

With the lyrical majesty of Queen, the virtuosity of Led Zeppelin and the dress sense of Cher, The Darkness are surely the greatest rock band ever

Horseshit!

The artistry of argument

A modern man's guide to verbal conflict

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The rules of engagement



a)
Basic equipment
Don't leave your chair without these

AUTHORITY This must be your tone (though don't mistake "of authority" for "authoritarian", which will get you hit).
SPEED Never let them build up a head of steam. Bring your big guns out first and it'll all be over before last orders.

CONCENTRATION If you want to win, don't allow yourself to be distracted: turn off the TV, put down the paper, don't start rearranging the furniture.
POLITENESS If you want to preach revolution, then do it in a suit.
PRECEDENT "Well, that certainly wasn't the case in the 19th century..."
STATISTICS Baffle them with mathematics (of course 78 per cent of it is made up). At some point in every argument, your opponent will try the same trick. "Research shows 78 per cent of people agree," they'll say. They may even attempt to throw the will of the people at you: "But 10,000 people can't be wrong." To this, you come back at once with: "McDonald's is the world's favourite food – does that make it the best?"



b)
Basic manoeuvres
From the kitchen to the courtroom, these are invaluable

FLATTER them with the furrowed brow of puzzled concentration, the wrinkled nose of having thought about it but in the end decided that it's rubbish (see Howard, Michael).
INTIMIDATE them with the open mouth of the man about to interrupt, the craning neck of the leashed dog, the shaking head that says they have missed the point (see Prescott, John).

WRONGFOOT them with the open palms of the honest man, the head cocked to one side of the sympathetic listener, the long pause followed by curt dismissal (see Blair, Tony).
EXTRAPOLATE them by taking what they've said to extremes: "So you're happy to have Federalism imposed on us by a European superstate? Any of Hitler's other ideas you like?" (see Campbell, Nicky).
CONFUSE them with obscure words. As the pen is mightier than the sword, so the spoken word can be more off-balancing than the judo manoeuvre. Try anything Greek-sounding and beginning with p: panacea, parapraxis, paradigmatic, pegmatite... (see Meades, Jonathan).
CRUSH them. "But what does that mean?" is good; alternatively, "Whaaaaaat?": disbelief will put them off their stride (see any student).

CASE STUDY 1 MARRIAGE

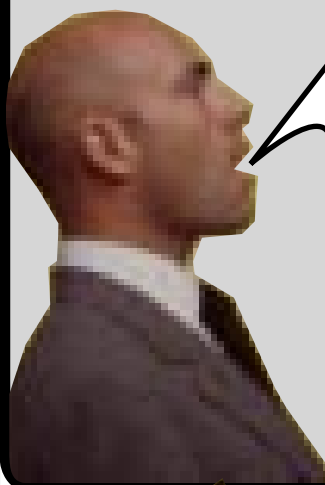
TONY SOPRANO You know when you asked me what Irina's cousin had that you don't have? Well, I thought about it, cause it's a good fucking question. And I figured out that it's not that you're not sexy. I realised that she actually had something to say.
CARMELA SOPRANO I'm here, Tony! I have things to say!
TONY Things other than 'Bring the chairs in'? She was a grown woman who was kicked around. She's a woman who had to struggle and didn't bitch and moan.
CARMELA Unlike me?
TONY Yeah.
CARMELA Well, who the fuck wanted it like this? This fucking house, and...
TONY Bullshit! For 20 fucking years all you did was fiddle with the air conditioning and bitch! And bitch, and bitch, and bitch to me!
CARMELA Well, well, well. It looks like all this time you wanted Tracy and Hepburn. Well let me ask you a question, Tony. What about all the other pigs you had your dick in? The strippers, the cocktail waitresses, were they all your best pals too? You fucking hypocrite. **'The Sopranos' (1999)**



PIC CREDITS TO GORME

FIG 1 THE ESQUIRE INSULT GENERATOR

Pick a word from each column to make perfect caustic quips for the more politically inclined dinner party. Stick to the same colour – life's too short to sit on the fence



