



Learning to Debate

An Introduction for First-Year Debaters

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SO YOU'RE THINKING OF DEBATING...

Why?

Debate is about decision-making. Our lives are filled with decisions to make. Some are simple and relatively unimportant ones, like what to have for dinner, or what to wear. Other decisions are more complex and with a lot at stake, like what car to buy, where to go to college, whether to take a job, or whom to marry. In all of these cases our lives, communities etc. are improved by better decision-making.

Some people view debate as training for law or politics, and in fact a fairly high percentage of debaters pursue those fields. But for the vast majority of debaters, participating in debate is about training for everyday life. The skills you will sharpen by debating – critical thinking, listening, research, information processing, creative thinking, communication, and persuasion – will serve you well regardless of your career choice. Many former debaters feel that participating on the debate team was the single best thing they ever did to train their minds.

You will also learn how to advocate. You can use these skills as a means to improve your school, your community, your country and your world. This is important as we are constantly engaged in these struggles, whether intentionally or not. Expressions of our opinions on important (and trivial) matters help define who we are.

Participation in debate will bring you into contact with people who share your intellectual curiosity and interests. You will travel to debate tournaments where you will test your skills against students from other schools. The competition is a means to an end. It will motivate you to think, research, analyze – training which makes you a better person.

Who?

You will be on a squad with other students at your school. At an individual tournament you will be paired with one other student from your school that will be your partner. You and your partner will be a “debate team.” You will have practices against other teams at your own school. You will travel to other schools and debate against students like you from other places. At some tournaments there will be dozens of other teams.

You will be judged by many kinds of people. Some judges are the coaches from other schools, some judges are parents of debaters, some judges are former debaters who are now college students and some judges are volunteers from communities who may or may not have previous debate training. You will receive valuable feedback from judges who will comment about the debate after it is over, or they may write a ballot.

What?

You will debate a national resolution for an entire year. All policy debate teams throughout the United States debate the same resolution. Using the same topic all year and throughout the nation helps debaters be prepared in-depth. The resolution determines the debate area. There are thousands of sub-topics under each resolution, so that debates are never the same and are constantly evolving.

Recent resolutions have concerned Africa, the United Nations, national service, and oceans. You will debate both sides of the resolution. Most of your emphasis will be on competitive debating at tournaments. You may also have an opportunity at your school to do a public debate on an issue of concern to the general population.

How?

A debate consists of four people, two on each team. In some debates you will be in favor of the resolution – the “affirmative.” In other debates you will have to be opposed to the resolution – the “negative.” This is called “switch sides” debating. By debating both sides of the resolution you’ll learn how to view an issue from multiple sides. You’ll come to understand not only your own opinions, but also the opposing arguments.

In every debate you will give two speeches. First, every debater gives an 8-minute “constructive” speech. Then every debater gives a 5-minute “rebuttal” speech. After every constructive speech there is a 3-minute question and answer period. You will be given some amount of time during the debate to use for preparation.

Here is the order of the speeches and question/answer sessions:

First Affirmative Constructive Speech	8 minutes
2N asks the 1A questions	3 minutes
First Negative Constructive Speech	8 minutes
1A asks the 1N questions	3 minutes
Second Affirmative Constructive Speech	8 minutes
1N asks the 2A questions	3 minutes
Second Negative Constructive Speech	8 minutes
2A asks the 2N questions	3 minutes
First Negative Rebuttal Speech	5 minutes
First Affirmative Rebuttal Speech	5 minutes
Second Negative Rebuttal Speech	5 minutes
Second Affirmative Rebuttal Speech	5 minutes

The affirmative goes first and is followed by alternating sides of constructive speeches. The first negative speaker gives the first rebuttal, alternating sides again, finishing with the second affirmative debater’s rebuttal. At the end of the debate the judge decides who wins and loses.

You will learn rules, techniques and jargon that will seem strange to you. The most difficult part of debate, like most activities, is the first few weeks. But after that it gets easier as you start to figure out what you are doing, learn the rules, and better understand what it takes to be successful.

When?

Most squads have meetings after school once or twice a week. Some weekends you may have practice sessions. Tournaments are one or two days on the weekends. Sometimes you will go to another school during the week and debate after school. Occasionally your debate squad may put on a debate for the general public in the evening. You will have to spend time on your own preparing and practicing between tournaments. Your squad may stay after school some days to brainstorm arguments or do research.

THE BASICS: WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?

Some people think that “engaging in argument” means being mad at someone. That’s one use of the word “argument.” In debate we use a far different meaning of the term. In some ways though, making an argument in debate is the opposite of being mad at someone. It means making claims based on logical reasoning and proof.

There are three parts to an argument in debate: the claim, the data, and the warrant. These terms seem kind of formal, and they are. But whether you know it or not, solid arguments that you make every day are based on these concepts.

Here is an example of an argument: “Team X will win the basketball game against Team Y because Team X has taller players than Team Y.”

The “**claim**” is the bottom line conclusion of the argument – namely in this example that “Team X will win the basketball game.” The “**warrant**” is the reasoning behind the claim. In this example the reasoning is that the taller team will win the basketball game. The “**data**” are the facts used to support the warrant. In this example the data is that Team X is taller than Team Y.

Here is another example of an argument. “The death penalty should be abolished because innocent people are killed.” The claim is that “the death penalty should be abolished.” The warrant is that any policy that results in innocent people being killed should be ended. The data is that innocent people are killed by the death penalty.

Claims without reasoning are very weak arguments. Some might say it isn’t even an argument at all. The more warrants, or reasoning, that a claim has the stronger it is generally speaking. Sometimes the data might be statistics sometimes it might be an expert opinion.

For example, the argument “I saw that movie got ‘two thumbs up’ so we should go and see it” uses the expert opinion as the data for the claim. The claim is that we should go see the movie. The warrant is that movies that receive two thumbs up are worth seeing. The data would be that the movie did, in fact, receive a review of “two thumbs up.” This reasoning is based on an appeal to the expertise of the reviewers, and little more.

So, that’s an argument. Claim-Warrant-Data. Debate is based on competing arguments. Each team offers arguments that they defend, and they attack the arguments of their opponents. Research provides the data and warrants for defending and attacking arguments.

There are many ways to attack an argument. You could challenge the factual basis of the claim. In the first example, perhaps Team Y was in fact taller than Team X. In the second example you could prove that there has never been an innocent person executed in the U.S.

Another way to go would be to attack the reasoning/warrant. In the first example you could point out that the taller team does not always win basketball games. You could find examples of games that were not won by the taller team. You could say that other factors such as shooting ability, experience, effort, and coaching might be equally or more important factors in winning.

In the second example you could argue that just because an innocent person might be killed is not sufficient reason to ban a public policy. For example, innocent people die in traffic accidents, does that mean we should ban driving automobiles?

WINNING CLASH BATTLES

Every debate turns on a handful of arguments where both sides have a valid point. Usually, most of the time spent in the debate falls in these areas. To be a champion debater you must learn how to win these crucial “clash battles.” There is a reliable, five-step extension technique that you can use to help you win clash battles. The 5 steps are:

(1) Refer back to the tag of your argument. This step is where you indicate to the judge what argument you want to extend. Make a specific reference to an earlier speech by your team where the argument was initiated. This could include a piece of evidence. This technique is often called “signposting.”

(2) Explain your argument. In this stage you comprehensively explain your argument. This step may take one sentence or several, depending on the time pressure in the speech and the importance of the argument. Explanations should include a statement of the underlying reasoning and proof for your claim.

(3) Characterize your opponent’s response to your argument. Your description should be fair. Do not be critical of the other side’s argument. Don’t call it “stupid” or “silly”. You will lose credibility with the judge if you do that. This part should also be brief, but you do want to develop an understanding in the judge’s mind.

(4) Resolve the issue. At this stage you explain why you are right and they are wrong. It could be something as simple as pointing out that your evidence is more recent or qualified. Other ways to resolve the issue include: use of historical example, a claim of a consensus viewpoint. The most common way to resolve an argument is to prove that your side contains internal logic that is not assumed by the other side’s argument.

(5) Impact the importance of winning the argument. The final step involves providing an impact assessment. You want to get maximum credit for winning the particular clash battle so tell the judge what it is exactly that you win if they do resolve the issue in your favor.

