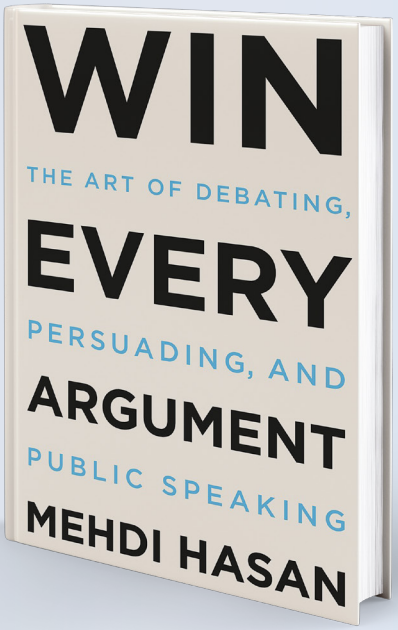

Win Every Argument

The Art of Debating, Persuading, and Public Speaking

By Mehdi Hasan

Mehdi Hasan is an award-winning British-American journalist. He is the host of The Mehdi Hasan Show on MSNBC and NBC's streaming channel Peacock. Hasan is a former columnist and podcaster at The Intercept and a former presenter on Al Jazeera English, and his op-eds have also appeared in the New York Times and the Washington Post.

Know Your Argument

Mehdi Hasan's goal in ***Win Every Argument: The Art of Debating, Persuading, and Public Speaking***, is to help his reader do just that. Hasan has made a career of arguing, and he does not believe arguments should be shied away from. He considers them "to be the lifeblood of democracy" as they help with problem solving, opening people up to new ideas, and discovering new ideas. He believes it is important to know one's own argument as well as the argument of the opposition. He quotes John Stuar Mill's *On Liberty as Mill* says the same. Hasan's goal, however, is not all about persuasion and logical arguments. In fact, at one point he argues for the use of what is frequently known as ad hominem attacks which are usually considered to be logical fallacies. Hasan breaks his book up into three sections.

In section one, he defines ethos, logos, and pathos, and helps his reader get the audience's attention as well as become a better listener. In part two, he shares techniques with his reader, and in the third section, he explains what people need to do in order to prepare to debate. He ends his book with an explanation of how to bring this all together.

Debate Basics

Hasan begins his first section by talking about the importance of knowing one's audience. This is important as different pieces of support will win over different audiences. He encourages debaters to know the make up, size, and demographics of the audience. While a debater should tailor the types of support provided to the audience, they should also tailor the language and even the voice volume used when presenting ideas. He does not condone changing a thesis because of an audience but rather just changing the way the argument is presented. Part of appealing to the audience is making sure to get their attention. He believes the first sentence a speaker says is important in grabbing attention. Speakers also need to be sure to make eye contact, praise the audience, and attempt to bond with the audience.

Hasan also believes it is important to bring emotional appeals to an audience rather than just facts and figures. He says, "our feelings rarely care about the facts." Because of this, facts alone will not win an argument. He discusses Aristotle's three modes of persuasion. These are ethos, which relies on the credibility of the speaker, pathos, which relies on emotional appeals, and

logos which relies on reason. Aristotle believed all three were equally important, but Hasan believes that pathos is the most important of the three modes. He quotes Antonio Damasio as saying that human beings are "feeling machines that think." Stories are one way that speakers and debaters can appeal to pathos. Quality pathetic appeals use careful language in an attempt to show rather than tell.

Hasan discusses logos in more detail in his chapter entitled, "Show Your Receipts." This involves both finding evidence and citing sources. The first part of this task is to actually get what he calls receipts, or facts and proof. A person can also create their own proof by citing something the opponent said previously in the argument against them. It is important not just to have proof to undermine the opponent's credibility; it is also important to time when a person delivers these receipts.

People concerned with formal logic such as professors in a classroom will advise people to avoid attacking their opponent's character. Hasan is not concerned with helping people formulate formal academic arguments. Rather, he is interested in helping people learn to win arguments. Because ethos, the credibility of the arguer, is part of Aristotle's three modes of argument, Hasan finds it very helpful to attack the credibility of the opponent; after all, if they are not credible, people will not take their arguments as seriously. These ad hominem attacks can be abusive like those Donald Trump uses. They can be circumstantial meaning that they can point out an opponent's biases, or they can be tu quoque meaning they point out the past words of an opponent to call into question their current case.

An example of this is when liberals point to pro-life Republicans supporting abortions in personal life while rejecting the pro-choice argument in political life. These ad hominem tactics do not prove the logic of an argument to be wrong, but they do call into question the veracity of the opponent. If someone is attacked with an ad hominem, Hasan says they can either call it out as an ad hominem fallacy, they can concede their argument and make apologies for past mistakes, or they can go on the attack with their own ad hominem attack.

Tools for Debate

In his next chapter, Hasan discusses the absolute necessity of listening well. People prefer to speak rather than to listen, particularly in debates. This is harmful, however, because people cannot appropriately respond to what is being said if they have not listened first. Hasan writes that there are two types of listening: critical and empathetic. Critical listening requires evaluating what is being said. Critical listening can help a debater recognize false claims and fallacious arguments and find places where they must concede points to the opposition. Empathetic listening is important when an audience member is speaking. It requires the listener to try "to see the world through that person's eyes." Hasan says that to improve empathetic listening a person can stay present to the speaker, make eye contact, and ask the right questions.