KNEE-JERK	BLEEDING-HEART	IMPERIALIST
WISHY-WASHY	WARMONGERING	LIBERAL
BELLIGERENT	TREE-HUGGING	XENOPHOBE
UNDERGRADUATE	TORY	INGRATE
TABLOID-READING	DOLE-SCROUNGING	NEANDERTHAL
SKIVING	PIG-HEADED	DO-GOODER
HAWKISH	BEARDY	INBRED
AMOEBIC	SELF-CENTRED	UPSTART
DYED-IN-THE-WOOL	SOFTIE	DINOSAUR
IGNORANT	PERRIER-QUAFFING	ANARCHIST
THATCHERITE	MORALLY VACUOUS	REDNECK
UNION-LOVING	BELLICOSE	COMMIE



c)
Advanced weaponry
For serious skills, go classical

BEGINNERS

AMPLIFICATIO Repeating an idea with extra detail: "This lavatory seat, this simple black lavatory seat, is at the heart of our problems."

GRADATIO To arrange words in increasing order of importance: "Beckham's lack of pace is one thing, his inconsistency another, but what really gets me is his increasing inability to keep his mouth shut."

HYPERBOLE Good old exaggeration: "If you don't mend the photocopier in 10 minutes, I'm going to kill you."

INTERMEDIATE

ANTANAGOGI Following a negative with a positive to disguise the negative. "Yes, I left the lavatory seat up, but I didn't piss all over the floor."

PARALIPSIS Pretending that a statement is far too obviously true to contend: "Beckham's recent poor form is there for anyone to see."

DIACOPE Repetition of a word or phrase. "So what if I did give the photocopier a kicking – so what?"

BLACK BELT

CHIASMUS Balancing two clauses in a mirror image: "You leave the seat up again, I leave."

EPANAPLESIS Starting and ending on the same word. "The captaincy is the thing that's holding him back, so he has to resign the captaincy."

HYPOPHORA Posing then answering a question – a classy rhetorical device. "And you think the copier's the only thing that doesn't work round here? No way, matey..."



d)
Illegal weaponry
Arguing is a non-contact sport, of course, but these are also off the menu

Swearing Makes any argument into a fight waiting to happen
Pointing When alcohol-fuelled, this may require reserves of self-control you didn't realise you had in you

Shouting At least before the end of the first hour. (Note: raising your voice by degrees is infinitely more effective)

Playground taunting "Yes you did"/"No I didn't"-style exchanges are best left where they belong, in Parliament

Name-calling Eschew references to appearance, misfortunes, criminal record, employment or lack thereof, sexual proclivities or likening your opponent to any of history's great tyrants in favour of a visit to the Esquire Insult Generator, above

Esprit d'escalier It's the lowest form of esprit

CASE STUDY 2 POLITICS

JEREMY PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

MICHAEL HOWARD I was not entitled to instruct Derek Lewis and I did not instruct him. And the truth is...

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD I did not overrule Derek Lewis.

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD I was entitled to express my views. I was entitled to be consulted.

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD I was not entitled to instruct Derek Lewis and I did not instruct him. And the truth of it is...

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD And the truth of the matter is Mr Marriott was not suspended. I did not...

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD I did not overrule Derek Lewis.

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him?

HOWARD I took advice on what I could and could not do...

PAXMAN Did you threaten to overrule him, Mr Howard?

HOWARD ... and I acted scrupulously in accordance with that. 'Newsnight' (1998)



e)
Best left in the bag
Keep these guys under control

THE BIGOT Only a fool generalises without first saying, "I'm generalising, but..."

THE FIRST-NAME CALLER "Well, Jim, the truth is a little different, Jim..."

THE COUNCILLOR Using "cannot", "do not" instead of can't/don't makes you sound stupider, not cleverer.

THE UNIVERSITY DON "Well, let me put it this way..."

THE MAFIA DON "Look, my friend, it's like this..."

THE CHILD Throwing your stapler across the office won't earn points.

THE PRESCOTT Avoid the smile that pops up randomly to show you've remembered your media training.

THE PUB BORE "Listen, you might learn something..."

THE SCIENTIST "Define your terms..."

THE SELF-EDUCATOR A big sine qua non to Latin – QED, vis à vis, per se, qua, et al, ad nauseam...

THE STUDENT Never quote anyone.

THE ROAD RAGER Just put the jack back in the boot. Now.



f)
Some notes on women
Women are different. Why? Just because

SELECTIVE MEMORY You know you did tell them, three times, but you will not win, because of...