Here is a complete example with the steps indicated along the way (you wouldn’t use the numbers, they are just to flag the different stages for this example):

“(1) Our third argument in the 1AR is that ‘schools are getting worse.’ (2) Statistics from all parts of the country indicate test scores are declining, and schools are literally falling apart. (3) They say ‘schools are getting better.’ (4) Our evidence is more recent than their evidence and comes from studies whereas their evidence is just one person’s opinion. (5) If we win this it proves we win inherency, that status quo efforts are failing.”

This technique has a number of benefits. It encourages you to actually extend your original argument, not simply repeat it. If all you do is repeat your argument it does not help the judge resolve the debate at all. The team that resolves the argument – taking it to the next level – will have a big advantage with the judge.

Second, the 5-step technique helps the judge follow along with the development of the argument. In a way it creates a conversation back-and-forth in the judge’s mind. By making a word-for-word reference to the other team’s argument you help the judge recognize that you are indeed answering the other side.

THE MECHANICS OF HAVING A DEBATE: FLOWING

Debates will become complicated. Even in relatively simple rounds there are often 20 or 30 claims that must be addressed. Keeping these arguments organized is crucial for success and to make sure you don't miss anything. If you miss something you will likely lose.

As a way to keep track of both teams' arguments debate has developed a convention known as "flowing." Flowing is basically a system for organizing and following along the details of the debate. While most young debaters view flowing as a chore, more experienced debaters quickly understand that having a good flow makes winning debates much easier.

Flowing is keeping a record of the speech-by-speech course of each argument. There is a standardized way to do it, but each person tends to develop her or his own variations. Learning how to flow may be one of the most difficult and boring tasks in learning how to debate, but it is among the most important. Some people flow on paper, and some flow using a computer spreadsheet program. Here are some basic steps to get started.

Step 1: Divide each sheet (paper or computer) into seven columns. Each column represents one speech in the debate. There are eight speeches in the debate but the two Negative Block speeches can be put in one column. Seven is the most columns you will ever need. Start in the left-most column then keep moving one column to the right for each later speech. At first, you'll find it helpful to write the speech abbreviations (1AC, 1NC etc.) at the top of each column.

Step 2: Start with the Case Flow. Do this by writing the details of the 1AC Case in the left-most column, from top-to-bottom. Try to write down the numbers or letters, the tags, the main point of the argument, and any details you can of the evidence that is read. You can use several sheets for the Case Flow to keep the major points of the 1AC separated.

Step 3: The 1NC speech will be flowed partly on new sheets and partly on the Case Flow sheets. When the 1NC presents Off-Case arguments they should start on their own new sheets (the Off-Case Flows) in the left-most column. Each Off-Case argument should be on its own sheet. When the 1NC starts to attack the affirmative Case, the flowing should switch over to the Case Flow where you would write in the second column, next to the related parts of the 1AC.

Step 4: The 2AC (and subsequent speeches) responses should be written down on their appropriate sheet, depending on whether they are answering the Off-Case arguments or rebuilding their Case. Off-Case arguments stay on the Off-Case Flows, and all the Case arguments stay on the Case Flow. Keep the Off-Case Flows separate from each other.

Step 5: When it is your own turn to speak, prepare by writing out your arguments in the columns that belong to you. Try to keep your writing in those columns. You might want to make your columns wider so you'll have more space to write things out in detail.

Step 6: Develop shorthand abbreviations. You'll quickly learn that you don't have time to write out words all the way otherwise you'll miss too much. Come up with a shorthand that you (and your partner) can recognize. You can use "AF" to abbreviate "Africa". You can use the letter "T" to abbreviate "Topicality". You can use symbols, like an up-arrow to stand-in for "increase". Even words that aren't jargon can be shortened. In the place of the word "engagement" you could write "eng".

Step 7: Practice, practice, practice. This is really the only way to learn how to flow and to improve. Flow practice debates and any other debates you see, even if you are just an observer. Practice abbreviations when you are taking notes in school.

THE LIFE BLOOD OF DEBATE: EVIDENCE

The way to support your arguments is to have evidence. Evidence might come from your own experience, common knowledge, or based on a story that someone told you. Most evidence for debate rounds comes from research done in the library or on the internet. Generally you look for examples, statistics or testimony that supports the claims you want to make. Evidence comes from books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and web sites. A number of debates are won because one team has better evidence. So what makes evidence “better”?

The Qualities of “Good” Evidence

You want evidence that is full of solid reasoning and warrants, not just claims. Evidence that has reasoning is more persuasive and credible than evidence without it. If someone told you to do something and you asked why and all they said was “because I said so” they would not be providing a warrant and you wouldn’t find their request very persuasive.

Suppose you wanted to prove that Senator Obama will be elected President of the U.S. You might find a quote that says “Senator Obama will be elected because he opposed the Iraq War from the beginning” it implicitly has a warrant that politicians who opposed the war have a better chance of winning. That warrant makes it stronger than if it said simply “Obama will win.” Evidence can have more than one warrant, which would make it even stronger.

You want evidence that is recent. Some claims are true at certain times but proven false over the course of time. The more recent your evidence is the greater chance it might remain true, other factors equal. You wouldn’t want evidence from 1998 for a prediction of who was going to win the Super Bowl this year. You might not even want evidence from three months ago.

You want evidence that comes from qualified sources. Qualifications refer to the credentials or experience of the author of your evidence. Other things equal it is assumed that sources who are more experienced or credentialed are more likely to be right.

You want evidence that comes from unbiased sources. Some sources, while they may be very experienced and credentialed, might have questionable credibility because they are “biased”. Being “biased” means that the source has a motivation that could override their interest in telling the truth. A politician might be more concerned about the political effects on their campaign than they are about the truth. A business leader might have strong economic interest in saying something that isn’t the truth. A friend or relative might be motivated by loyalty or love more than the desire to tell the truth.

When you find your evidence you are required to have a complete citation before you can use it in a debate round. What makes for a complete citation?

The Parts of a Complete Citation

When you find a piece of evidence it is essential that you provide a complete citation for it so that someone can look it up if they want to. Think of it like a bibliography. Getting the source citation correct is often boring and detailed, but it is very important to be done accurately.

A full and complete citation includes: the author, the qualification, the source, the complete date, and the URL or page number. Here is an example:

Michael O’Hanlon, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institute, Brookings Web Site, November 18, 2007 http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2007/1118_pakistan_ohanlon.aspx

HOW TO FIND EVIDENCE: RESEARCH STRATEGIES

You need to have a plan of attack when you begin to research. When you set out to find evidence it is helpful to have an idea of what arguments you are trying to support ahead of time. Those ideas can often come from brainstorming sessions by you and your teammates. As you think of ideas for arguments you should write them down and save them to review when you begin your research.

Doing outstanding research is a function of effort. The best-researched teams are the ones that spend the most time doing it. Just like in most things, the more work you put into it the greater your chances of success. Some times it takes a while to find any evidence for your point at all. Other times you can find average-quality evidence but it takes more time to find high-quality evidence.

Thoroughness is crucial, and can prove decisive in winning and losing. When you find good evidence you should bookmark the web site or write down the part of the library you used. You will find that as you gain more experience with researching that it will get easier and you will develop your own shortcuts and strategies for being efficient. As you become more experienced with debate rounds you will learn a sense of how good your evidence must be to help you win the debate.

Library

The library at your school or community might be a good source for finding materials on the debate topic. You can often discover good evidence in books, from reference documents, journals and magazines and sometimes paper copies of newspapers.

If you are unfamiliar with how to search for books, journals and newspapers in nearby libraries ask the librarians to help you get started. They will be eager to assist you. That is their job.

Internet

Most debate research these days is done over the internet. It can be done either at school or at home depending on where you have access.

A common internet-based research strategy is to use a search engine like Google or Yahoo. Using either a basic or advanced search in one of these programs can help you find relevant web sites, newspapers and reports. Google Scholar is a good resource for finding articles in academic journals, although sometimes you have to have a subscription to get access to those articles.

Evaluating the Internet

The internet is a fantastic resource for debate research. Most of you are already very experienced with how to use it to find things that you want. In many ways the internet helps to equalize access to research across urban, suburban and rural areas. On the other hand, there are many potential pitfalls with internet research – namely, anyone with a keyboard can “publish” internet materials. It is important to be able to sort out the good from the bad.

Unfortunately, most of this evaluation has to be done on a case-by-case basis. You can often judge a web site based on the factors of authority, accuracy, objectivity and how up-to-date it is. Does the site provide authoritative references and footnotes? Do its claims conform to what you already know, and what other authors claim? Does the web site treat alternative ideas fairly and thoroughly? Has it been updated recently?

YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE - VERBAL

Every speaker has his or her own style, and that's a good thing. Whether you try to or not, you will have your own unique signature as a speaker. This offers a bit of choice, however. On the one hand, you want to have a distinctive style. On the other hand, you don't want to be so distinctive that it becomes a distraction to the judge. Style is part of substance. Your body language, volume, speed, variety all say something about your credibility. Some qualities have proven more effective in general than others.

Clarity

Effective communication depends importantly on your clarity. Your style choices are crucial in determining the clarity of your communication. Volume, speed, variance, language choices are all factors in your clarity. Start by understanding yourself what you want to say. Use concise statements – short and to the point – whenever you can. Limit the jargon and technical language when required by your audience.

Volume

If you are too loud your judge may resist your message and shut down their listening. If you are too soft it becomes too difficult for you judge to pay close attention. Your room may have bad acoustics based on the room size or shape. You want to sound energetic and enthusiastic, which requires some volume. You also want to raise your voice sometimes for emphasis. You can often look to your judge for feedback on volume.

Pitch

Your voice can be so high that your judge finds it grating. It may be so low that it becomes distorted. If you have just one tone (monotone) you become boring. You also want to avoid a repetitive inflection of rising or falling as your sentence goes on. Relaxing will help your pitch. Don't have a fake "debate voice" or inflection. Be yourself and be conversational in pitch. If your pitch is too high, project from your stomach, not your throat or nose.

Rate

When you first start debating you may be "too slow." This "problem" generally takes care of itself as you become more experienced. Most debaters go too fast for their own clarity. They go so fast they begin to garble their words. Speed without clarity is harmful to your ability to persuade the judge. Debaters often fail to recognize that while they can understand 100% of their own spoken words, the judge understands a much smaller percentage. Most debaters would actually effectively communicate more ideas per minute if they slowed down a little bit.

Articulation

The concept of articulation refers to the distinctiveness or clarity of the words that you say. Some times articulation problems are caused by a debater trying to go too fast. Other times it is due to a mush-mouth. The easy solution to this problem, besides slowing down a bit, is opening your mouth wider and putting effort into finishing your words.

Pronunciation

It is important to have correct pronunciation – saying your words correctly. It can greatly undermine your credibility if you don't pronounce your words right, or you confuse two words that sound alike. Don't over-reach on your vocabulary. Listen to how other speakers say certain words. You can also look up in a dictionary to see how words are pronounced.

YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE – NON-VERBAL

Think of the first day of school. You're sitting in the classroom waiting for your teacher to show up. When that teacher walks in the room you look at her. Before she says anything you make judgments. How well is she dressed? Does she seem confident, energetic? Does she seem friendly and smile? Does she look right at the class before she starts?

These are just a few examples of how speakers communicate without saying a word. Non-verbal traits are crucial for conveying honesty, respect, and competence. As important as first impressions are, many times they are non-verbal. The way judges evaluate debaters follows this pattern.

Appearance

It is important to have your own sense of style, and that includes the way you dress. On the other hand, you do not want your appearance to be distracting to the judge. If you are underdressed the judge will think you aren't professional and don't take the activity seriously. If you have poor hygiene (messy hair, unshaven) it will convey the same lack of respect. What do you think of your teacher on that first day of school if they walk in without combing their hair?

Gestures

Speakers are told – you must have gestures. As a result, many gestures are forced and look stiff, they are poorly timed, they seem random and unconnected to the message, and gestures can become repetitive and even distracting. Despite these concerns, debaters should not fear gestures. As long as the gestures are natural, modest, and connected to their message, they can be an effective way to underline what they are saying.

Body Language

The way you stand, walk and move during your speech conveys information to the judge. If you seem hesitant getting prepared to speak, it sets a bad tone. If you seem eager to finish your speech and sit down, it makes the judge think you are dissatisfied with what you said. If you slouch, pace nervously, or sway, it sends a bad signal to the judge or is distracting. Debaters should stand up straight. Walk up to the podium and back from the podium in an upright, confident way.

Eye Contact

In our culture, eye contact is one of the most important aspects of communication. How do you react to a sales person who looks down at their shoes when they are talking to you? What do you think of your teacher if they look above the class the entire time? In our culture, evasive eye contact is interpreted as lying or insincerity. Debaters should establish eye contact at the start and conclusions of their speech, as well as many times in-between. This enables you to make a connection with the judge. Eye contact is also a crucial way for a debater to receive feedback.

Facial Expressions

Some debaters think they need to be a stone-face to convey seriousness. Others take facial expressions to such an extreme they are phony. As with most other "rules" of communication, just being your normal self is the best strategy with facial expressions. Debaters should convey a sense of friendliness and goodwill by smiling before they start to speak. Don't force your facial expressions.

12 MINUTES UP FOR GRABS: CROSS EXAMINATION

Cross-examination, also referred to as "CX" or "cross-ex," is a question and answer period that follows every constructive speech where the speaker answers questions about their speech.

The key to effective cross-examination, just like any other part of debate, is hard work and preparation. Those debaters who put considerable thought into their cross-ex strategies will be much more successful much better than those debaters who don't plan ahead for the questions they want to ask. Those who prepare for cross-exam periods will win them, and consequently, more debates. The 12 minutes of CX in the debate are literally up for grabs.

Cross-examination Style

First, stand-up and face the judge. This is an important part of being credible. Second, be forceful and clear. You want the judge to be able to hear every question and answer. Third, maintain eye contact with your judge. They are your target audience. Finally, do not be rude or evasive in cross-examinations. Question and answer sessions reveal more about you as a person (and as an advocate). Judges will be evaluating your personality as much as the content of your questions or answers

Using Cross-Ex for Clarification

Both the affirmative and the negative can **use cross-examination for clarification**. These questions usually are the first ones you would ask in cross-examination. Ask clarification questions first if your partner is relying on that information to help them prepare their upcoming speech. If you need to ask for evidence do so at the start if your partner needs it. Ask for the evidence at the end if it is for you to read. Clarifying questions are important because they allow you to be sure what your opponent is arguing.

Strategy for Cross-Ex

Cross-examination can be used effectively as a **strategic tool to set-up arguments** that you will make later in the debate. Using cross-examination in this manner requires some preparation and pre-round planning. Preparation for cross-ex periods really pays off. Cross-ex can be a very valuable tool for making good arguments even better.

Do not expect your opponents to concede anything important in the cross-ex period.

Matlock is a fictional TV show. Very few debate teams break down and admit that their plan is not topical in the cross-ex. Do not expect concessions. Use the C-X to lead the other team to the edge of the cliff, push them over during your subsequent speech.

Do not dwell on the same point for the entire cross-examination period. Very rarely does it help to spend more than one of the three minutes pursuing a particular line of questioning. Ask your question once or twice and if you are not getting satisfaction from the answers you hear, go ahead and move on. Count on the judge being frustrated with you.

Answer questions fully, but do not be obnoxious about consuming lots of time. Make the C-X period an extension of your earlier speech, with additional explanation, if possible. If you try to be evasive or run on and on your judge will recognize it and reach a negative conclusion.

Finally, **answer and ask questions only for yourself, not your partner**. Don't interrupt your partner's answer just because you think you have a slightly better answer. At most, just write down what you want your partner to say and show it to them. When one partner hogs the cross-ex it undermines the credibility of the other half of the team.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Like in most other competitive activities you can get better at debate by practicing between tournaments. Beyond researching, writing blocks and organizing your evidence you can improve your chances for success by practicing your speaking. There are some drills that are designed to improve your speaking skills, others that focus more on the content of the topic.

Speaking drills are for everyone. Debaters from novices to top varsity can benefit from practicing. As some have said, speaking drills are like preparing for a marathon – you don't practice once or twice and then run a marathon. You have to train every day, even after you win a marathon, because there is always another race to run. Get in the habit of doing speaking drills every day. Even 10 minutes a day can make a huge difference.

Speaking Skill Drills

In general, delivery problems are usually caused by a lack of familiarity with your materials. Begin the habit of reading your briefs as you file them. Repeat the practice for important blocks. You also could practice by reading materials that are unrelated to your debate topic. This will help you focus on the mechanics of speaking, not the substance. Start your speeches a little slowly and build up your speed.