Laughter is another important tool for the debater, according to Hasan. Audiences appreciate humor. Laughter, in fact, can bring an audience together, helping them to identify with the speaker. Hasan is not against getting laughs at the opponent's expense. In fact, Hasan quotes Mary Beard as saying that Cicero, one of the best orators in ancient times, used to use ridicule to get the upper hand. Humor can open up an audience to a speaker's points because it can make the audience like the speaker better. It also serves to lighten the mood. Sometimes jokes can be planned out, but a debater also needs to be prepared to be spontaneous. He does warn against being offensive, however, as well as against telling too many jokes.

One tip Hasan gives is to use the rule of three. He explains that people understand and remember ideas given in three parts. Again he goes back to Cicero to show how ancient this technique is. He says that one benefit of the rule of three is that audiences will naturally clap before the third item is given, such as in Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech. A person can organize a speech around the rule of three by including a beginning, a middle, and an end, and making sure to introduce three main points in the introduction and repeat them in the conclusion.

Next Hasan moves on to what he calls his judo moves. He discusses the imperative to sometimes be willing to yield. Sometimes this yielding can actually help a person win an argument. One of the ways a person can gain an upper hand is by admitting to concessions. Sometimes an opponent makes a valid point. By admitting that the opponent is right, a speaker can frequently throw the opponent off their game while making the audience see the speaker as being both reasonable and rational. Hasan discusses synchoresis which occurs when a person concedes one point in order to make a more important one. He then discusses that sometimes having the last word is not as important as people think it is. He prefers to speak first when there are multiple speakers because he can debunk opponent's arguments before they are even made. Judo moves that put an opponent off balance should be used sparingly so as not to be overdone.

Next Hasan discusses the zinger. To exemplify the zinger, Hasan mentions how often Dan Quayle used to mention how he had as much experience as JFK did. Eventually after Quayle had said this numerous times publicly, Lloyd Bentsen responded by saying, ""Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy." This zinger is considered to be one of the biggest moments in vice presidential debate history. A zinger is something that is intended to throw a person off guard. They are used to leave opponents "red-faced and speechless." Hasan's suggestions for using zingers are for the speaker to be prepared, practice the zingers when possible, and to keep them short. Timing is key.

Hasan also thinks it is beneficial to set booby traps. One way to do this is through using an opponent's own words against them. This often requires a lot of research, and it can be used effectively when first asking a person if they agree with something without telling them that the words came from a statement they previously made. Then when they disagree, the speaker can inform them that these were their own words from the past. This can be effective because often people give so many interviews that they simply cannot remember everything they

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have said. Another way that a speaker can trap their opponent is with a question that they will not be able to answer. Here he gives an example of when he stated the number of Tibetans that have been killed in the last sixty years. Zhang, the person he was interviewing, said that number was wrong, so Hasan asked him what the number was. Zhang was not able to answer the question, and Hasan used this to prove that he, then, should not be questioning the studies.

Hasan uses the term gish galloper and quotes the Urban Dictionary's definition as "spewing so much bullshit in such a short span that your opponent can't address let alone counter all of it." It is much harder to counter false claims than to make them, and as such, the gish gallop can be effective in debate. Hasan gives his reader tips for when they encounter such a rhetorical situation. First, he suggests that a person pick their battles. All of the claims simply cannot be addressed, and as such, it is important to hone in on which ones to pursue.

He suggests finding "the weak links in the chain." This works best when there is one clear, definable worst argument presented in the gish gallop. It does not work as well when a cohesive argument is given. He then goes on to recommend that a speaker never budges when confronted with a gish galloper. Often the gish galloper is trying to muddy the water rather than actually win people over. It is important not to allow the speaker to move on to new points or evade questions. Another tactic is to specifically call out the person for the gish galloping that they are doing.

Being Confident, Calm, and Prepared

The final section of Hasan's book details what should occur behind the scenes in order for the reader to win an argument. Hasan starts by describing the importance of confidence, and then he presents some tips for increasing this confidence. One of these is to visualize success while with as much detail as possible. Next, he suggests taking risks such as volunteering to speak in situations and participating in arguments with friends. FInally, he says it is important to surround oneself with positive and encouraging people. Body language, voice projection, and eye contact are all crucial elements for a speaker.

Being calm is also important, says Hasan, in an argument because, among other things, it gives the speaker the best chance to get their point across. He gives numerous strategies, including breath control and laughter to help with this. In regards to self-talk, he recommends people speak to themselves in the third person which helps them think of themselves in the same ways they think about others.

Winning arguments is something that can be taught, he maintains. As an example, Hasan writes about Winston Churchill who, as a child, had a stammer, a lisp, and was shy. He worked on all of these and spent so much time rehearsing and practicing his speeches, that he rose to become an excellent orator. For his reader, Hasan recommends recording and watching back videos of their own speeches, sometimes without the volume, to see how they present to the audience. In regards to voice, he encourages his reader to focus on pitch, power, pace, and pause as these all affect how a message will get across.

After discussing the importance of doing the homework and understanding one's opponent and argument, Hasan closes out his book discussing the importance of a great ending to a speech. The ending is an excellent place to include pathos which helps draw the listener in. It is also a good time to summarize the main points of the argument, but it is important not to include new arguments at this point. Also crucial, to Hasan, is avoiding just ending an argument after the final point.

Hasan's book is not a theoretical book on rhetoric or logical arguments and fallacies. Rather, it is a practical book, written by a master of debate, whose purpose is to help readers win arguments. The book walks the reader through the entire process of debate, from the preparation and practice phases through actually delivering a speech or argument. The book does not just tell the reader what is important but gives the reader practical tips that help them to implement these crucial aspects into their own speeches. Hasan discusses the importance of lists of three, and many of his recommendations come in groups of three, leading to a well-organized, cohesive, and easy to understand and implement guide to winning arguments.