

New Debater Training 1: Overview, Walkthrough & Structure, Stock Issues/1AC

Disclaimer: Throughout training, many things will be presented as fact or “the way things are.” While I believe this is necessary for an effective introduction to the activity, one should keep in mind that in debate, EVERYTHING is up for debate, including accepted norms and the basic structure of debate. Hopefully you’ll see more of what I mean as we go along, but just keep in mind that nothing presented here is seen by everyone as universal truth.

What policy debate is:

While there are many types of debate, our team competes in a style known as **policy debate**, which (especially at the collegiate level) is considered the most prestigious. Policy debate is **extended topic**; that is, it centers on a single **resolution** that is debated for a whole year. The resolution is always a **proposition of policy**; that is, it is always of the form “the United States Federal Government should [do something].” The debate is also **switch-side debating**, meaning teams must debate both in support of and against the resolution. Finally, the debate is also **evidence-based**, meaning it centers on research and preparation, rather than extemporaneous speaking.

Actual debates take place in **rounds** at **tournaments** held both regionally and nationally throughout the year. A round takes place between two teams (from different schools) each with two members. One team **affirms** (or debates for) the resolution, while the other **negates** (or debates against) it. A normal tournament consists of six preliminary rounds, with the best advancing into single-elimination bracket-based “out-rounds” to determine the overall winner of the tournament. Most tournaments include novice, junior varsity, and varsity divisions based on experience. In addition to team awards, individuals are recognized through speaker awards that are independent of win-loss record.

What happens in a debate round:

As mentioned above, a round is an actual debate between two teams. Each team has two members, and each person gives two speeches. The first four speeches are known as constructive speeches, last nine minutes each, and are (basically) when each team explains its side of the debate (introducing all relevant issues). The last four speeches are known as rebuttals, last six minutes each, and are when each team attempts to explain why their side of the argument is better and why they should win the debate. Each debater also participates in two cross-examination periods, one where they ask questions of the other team and one where they answer questions from the other team. The cross-ex periods occur after each constructive speech and are three minutes long. The timeline for a debate, then, looks as follows:

1st Affirmative Constructive (1AC) – 9 minutes

2nd Negative Speaker Cross Examines 1st Affirmative Speaker (3 min)

1st Negative Constructive (1NC) – 9 minutes

1st Affirmative Speaker Cross Examines the 1st Negative Speaker (3 min)

2nd Affirmative Constructive (2AC) – 9 minutes

1st Negative Speaker Cross Examines the 2nd Affirmative Speaker (3 min)

2nd Negative Constructive (2NC) – 9 minutes

2nd Affirmative Speaker Cross Examines the 2nd Negative Speaker (3 min)

1st Negative Rebuttal (1NR) – 6 minutes

1st Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) – 6 minutes

2nd Negative Rebuttal (2NR) – 6 minutes

2nd Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) – 6 minutes

Try to think of some ways of remembering the speech and CX order.

Stock Issues and the 1AC:

The affirmative gets the first speech in the debate round. The basic task of the first affirmative speech is to propose and defend a policy (i.e. the resolution). Therefore, what a team will do (normally) is identify a problem in the **status quo** (or the way things are now), propose a policy solution (their **plan**), and make the case for why and how their solution in fact **solves** those problems. An affirmative team does this by focusing and winning what are called the **stock issues** of the debate: First, that there is a **harm** in the status quo, which is both **inherent** (i.e. won't be solved the way things are now) and **significant**. Second, their plan **solves** those harms. Finally, at times the affirmative may be called upon to defend that their plan does, in fact, defend the resolution (something called **topicality**, which we will talk about in more depth later, but in general asks the question, is the affirmative upholding their **burden**, or their side, in the debate?). A good mnemonic for remembering the stock issues of an affirmative case is **SHITS** (**S**ignificance, **H**arms, **I**nherency, **T**opicality, **S**olvency). In general, a 1AC must have all of these elements, and an affirmative team must AT LEAST win these issues in order to win the debate.

Some other notes on affirmative debating: sometimes teams will use the term **advantage** rather than harm. It's the same idea, just a slightly different way of phrasing it. A harm is something in the status quo which the plan fixes, and advantage is something good which results from plan. Also, the affirmative has power of **fiat**, which in general means the debate centers around what will happen if plan comes into being, not whether congress will pass the legislation.

As an example, the resolution for the 2003-2004 debate season is:

Resolved: that the United States Federal Government should enact one or more of the following:

- Withdrawal of its World Trade Organization complaint against the European Union's restrictions on genetically modified foods;
- A substantial increase in its government-to-government economic and/or conflict prevention assistance to Turkey and/or Greece;
- Full withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization;
- Removal of its barriers to and encouragement of substantial European Union and/or North Atlantic Treaty Organization participation in peacekeeping in Iraq and reconstruction in Iraq;
- Removal of its tactical nuclear weapons from Europe;
- Harmonization of its intellectual property law with the European Union in the area of human DNA sequences;
- Rescission of all or nearly all agriculture subsidy increases in the 2002 Farm Bill.

So, for its plan an affirmative might propose that the USFG cede control of the peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts in Iraq to NATO. Advantages to adopting plan might be that NATO is better at reconstructing countries, that they are better at fighting terrorism, that it would serve to check the militaristic and imperial tendencies of the United States, that it would improve relations with Europe, etc. All advantages would have to be demonstrated through solvency evidence, and (mostly likely) defended on why those are good things.

Recommended Reading/Viewing:

Code of the Debater, any of Part 1: Initiation, but especially "What is debate all about?" for rookies; Debate Videos Part 1: Debate Walkthrough, and Part 2: Stock Issues (for rookies)
Code of the Debater, "The Affirmative Case" (in Part 2: Basic Knowledge); Debate Videos Part 5: Affirmative Debating #1, and Part 12: Affirmative Debating #2 (for vets)

Key terms from this training are in bold, you should strive to know what all of them mean before the next training session.