Warm up before rounds if you have the time. Read out loud on the way to the tournament in the morning. Find a place at the school before your rounds to read through some blocks.

To correct breathing problems (huge gasps of air) you should practice by breathing at natural pauses in evidence, such as at punctuation. You can also practice by breathing at natural break points in the speech such as after the tag, after a piece of evidence, or between arguments. Practice breathing from your stomach not your throat or nose. Stand up as straight as possible.

To correct enunciation problems you should practice by reading your evidence slowly and exaggerate hitting all the syllables. Slowly build up your speed. Have someone listen to you and see if they can understand every word you say. Open your mouth wider, to an exaggerated degree.

To correct choppy speech try reading ahead a few words further. Push yourself to have your eyes read further and further ahead of what your mouth is saying. Ignore any stutters or stumbles, don't bother going back to repeat a word you might have messed up. Use a natural voice pattern. Try slowing your speaking a little bit.

Record and review your speeches, both audio and video if you can. Download the video to your MP3 player or computer to watch it over and over to learn your areas for improvement.

Rebuttal Reworks

For advanced debaters, you can practice the substance of debate rounds by **reworking your speeches from previous tournament** or practice rounds. Take the flow of your old speech and completely rewrite your entire speech. Add arguments and evidence. Typically you will find that you can give the same speech in much less time. If that is the case, write out more arguments (don't repeat anything) and give the speech again. You can do this over and over until you've added a huge amount of new arguments. This practice technique enables you to see your greatest potential. Every once in a while you'll have a debate at a tournament that is a repeat of a previous round. If you have practiced your rebuttal from that debate you'll be awesome the second time around. Do as many rebuttal reworks as you can.

THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE

When you are the affirmative team, you have the responsibility to present a Case and Plan in your first speech. The Affirmative Case must establish that there is a significant problem in the current system (Harm), that the current system cannot or will not correct the problem (Inherency), and that you have a plan that will solve or improve the condition (Solvency).

Inherency

As part of building the Case, the affirmative must prove that the current system – often referred to as the “status quo” – is incapable and unlikely to solve the Harm area. Part of this is documenting that the Harm will continue without the proposed solution of the Affirmative Plan.

This burden is referred to as “Inherency.” If the affirmative fails to prove their Harm area is Inherent, there is no reason to vote for the Affirmative Plan since it is not necessary. If the current system is working to solve the problem, there is no case for changing the system.

Inherency claims include descriptions of the attitudes or structures that demonstrate the present system is insufficient. If a problem is getting worse that is evidence the current system is not addressing the Harm area.

In our example of failing schools the affirmative might offer evidence of a lack of adequate funding for school construction and repairs. They might argue that because teacher salaries are so low there are not enough qualified people interested in that job.

Harm

When you are affirmative you have the responsibility of showing there is a significant problem in the status quo. This is called the burden of **Harm**. To meet this burden the affirmative documents the extent and the importance of their Harm area.

For instance, your Affirmative Case might claim the Harm area of failing schools. There would be several possible ways to demonstrate the extent of the problem through the use of evidence – the percentage of schools the are in need of repair, the percentage of students who are not learning, the number of dropouts, declining test scores and more.

The second aspect of the Harm claim is showing the importance of these statistics. In the example of failing schools the affirmative could argue that academic achievement is crucial for employment opportunity, going to college, or achieving social progress.

Some Harm claims emphasize the quantity of its extent – such as millions of people starving to death, or thousands of people dying in a war. Other Harm claims might emphasize the quality or value – the intrinsic value of biodiversity, the unfairness of discrimination, the immorality of violating fundamental rights, are examples. The best affirmative Harm claims have strong quantitative and value components.

SOLVENCY AND THE AFFIRMATIVE PLAN

Solvency

It is not enough for the affirmative team to show there is a problem that is not being addressed in the status quo. They must also prove that they have a solution that can work. The proposed solution, called the Affirmative Plan, must be proven to be comparatively better than the current system.

That is the third component of the Affirmative Case – called “Solvency” – proof that their proposal can solve or reduce the Harm area they have identified in their Case. In policy debates the affirmative must present a proposed action by leaders – i.e. Congress passing a law, the Supreme Court making a decision, the President taking action.

The Affirmative Case must include a Solvency point that contains evidence that demonstrates the Affirmative Plan will solve or improve the Harm area.

For example, if a certain State (say, Ohio) has successfully used higher teacher salaries to improve schools, the affirmative team might propose to have the Federal Government copy that state. The affirmative would present evidence about how higher teacher salaries in the State of Ohio have increased academic achievement there.

The Affirmative Plan

The affirmative should present in their first speech a specific proposal for a course of action to be taken. They advocate that the judge endorse or vote for this proposal. This proposal is referred to as the “Affirmative Plan.”

The Affirmative Plan must be an example of – or come from – the resolution. That is referred to as the burden of “Topicality” (page 15).

There are two basic considerations for the Affirmative Plan: the agent of action and the actions themselves.

The agent of action is where the affirmative team specifies who will be implementing their plan. The resolution may indicate the “Federal Government” should be the agent. Some resolutions specify the “United States” or the “United States Federal Government.” The affirmative may want to go into more detail and specify the part of the Federal Government they imagine should implement the affirmative Plan, such as the Congress, President, the Supreme Court or possibly a government department like the Department of Defense.

In our example of school reform the logical agents would be the Congress and President.

The second consideration for the affirmative plan is the actions that they propose are taken. These actions are typically tied pretty closely to the evidence presented in the affirmative’s Solvency point. In our example of school reform the Affirmative Plan would state that the Federal Government should copy the system of higher teacher pay used by the State of Ohio throughout the entire United States.

SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE AND PLAN

This outline is an example of a structure for an Affirmative Case and Plan that they would present in their First Affirmative Constructive. It consists of three main “contentions” and the affirmative Plan. Each contention represents one of the three burdens the affirmative must demonstrate for a complete Case: Inherency, Harms and Solvency. Under each major contention there might be sub-points, although there is no set number for that. For each contention and sub-point there would be evidence supporting those claims.

I. Inherency – The Status Quo Fails to Improve Schools

A. Insufficient Resources Being Spent on Schools

- 1. Federal Government**
- 2. State Governments**

B. Teacher Salaries Are Way Too Low

II. Harm – Schools in the United States are Bad Shape

A. Schools All Through the U.S. are Falling Apart

B. Test Scores are Declining for Millions of Students

C. Academic Achievement is Crucial

- 1. Success in College**
- 2. Employment Opportunities**
- 3. There is a “Right” to Adequate Education**

Affirmative Plan: The United States Federal Government should adopt a policy of raising teacher salaries, modeled after the program in the State of Ohio.

III. Solvency – Our Plan Will Improve Schools

A. Higher Teacher Salaries will Attract More Qualified People

B. Teachers are the Key to Better Schools

C. This Proposal is working in the State of Ohio

FIRST AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

In any debate it is a strong advantage to go first. Many judges or audiences have short attention spans and will only pay attention at the beginning. After that their interest may fade. Further, the judge and audience tends to make quick judgments about the debaters based on their early impressions.

The First Affirmative Constructive (1AC) is always the first speech in the debate. It is the initial opportunity for the affirmative team to present and defend their Case and Plan. It is a way for the affirmative team to stake their own ground, and choose any area of the topic they want to talk about. The 1AC should be designed strategically to emphasize the affirmative's strongest arguments.

Substance

The 1AC is generally **completely written out ahead of time**. The entire outline of the Case and Plan (see sample on page 11) should be presented at this time. Typically the affirmative should place their best evidence in their 1AC. "Best" in this case might mean the longest, most qualified, and most recent evidence with the strongest warrants.

Your 1AC **evidence should have qualifications**, and those should be read in the speech itself. Not only does this help establish the credibility for your Case and Plan, but it also sets up possible comparisons with evidence the negative might read. Typically the affirmative has better research on their own Case than the negative does, so they usually have better qualified evidence.

After you have selected the evidence that forms your basic case sub-points think defensively and include cards that **anticipate common negative arguments**. Where you think there might be a weak spot, find some back-up evidence.

Adjustments to your 1AC are crucial as the year goes on. After you have been to a tournament or two, **evaluate your evidence selection** in your 1AC. Are there cards in your current 1AC that you seldom use in the rounds? If so, consider taking them out of your speech. Are there cards that you find you are always reading in the 2AC? If so, consider adding those cards.