OBSTINACY They have reserves of staying power that you don't and they know it, from a terrifyingly young age.

CRYING The ultimate weapon: if you could use it, you know you would.

THE EYE OF THE STORM The tempest has passed, sunlight is starting to glimmer through the clouds, then suddenly she rears up like the wave in *The Perfect Storm*...

THE PHOENIX Like The Eye of the Storm, but arriving 24 hours after you'd forgotten you were arguing.

THE LAST WORD They can say "Just because" and that will be an end to it. All the shouting in the world will not change that.

REX/FEATURES

2

Getting started



a)
10 ways to start an argument

Ask IT to soup up your computer

Say: "We don't play that rule where I come from" in close proximity to a pool table

Ask HR whether appraisals are really for us or for them

Shout incorrect quiz-machine answers over somebody's shoulder

Using any long implement, ding the last-orders bell at 10.30pm

Wedge a matchbox onto your nose and shout: "Who threw that?"

Flash up football scores on Teletext during any programme with the word "wives" in the title

Borrow the fuse from the hairdryer

Try paying with a £50 note

Get into a taxi



b)
10 positions to take for the hell of it

Vegetarians have a similar chemical imbalance to paedophiles

Referees are the frontline of an FA plot to create five superclubs

Women like to be told

The last thing we need is a cure for cancer

The Neighbourhood Watch should be armed

What Britain really needs is a benevolent dictatorship

Most of Fathers 4 Justice don't even have kids

Bono has done more for world peace than Gandhi

4x4s are the ideal urban vehicle
L. Ron Hubbard had it about right

FIG 2 THE SEVEN AGES OF ARGUING WITH WOMEN

Mother	"WANT ICE CREAM!!!" "No, I didn't wee on the seat..."
Sibling	"Did." "Didn't." "Did." "Didn't."
Girlfriend	"But how do you know you won't like it, unless you try it?" "Honestly, I don't think your sister is better looking than you are." "I know they look better on you than they do on me, but they're my last clean pair..." "Are you about to have your period?" "But he's my best friend."
Wife	"But you asked me whether or not she was good-looking." "What, so I can't go out for a drink with my mates anymore?" "I said I'd do it, AFTER the football." "Blue. Pink. What's the difference? Whichever I say, you know we're going to end up buying the one you like." "But you never mentioned anything about your mother coming." "You're getting a bit too close to the car in front... FOR FUCK'S SAKE, BRAKE!" "What do you mean, I never clean the lavatory?" "What do you mean, you'll get to keep the house?"
Daughter	"No, you don't automatically get the right to borrow the car." "No, you can't stay over at his house tonight. Or any other night." "What do you mean, you spent it all?" "I don't care what your mother said..." "What do you mean, the piercing's below navel level?"
Second wife	"I know I called you by her name but I was thinking of you." "You're starting to sound just like my ex." "I told you I had to work late." "Remember, I am paying for two wives." "But I did clean the toilet."
Care-home matron	"No, I didn't pee on the seat... But I did shit in the bed."

CASE STUDY 3 KIDS

CARTMAN I'm gonna be on television. I'm gonna be on television.

STAN We don't believe for a minute that you won that contest fairly, fat boy.

CARTMAN Oh, stop defending your girlfriend for writing about some stupid fish.

STAN Dude, dolphins aren't stupid. They're intelligent and friendly.

CARTMAN Intelligent and friendly on rye bread with some mayonnaise.

STAN Dolphins are way smarter than you.

CARTMAN Oh, yeah? If they're so smart, how come they live in igloos?

STAN Dude, that's not dolphins, that's Eskimos.

CARTMAN Dolphins, Eskimos, it's all a bunch of tree-hugging hippy crap.

'South Park' (1997)



a)
Most boring arguments of all time

Any conspiracy theory
What constitutes "early", "mid" and "late" thirties

The conversation that follows: "Would you like it if I had breast implants?"

The restaurant bill

Apple v PC

Apple v The Beatles

Lennon/McCartney, McCartney/Lennon

Any pop rivalries

Clive Woodward's move into football

TV's 100 anything

Which sense it would be hardest to live without

Housework

Julie Burchill v other newspaper columnists

Anything on Radio 4's 'Moral Maze'

VAT on tampons ("What about razor blades?")

With a bus driver