What to Do In a Rebuttal

The goal of refutation is to answer your opponent’s arguments. The steps of the refutation process include:

1. Identifying the particular argument you are refuting
2. Critically evaluating the argument and explaining why it is wrong
3. Supplying additional evidence to support your claims
4. Explaining the implications of this particular argument for the more controversial issue

Rebuttal speech pointers

1. Take the place of the judge/audience and speak in their language
2. Synthesize the arguments for the judge
   a. You might have an itemized list: “There are several reasons why my opponent’s claims are wrong…”
   b. You might meld arguments: “All of my arguments show that” or “The cumulative weight of my arguments point to…”
3. Point out your opponent’s omissions (arguments they didn’t respond to) and explain why those omissions are important for how the debate should be evaluated
4. Point out what is at stake in the controversy
5. Provide decision criteria or decision rules or guideposts for how the audience ought to evaluate the debate. Examples include:
   a. My evidence is superior…
   b. My position makes the most sense…
   c. My argument incorporates your position.
   d. Even if you don’t agree with me on this particular issue, your unshakable faith in the first amendment must lead you to conclude in my favor.
What not to do:
1. Don’t concede
2. Don’t be overly ambitious
3. Don’t drop or ignore important arguments
4. Don’t spend too much time on your opponent’s arguments
5. Don’t give another constructive

The opening constructive speech should:
• Introduce the proposition being debated
• Lay out the reasons why the proposition should be accepted or rejected
• Utilize grounds/evidence (narratives, statistics, testimony) to support the claims
• If it is a policy debate:
  o The affirmative advocate should show that:
    ◦ There is a problem
    ◦ That the status quo fails to solve the problem
    ◦ Failure to solve the problem will have an impact
    ◦ There is a solution to the problem
    ◦ The solution will actually solve the problem
  o The negative advocate should show that:
    ◦ There is no problem
    ◦ The problem will be solved in the status quo
    ◦ The impact to the problem is not significant
    ◦ The solution will fail to solve the problem
    ◦ The solution will cause a problem
    ◦ There is an alternative solution to the problem

The rebuttal speech should:
• Engage in focused listening
• Critically evaluate the arguments being advanced by the opponent
  o Determine what the advocate is saying
  o Evaluate the reasoning
  o Evaluate the grounds/evidence
• Formulate a response
o Plan a strategy
o Decide on tactics
  - Refutation by denial
  - Refutation by mitigation
  - Refutation by additional consideration
- Reduce the argument to absurdity
- Turn the tables
  - Prepare for refutation
o Present the response
  - Identify the point to be refuted
  - Label and signpost your refutation
  - Support the refutation
  - Show the impact of your refutation