Style

Not only is it important to make a good initial impression on the judge, the 1AC literally lays the foundation for the entire rest of the debate for the affirmative team. Both affirmative debaters in later speeches will want to frequently refer back to their 1AC, so it is crucial for the judge to understand and absorb it right away. In particular, read the Plan a little more slowly and clearly so the judge understands what you are proposing right away.

Because the 1AC is completely scripted before the debate, it is easy to practice so that it sounds very professional and polished. The First Affirmative debater should present all the headings, tag lines, and evidence very clearly and persuasively. The evidence should be read with strong internal emphasis.

SECOND AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The two main jobs for the Second Affirmative Speech (2AC) are first, to rebuild the affirmative Case, and second, to respond to the Off-Case arguments presented by the 1NC. The 2AC is the affirmative's last constructive speech so it is their final chance to make the arguments they need to win the debate.

Preparing at Home

The 2AC is a speech where time allocation is especially important so preparation is a crucial asset. Most of the arguments the negative will make against your Case and Plan can be anticipated, and therefore can be prepared for at home before the tournament.

The affirmative should **write sets of answers** to every topicality argument, every disadvantage, every counterplan and every Critique they think of. This is referred to as "writing front-lines." After each tournament you should review your flows and update your answer files where necessary. This kind of detailed preparation can make a crucial difference in winning and losing on the affirmative.

Responding to Off-Case Arguments

The 2AC must **respond to each Off-Case argument presented in the 1NC**. Generally you want to "group" each Off-Case argument and respond to it with one block of numbered arguments. Front-lines they should be quickly pulled and made ready to read.

The 2AC should **allocate time according to how much time the negative spends** Off-case for each argument. For example, if the negative spends 4 minutes Off-case and 4 minutes on the Case in the 1NC, the 2AC should roughly do the same allocation. Most likely the 2AC can afford to spend a bit more time on the Off-case arguments since they can rely on the 1AC evidence to help answer the Case arguments.

The 2AC should **diversify the types of answers** that are made against each Off-case argument. Do not focus on just one or two specific types of arguments, but instead present a wide variety. This diversity should include "turn" strategies on disadvantages, counterplans and critiques. Designing strong response strategies is equally important as your affirmative Case construction.

Re-Building Your Case

The 1NC will usually make many arguments against your affirmative Case, including attacks on Harm, Inherency and Solvency. It is the job of the 2AC to **rebuild the Case back to its original strength**. You will have to answer those arguments on an efficient, line-by-line basis. It is very important that the 2A debater be an expert on their Case, inside and out.

Use the 1AC evidence generously. The 1AC evidence is the strongest in the affirmative file. The 2AC should refer back to the evidence, both the substance of the reasoning in the evidence, as well as the quality of the sources. If the affirmative has written a strong case the 2AC should have to read very little new evidence on the Case side of the debate.

Prepare power-worded summaries of your case Harms. The larger the affirmative Harm claim the more persuasive the Case is, and that leads to a greater chance of winning. You can prepare sweet, carefully worded descriptions of your Harms that you can use in your 2AC (and rebuttal speeches, too).

FIRST AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL

The First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) must cover all of the arguments extended by the negative team in both the 2NC and the 1NR, including the off-case and on-case arguments.

The sheer timing of this is difficult considering the 1AR is only 5 minutes long and the negative block is 13 minutes. Obviously the 1AR must be selective and very efficient.

Strategy

The 1AR should **have a strategy in mind for allocating time**. Generally the 1AR should allocate their time in proportion to the way the negative block did. For example, if one-third of the negative block was spent on extending a Topicality argument, approximately one-third of the 1AR should be spent answering it. This guideline must be adjusted based on the quality of the negative's arguments, the strengths of your earlier affirmative arguments, and the importance of each argument toward winning and losing the debate.

The 1AR should **use their partner's 2AC as a reference point** for their speech. The 1AC evidence and analysis can also be used as well. As the 1AR extends the case and off-case arguments they should make direct reference ("signpost" – see page 5) to the 2AC speech. Refer back to their tags, analysis, author of evidence and the reasoning in their evidence. This does not mean the 1AR must extend every single 2AC argument, only the most important ones.

The 1AR also needs to **think of the speech as a set-up speech for the 2AR**. The 1AR must extend a diverse array of arguments so as to provide flexibility for the 2AR. For example, when answering a disadvantage the 1AR should extend link, uniqueness and impact arguments if possible. That way the 2AR can choose among them.

Tactics

The 1AR **concentrate on word economy**. It is vitally important that the 1AR not repeat arguments in different places on the flow. The goal of the 1AR, as with the other rebuttals, is to make 5 minutes of completely different arguments. Repeating an answer usually is a waste of your time. Word economy must start at the beginning of the speech, not just at the end.

The 1AR must **respond directly to the negative's arguments**. It is not enough to simply repeat your 2AC answers or your 1AC arguments. You must ask yourself, "What arguments did the negative make that would make the most impression on the judge?" then directly answer those arguments. Reminder: your job is to extend, not just repeat, the affirmative arguments.

The 1AR should **avoid "dropping" really important arguments**. As has already been mentioned, the 1AR is a very time-pressured speech. It may be difficult to cover every negative argument that you want to. In that case, the 1AR should be sure not to put crucial arguments at the end of their speech where they may not get to them at all. Arguments like Topicality that are "all-or-nothing" should not be saved for last.

If possible, the 1AR should try to **read some supporting evidence**. This evidence should be chosen selectively to respond to the most dangerous aspects of the negative strategy.

SECOND AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL

The Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) is the final speech in the debate, which gives the affirmative a huge advantage. Some judges and audiences will remember best what they hear most recently. The 2AR needs to make a strong speech to take full advantage of this lasting impression.

Strategy

As the “closing statement” for the affirmative team 2AR must summarize and put-together the entire strategy, both Case and Off-Case. The 2AR must completely explain the affirmative Case and how they have a comparative advantage over the negative policy. Again, the 2AR should have practiced, well-worded descriptions of the affirmative Harm claims to make them seem as big and compelling as possible.

The 2AR must **assess which arguments are necessary to win** the debate, and also determine what arguments the affirmative can afford to lose. Then they should start off by setting out to win their most impressive argument decisively and early in the speech. Generally that will be a specific advantage or Harm area. It might be a comprehensive link or theory argument.

In addition to summarizing the affirmative arguments, the 2AR must also address all the arguments extended by the last negative speaker. **Adapt to their weaknesses.** If the 2NR mishandles an argument, capitalize. Be realistic that you may not win every argument in the debate, but explain to the judge how you still win overall.

Put the debate in an overall framework where the arguments you win seem more important than the arguments you think the negative may win. Use an overview at the beginning.

Tactics

Refer back to the 1AR frequently. You cannot make up new arguments in the 2AR. Sometimes the judge will have a hard time telling whether or not your argument is new or not. The more you refer back directly to your partner’s arguments the more it sounds like your 2AR arguments are grounded there, not brand new. This is especially true in relation to evidence that was read.

Directly clash with your opponent’s best arguments. The 2NR will likely make some pretty persuasive sounding arguments. Figure out which ones are creating the best impression on the judge and clash with them word-for-word.

The agenda of the 2AR should be affirmative arguments, not negative extensions. The 2AR should be based on previous affirmative answers. Signpost back to those arguments and explain them before you address the negative points. This will make sure that you are spending your time on your ground, not on theirs.

The 2AR should **be selective and somewhat slower** than previous speeches. As the last speech, the 2AR has the freedom not to worry about what comes afterwards. Choose a few arguments and develop them thoroughly. A rushed, frantic 2AR sounds like a losing 2AR. Lowering the speed generates a sense of confidence and boosts credibility.

DESIGNING THE NEGATIVE STRATEGY

Designing the negative strategy is one of the most important aspects of preparation. It is important to focus your energies on coherent and logical positions. There are two kinds of negative strategies: specific and generic. Specific strategies are for Cases that you know about. Generic strategies are for times when you have no specific strategy. This may happen when the affirmative runs a brand new Case.

When you brainstorm, ask some questions about the affirmative. What are the basic assumptions of the affirmative Case? The answers will form the basis of your on-case attack. Who would be hurt by adoption of the plan? The answer to this question will help form the bases of your disadvantages. Are there any basic questions of philosophy their plan violates? This will help you decide on critiques. Finally, is there some better way to solve the problem? This helps with designing counterplans.

The negative strategy should avoid repetitive parts. For the Case arguments the negative should choose a set of responses that are not redundant. Also avoid choosing disadvantages or critiques that have similar links or impacts.

The negative strategy should avoid inconsistent or contradictory parts. The negative almost never benefits from contradictory arguments as you can only win the debate on one or the other. Plus contradictions set up the possibility of the affirmative being able to get out of both.

Design the negative strategy so you can kick out of parts of it later in the debate. It is very difficult for the 2NR to cover all aspects of the 1AR. Both speeches are the same length, but the 1AR does not have to wrap up the debate as the 2NR does. Ideally the negative team would extend certain arguments in the negative block that they will not need to cover in the 2NR. Even a small concession might make a huge difference.

For example a negative team could extend a topicality argument in the 2NC which the 1AR might spend 1 minute answering. The negative could then concede this topicality argument, gaining an extra minute for the 2NR for covering all remaining arguments of the 1AR. Gaining an extra minute in a 5-minute speech is a huge strategic advantage.

Finally, **design strategies that would appeal to a wide variety of judges.** Some judges are conservative on debate theory and some are liberal. Some judges have broad views of the topic some have narrow views. It is risky to devise a strategy at home that only would appeal to a narrow range of judges.

Generic Strategies

Generic negative strategies are necessary sometimes. It is impossible for the negative to always have specific attacks against every affirmative case and plan.

Generic attacks should follow the above guidelines as much as possible. Avoid repetitiveness, contradictions and build in some flexibility. In addition, always try to tie the specific affirmative plan to the generic evidence as best possible. Even if the negative has no specific evidence matching up to the affirmative case or plan they can often successfully argue that the affirmative plan is the same as other plans with the common link.

TOPICALITY

Debates are governed by a resolution, referred to as the topic. Policy resolutions, like the one you have, are written broadly to allow for many examples. The affirmative must be able to prove that their Plan is actually an example of the resolution. This is referred to as having a “topical” Plan – it falls under the topic, so it is topical. But words, including the words in the topic, are subject to some interpretation, so this issue is not always clear-cut.

The burden on the affirmative to have a topical Plan has a debate jargon name that you will not find in most dictionaries: Topicality.

Topicality arguments play an important role in debates because they are an all-or-nothing issue. It is generally accepted that if the affirmative fails to prove that their Plan is Topical, they will lose. Many debates are decided for the negative on the issue of Topicality alone.

When the negative wants to advance a Topicality argument they must provide their own interpretation of the resolution, with definitions of words in the topic. They would then argue that their interpretation is the best one, for several possible reasons, based on standards for interpretations (discussed below). Then they would argue that the affirmative Plan “violates” their interpretation by falling outside of it. They also attack the affirmative’s interpretation of the topic. If the negative wins that the affirmative plan is not topical, they generally win the debate.

Notice that the focus of Topicality is the affirmative Plan not the Case. The advantages claimed by the affirmative are not subject to topicality scrutiny no matter how distant from the topic they seem. If the affirmative Plan is judged to be topical, they have met their entire topicality burden.

To defend against this, the affirmative generally provides their own interpretation of the resolution – one that clearly includes their Plan. The affirmative also usually attacks the specific negative interpretation as being too restrictive or unusual. Usually the judge decides between the two interpretations.

Topicality Standards

Here are some ways to evaluate interpretations of the resolution – called “standards.” Both teams use standards either separately or in combination depending on what their interpretation is like in the specific debate.

Standards: Is the interpretation too limited or too unlimited? Is the interpretation consistent with common dictionary definitions? Is the interpretation consistent with the way experts in the policy area use the terms? Is the interpretation grammatically correct? Is the interpretation predictable for both teams, or is it very unusual? Finally, does the interpretation lead us toward or away from the core issues we would expect to debate under the resolution?

The wisdom of all of these is subject to argument. Even these standards are debatable within a debate. Are limited resolutions good for education because they focus debate on a few key issues, or are they bad for education because they stifle creative thinking? There is no debate rulebook to resolve this. It’s up to the arguments each team can present in the round.

Quite often there will be “competing standards” in a round. For instance the affirmative might have a dictionary definition to back up their interpretation, but the negative might be able to prove that’s not the way experts in the field use those words. Who wins in that case? Again, it comes down to the arguments advanced about education and fairness in the round itself.

CASE DEBATE

Attacking Affirmative Harm Claims

One way to attack a harm claim is simply to provide evidence that it is declining and that the situation is getting better. Negative teams can also attack harm claims by proving that underlying circumstances have changed so that affirmative harm claims that may have been true in the past are no longer viable. The negative can boost their refutation of harm claims by citing scientific studies that empirically demonstrate how rare the affirmative harm is. The more qualified the negative source is the stronger the evidence is. One strategy for harm refutation is to attack the motivation of the affirmative authors. Perhaps they have a strong self-interest in making the problem seem greater than it is.

A powerful negative strategy is to argue that status quo programs are reducing the affirmative harm area. This simultaneously attacks both the harm and inherency (see next section) claim.

When the affirmative defends harms that are philosophical in nature the negative can argue that the affirmative criteria, or decision rule, is detrimental in the extreme. Another approach to philosophical harm areas is to defend the notion of pragmatism or realism as an overarching framework for our foreign policy. Finally, the negative could offer a counter-value, or an offsetting philosophical argument.

Attacking Inherency Claims

The affirmative must prove that the status quo will not solve their Harm claim. To attack their inherency claim the negative must prove that an actor in the status quo is taking a step that will address the significance of the affirmative's Harm claim. If the negative proves that the problem is being solved in the status quo they greatly reduce the comparative advantage offered by the affirmative plan. Another approach is to identify empirical examples of how status quo programs are already working. The negative can also attack the affirmative inherency claim by arguing there is a trend toward solving the affirmative problem. One other excellent strategy is to argue that agents other than those used in the affirmative plan are solving the problem.

Attacking Solvency Claims

The negative attack on the affirmative Solvency is often one of the most powerful strategies. Many affirmative plans make intuitive sense, but in the real world cannot fulfill their promise. There are generally many intervening factors between the specific mechanism in the plan and the ultimate effect the plan has on the situation in the real world. The primary way that the negative can contest solvency is to provide empirical examples of policy failures that are similar to the affirmative proposal.

Another common solvency approach is for the negative to provide alternative causes for the problem to continue. Some solvency arguments present alternative causes of the harm claim that the affirmative plan does not address. The debate terminology for this type of argument is "alternative causality." For instance if your car did not run because it was out of gasoline, and because it was missing spark plugs, a plan to purchase gasoline would not get your car running unless it also addressed the spark plugs. In this example the lack of spark plugs would be an alternative causality argument against a plan to buy gasoline. To develop alternative causality negative teams should collect proof of all the many causes of certain harm claims.

Solvency is typically a weak link in the affirmative comparative advantage analysis and should be challenged vigorously by the negative. Most affirmative plans are very idealistic and often ignore the realities of how difficult it can be to solve certain problems.

DISADVANTAGES

When people make proposals to do something, often there are drawbacks to that proposal. To consider a course of action we generally weigh the benefits against the potential downsides. Policy debate is no different. In fact, arguments about the downsides of affirmative Plans are one of the most common parts of a debate.

These drawbacks are called “disadvantages” (DA) in debate jargon. DA’s are arguments advanced by the negative team that represent the unique reasons why adopting the Plan would be a bad idea. If the negative team can prove the disadvantage to acting was greater than the advantage of acting the judge should not endorse the affirmative Plan and should vote negative.

Burdens of a Disadvantage

Disadvantages have parts to them. Just as an affirmative Case has to have Harm, Inherency and Solvency, and the affirmative Plan must be Topical, disadvantages have burdens they must meet before they become reasons to reject the affirmative. DA’s must have a link, be unique to the affirmative plan, and have an impact that outweighs the affirmative advantage.

Disadvantages must link to the affirmative plan. This means that the negative team must be able to prove that the drawback results from adoption of the specific affirmative Plan. Links can come from the actions of the Plan or the advantages of the Case. Some DA’s are based on several “internal links” – like a chain reaction. The affirmative can deny the link to a DA either by proving their Plan will not result in that outcome, or by questioning one of the internal links.

Disadvantages must also be “unique” to the affirmative plan. This burden means that the drawback occurs ONLY when the Plan is passed, that it won’t occur in the present system. For example suppose someone suggests that you go to dinner at Wendy’s and someone responded by saying, “don’t go there, the fries are greasy” (a DA). That person would have to prove that if you didn’t go to Wendy’s you would be able to find some food that wasn’t as greasy. If a DA is not uniquely caused by the affirmative plan it is not a reason to reject it. In our example, suppose the alternative to Wendy’s was McDonalds, you could say that McDonald’s had greasy food too so going to Wendy’s would not have a unique disadvantage of greasy food.

Disadvantages must have a large impact – one that is bigger than the advantage that the affirmative wins in the debate. The negative has to prove that the bad consequence of adopting the Plan would outweigh the benefits otherwise it isn’t a reason to reject the Plan. An example might be that the affirmative plan could hurt the economy, which would push us into a recession. The impact of the recession might be greater than the affirmative Case, especially if the negative is also making some inroads in beating the Case. Disadvantages with bigger bottom line impacts are better for the negative to run. Affirmatives could debate against the impact by saying it wouldn’t be so bad.

Turns

Often, one of the most powerful arguments an affirmative can make against a disadvantage is to say that their Plan actually has a positive effect in the area of the DA. That means the argument really becomes a net advantage, not a drawback, to adopting the plan. For example, suppose the person proposing we go to Wendy’s said that Wendy’s offered more grease-free options, like salads and baked potatoes, than any other fast food chain. In our example about the recession, the affirmative might have an argument that their Plan was actually good for the economy. Both of these would be example of “Turns” to the disadvantage. As you can see, turns are very important arguments and both teams should focus on them.

COUNTERPLANS

Many times in life we are not confronted with a simple choice between a proposal and the current path. Instead we are faced with one proposal weighed against a second proposal. For example, if your refrigerator breaks down, you may look at the option of buying a new refrigerator compared to the “status quo” of the broken appliance. But more likely you’ll compare one new refrigerator vs. another new one. In debate, when the negative defends an alternative policy and not the status quo, it is said that they are defending a “counterplan” (CP).

How to Run a Counterplan

Counterplans are policies that are defended by the negative team. It should be presented in the 1NC. It should be written out and be as detailed as an affirmative Plan.

The CP must be a reason to reject the Plan. To explain this, let’s go back to our example. Suppose your idea is to buy a GE refrigerator (the Plan). If someone else in your family said instead “let’s turn the lights on in the living room,” you would likely reject that suggestion as being irrelevant. Obviously, it would be possible to buy the GE fridge and also turn the lights on in the living room. There is no need to choose, so you’d still accept the initial idea.

To test whether or not the CP is a reason to reject the affirmative Plan you ask two questions. First, is it impossible to do both the Plan and the CP at the same time? If the answer is yes, then we are forced to choose. The second question: Is it the case that we *should not* do both the Plan and the CP at the same time? If the answer is yes, then it is illogical to do both together. In either of these cases the negative also has to prove that the CP is better than the Plan. This test is used to establish whether the CP meets its test of “competition.”

The most common strategy for the negative running a counterplan is to say there is some other way to solve the Harm area without triggering a DA that links to the Plan. For example, if the affirmative Plan was U.S. HIV/AIDS assistance to Africa, the negative could CP with European Union HIV/AIDS assistance to Africa. They would combine the CP with a DA to U.S. action, say a tradeoff in the USAID budget. So the negative would be saying the CP is a reason to reject the affirmative Plan because it solves the HIV/AIDS harm without triggering the USAID DA.

Answering a Counterplan

At first, debaters have a hard time answering counterplans until they get used to it. Most teams are used to comparing the Plan to the status quo, not to a CP. Experienced teams eventually learn how to design their affirmatives with the common counterplans in mind.

Here are some ideas: Find reasons that the CP does not solve the affirmative Harm area as well as the Plan (called a “solvency deficit”). Ask to read the CP and look for wording mistakes in the text. Present new affirmative advantages, ones that the CP does not solve very well. Challenge the CP if it does not have any specific solvency evidence. Come up with arguments for why it would be better to “do both” the Plan plus the CP.

Argue that the best policy would be to combine the Plan with part of the CP – this is referred to as a “permutation.” For example, you may suggest going out on a date to a movie. Your object of interest suggests instead going to dinner. You initially say, well why not “do both” and go to dinner and a movie? The response by your date is that there isn’t enough time to do both. So then you come up with the “permutation” of going to the movie then going out to get dessert (the best part of dinner, after all!). If the “perm” ends up being the wisest course of action, there is no reason to reject the initial idea of going to a movie, which is part of the permutation.

CRITIQUES

Some arguments that we use in everyday life do not fall into the categories of disadvantages or counterplans, but are still reasons to reject a course of action. These arguments often involve philosophical reasons to reject certain actions or the way we talk about those actions.

Imagine a situation where you and your friends are looking for a place to eat and one of your friends suggests Denny's. Someone else points out that Denny's has been involved in certain acts that might be considered racist – and therefore that you should look for somewhere else to eat. That objection to eating at Denny's isn't really a disadvantage – after all, it's not like you and your friends eating at Denny's is going to keep them in business, and shunning them won't cost them much. It's a statement of morality or principle on your part

Explanation of Critiques

A critique (sometimes written in the German 'kritik and abbreviated as a K) is a philosophical argument linked to a policy or language. Usually negative teams use critiques to attack the affirmative's fundamental assumptions or language. Often the affirmative makes these assumptions by choice and sometimes they do it because it's their job to defend the resolution. Critiques are usually complicated arguments, and many people are not familiar with the kinds of ideas associated with critiques.

A "representation" critique is the most common type. It is based on the way that a team represents their arguments – such as their language choice. In some ways a representation critique is similar to making a decision based on appearance or characteristics. In our above example, you might choose not to eat at Denny's because of the way they treated other customers, not the taste of their food or their prices.

Examples of Critiques

Some examples from debate rounds include critiques of gendered language such as "mankind" or "Congressman". Another would be a critique of the concept of "Sub-Saharan Africa."

Critiques have components that are in some ways similar to other types of arguments. They typically have "link" arguments, where the negative connects the specific actions of the affirmative to their critique claims. There are also "impact" arguments where the negative identifies the implications of the critique. Finally, some critiques offer "alternative" ways of viewing the world, or alternative representations. These often function very similarly to counterplans. Alternatives can be explicit or implied.

Implications

Generally, critiques have a couple of implications. One is that they undermine some part of the affirmative Case such as the Harm or Solvency. Second, they might implicate consequences similar to that of a disadvantage. In other words, a critique might justify voting against a team altogether in order to reject their assumptions.

Affirmative Strategies

Affirmatives can attack critiques at a number of levels. They can argue their affirmative outweighs the critique. They can deny the link to their representation. They can try to formulate a permutation similar to against a counterplan. They can attack the "Solvency" of the critique alternative, or argue drawbacks to the alternative. They might be able to find some inconsistencies within the negative arguments.

FIRST NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The First Negative Constructive speech (1NC) lays the foundation for the negative strategy in the debate. In this speech the negative starts every major argument that is part of their strategy. The main job of the 1NC is to present all of the negative attacks against the affirmative Case. They should also present “shells” of all of their Off-Case arguments (topicality, disadvantages, counterplans, critiques). The 1NC should build a solid negative policy to defend, whether that be a defense of the status quo or a counterplan.

Preparation

You can **prepare for the 1NC days before the actual debate**. Pre-tournament and pre-round work can get the 1NC all set to go. Choosing the best Case and Off-Case arguments ahead of time leads to making the right selections. Against common case Harm areas the 1NC responses can be completely written out. The negative should write “front-lines” of arguments whenever possible.

Selection

The 1NC should **avoid repetitive arguments**. Repeating arguments make it too easy for the affirmative team to answer. This is true both for Case and Off-Case arguments. Make sure your disadvantages do not have similar link or impact arguments. Do not present duplicative Case arguments. The 1NC should attack as many aspects of the affirmative Case as possible.

Presentation

The 1NC should **read their Off-Case arguments first** and then proceed to their Case attacks. Off-Case “shell” arguments have to be read in a complete form, with each logical component being included. Try to divide your speech roughly equally between the time you spend on the Case and Off-Case.

Specific Links

Many Off-Case arguments are “generic,” meaning they apply to many different affirmative Plans. This is a powerful weapon for the negative as it helps them be more familiar with their negative strategies. On the other hand, judges may not like it when they think the negative is running the same arguments every round, regardless of whether they really apply to that specific affirmative Plan. In order to make your generic arguments seem relevant, **include a specific link argument in the 1NC shell**. That means you should write out a sentence or two that explains the connection between your argument and the specific affirmative.

Delivery Style

The 1NC should be **delivered quickly but clearly**. The appropriate speed will be governed, as in most cases, by the experience level of the judge. Clarity is as important for the 1NC as it is for the 1AC as it is the first impression the judge will have of your arguments, and set the stage for later references back.

Analytical Case Arguments

Some debaters think they can’t make an argument unless they have evidence. This is not true. Analytical arguments (arguments without evidence) can be very powerful. It is often very easy to poke holes in the affirmative Case by **making logical arguments**. These types of points should be added to your Case attack, mixed in with evidence-based arguments. Focus your strategy and attacks on the largest, most threatening parts of the affirmative Case.

SECOND NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE

The Second Negative Constructive speech (2NC) is one of the most important negative speeches in the debate. The 2NC typically extends two or three of the Off-Case argument shells that were presented in the 1NC. These arguments are typically the key parts of the negative strategy, and the likely place where the negative team will end up trying to win the debate in the end.

Preparing

Much of the preparation for the 2NC can be done at home before the tournament. You pretty much know, either through brainstorming or through experience of actual debates, what the 2AC is going to say against your Off-Case shells. You can **prepare front-lines, with analytic and evidenced answers**, to read against the 2AC.

Before you stand up to give your 2NC it is really important that you **know and understand everything the 2AC said** to your arguments. If you need to ask for clarification in cross-examination, you should do that. If you have the time to read through the evidence they read you should try to do that. Asking to borrow the 2AC blocks after the read them is the surest way to make sure you don't miss anything.

Tactics

You start by making a **short “regional” overview** at the top of the flow for that argument. The regional overview should contain a short explanation of all pieces of your argument. Make the link as specific as possible to the affirmative Plan or Case. For example, when you extend a disadvantage your regional overview should include a sentence on the link, uniqueness and impact. The regional overview is a way of summarizing the argument for the judge, and helps pull it all together.

After the regional overview the 2NC should **cover all of the 2AC arguments**, usually one-by-one, without skipping over any. On some arguments you'll need to read evidence, in some cases you won't need to. In part that depends on whether the 2AC used evidence or not.

Rebuild the key parts of the Off-Case arguments by reading more evidence if necessary. This is often referred to as having a “wall” of extensions, i.e. the “link wall” or the “uniqueness wall.” But don't forget to use and extend the 1NC shell evidence, as that is usually the best evidence you have. Refer to it by author and explain the warrants in the evidence. Stress the specific link arguments.

Finally, **weigh or assess the impact** of winning the Off-Case argument. If it is a DA, explain how it outweighs the affirmative; if it is a K, explain how it undercuts the Solvency or turns the Case; if it is a CP, point out how it solves the case while avoiding the DAs. Reading additional impact evidence is usually a solid strategy.

Strategy

The 2NC should **choose one Off-Case argument to be the primary strategy**, but generally they should not make this choice obvious. If you tip your hand to the affirmative too early in the debate they will know to focus on it. The 2NC should extend two or three arguments so they can disguise their intentions and to maintain flexibility. What looks like a sure thing before the 2NC may seem iffy or a second choice by the time the 2NR rolls around.

FIRST NEGATIVE REBUTTAL

The First Negative Rebuttal speech (1NR) is the second part of the Negative Block – where they give back-to-back speeches in the middle part of the debate. The 1NR is a very important part of the overall negative strategy and should not be underestimated. A powerful 1NR puts great pressure on the affirmative team, particularly the First Affirmative Rebuttal.

Case Extension

The 1NR should **focus on extending the most powerful attacks** on the affirmative Case. Using the 5-step extension technique (page 5), the 1NR should base their speech on the 1NC arguments, while answering what the 2AC had to say on those points. The agenda of this part of the 1NR should be the 1NC. The 1NR should signpost back to the 1NC structure.

Explain the 1NC arguments fully, including **developing the warrants in the original evidence**. The reasoning within the evidence, not just the old tag line, is the important part that needs to be expanded and impacted. The full use of the 1NC warrants is the strategy that makes the 1NR an A+.

The 1NR should **be somewhat selective**, if necessary, among the various arguments begun in the 1NC, as some of those initial points may not be worth it. Some arguments have “round winning” potential, others are kind of trivial. You likely won’t have time to go for all of the 1NC points, especially if you are expanding them as you are supposed to. So you’ll need to be selective and realistic.

The goal in extending Case arguments is to **rebuild them** to the point where they are really powerful and do-or-die for the affirmative team. It is not very strategic to extend negative arguments so weakly that they barely register. The 1NR should explain the impact of these arguments as fully as they can.

One way for the 1NR to make their extensions more powerful is to **read additional evidence**. It might even be a good idea to save some of your best Case evidence for reading in the 1NR where it is much more difficult for the affirmative to answer.

The 1NR should **clash directly with the most threatening affirmative Case arguments**. This ideally should be done in a word-for-word manner to make clear to the judge that you are not ducking the big Case debate. If the 2AC highlights certain evidence or arguments to the judge, you need to go after them with a direct response.

Off-Case Extension

Some times the 1NR is assigned to extend an Off-Case argument, such as topicality or a disadvantage. It is possible for the 1NR to do both the Case (or part of the Case) and extend an Off-Case argument. It all depends on where the biggest need is. While it may be possible to do this, you don’t want to spread the 1NR too thin, making all the arguments they cover really easy for the affirmative to answer.

In the Off-Case extension the 1NR should follow the advice given above (page 23) for the 2NC in going for these arguments. Start with a short “regional” overview. Cover the 2AC in a thorough, line-by-line, manner. Read more evidence on the key points. Emphasize the specific link. Weigh or assess the implications of winning that argument.

SECOND NEGATIVE REBUTTAL

The second negative rebuttal (2NR) is the most difficult speech in a debate. It requires substantial coverage and explanation skills. The 2NR must tie together the entire negative strategy, extending each part in detail and creating a favorable impression. They must also cover the many arguments of the 1AR. The 2NR has to balance all these factors, and then throw in being responsible for the strategic decision-making for the team.

Strategies

The most important strategic goal for the 2NR is to, in fact, **have a strategy**. While this sounds obvious, many 2NR's simply go through the motions of trying to win every argument. Instead, the 2NR must assess how the strategy is working up to that point and make a decision about the right mix of the Case or Off-Case arguments, and choosing among the Off-Case arguments.

The 2NR should **adapt to the weaknesses and strengths of the 1AR**. No two 1AR's are alike. Some might make serious coverage mistakes in unexpected places. When the 1AR makes a serious coverage or time allocation mistake the 2NR must maintain enough flexibility to adjust and capitalize. There are no degree-of-difficulty points in debate. If the other team presents an unforeseen opportunity, take it.

The 2NR must attempt to **anticipate the 2AR strategic choices**. The more experience you have, the more easily this will come. The more times you debate a certain team the more you can expect what they will go for in the last rebuttal. The 2NR should focus on that strategy and extend enough arguments against it to neutralize it. While the 2NR may want to make some reference to your opponent's upcoming speech, it is generally more effective to internalize the chess game and just shape your 2NR to pre-empt their strategy.

The 2NR must **evaluate all your impacts** in the debate, whether it that means choosing which disadvantage to extend, or emphasizing case advantage turns. You may have to decide between a counterplan strategy vs. kicking the counterplan. You may have to decide between a critique and a counterplan.

Techniques

Repetition is fatal for the 2NR. The goal of the 2NR should be to make **five minutes of totally separate arguments**. If you sense that you are repeating the same argument in several places in the debate you should correct that by diversifying your positions. Do not over-rely on one argument, one assessment, or one insight.

The 2NR should **begin with an overview** briefly explaining how they will win the debate. This overview should not last more than 30 seconds. It should compare the arguments each side will win and say this comes down favorably for the negative. Be realistic about the arguments the affirmative may win. It's a waste of time to just get up there and say you are winning everything.

The 2NR **chooses which Off-Case arguments to go for**. They have to (very quickly) kick out of the ones they don't want, and then thoroughly extend the ones they do want. On those, they must answer everything the 1AR said on that flow. It is crucial not to miss anything.

The 2NR also needs to **extend the key Case answers**. They will probably have to focus on a few of them, though, given the time constraints. They should choose the ones where the affirmative is the weakest and the negative has the best warrants.