

Bay Area Urban Debate

Intro Manual for New Debaters

What is Team Policy Debate?

Team policy debate is an activity in which students try to persuade a judge that their arguments should win them the debate. This debate format has evolved over many years in the U.S. and has resulted in specialized concepts and jargon. High school students from around the country debate a single topic (called **resolution**) for the entire year. Policy debate is focused on the content of arguments made by the debaters rather than on presentation or delivery. Arguments are supported with published quotations researched by the debaters (called **evidence** or **cards**).

A team of debaters is composed of two students (usually from the same school). In one **round** of debate, there are two teams: the **affirmative** and the **negative**. The affirmative will begin by presenting an eight-minute speech that identifies a problem that exists now and offering a policy to solve the problem. This policy is called the affirmative **plan**. After the affirmative has presented their case, the negative team gives a speech against it, then the affirmative will argue against the negative and so on, back and forth, until the debate ends with the affirmative giving the final speech. All together, there are 8 major speeches in a debate. There are also four cross-examination speeches so that each debater gets to ask questions once and answer questions once. There are usually several (in Baltimore Urban Debate League tournaments—3) rounds at a tournament. Debaters must debate both sides of the question in alternate rounds.

The Speeches

Speech	Time	General purpose
First Affirmative Constructive (1AC)	8 minutes	Present affirmative case (harms, inherency, plan, solvency)
Cross-examination by Second Negative	3	Ask questions, clarify affirmative's arguments
First Negative Constructive (1NC)	8	Present negative off-case and attack affirmative case
Cross-examination by First Affirmative	3	Ask questions, clarify negative's arguments
Second Affirmative Constructive (2AC)	8	Attack negative off-case arguments, rebuild affirmative case
Cross-examination by First Negative	3	Ask questions, clarify affirmative's arguments
Second Negative Constructive (2NC)**	8	Respond to some of 2AC arguments, rebuild negative arguments
Cross-examination by Second Affirmative	3	Ask questions, clarify negative's arguments
First Negative Rebuttal (1NR)**	5	Respond to rest of 2AC arguments, rebuild negative arguments
First Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR)	5	Rebuild affirmative arguments, respond to both 2NC and 1NR
Second Negative Rebuttal (2NR)	5	Explain why the negative team should win
Second Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR)	5	Explain why the affirmative team should win

**These two speeches, 2NC and 1NR, are called the "negative block" and are treated as one long speech (with a cross-ex in between). The negative speakers should divide the important issues in the debate between them so that they each handle separate arguments rather than having the 1NR merely repeat the same ones the 2NC made.

Preparation time

Each round, each team is allocated ten (10) minutes total of preparation time during which to talk with their partner, find evidence, write arguments, etc.

Argumentation

Debate is a game of persuasion in which students try to convince the judge that their policy option is best. The “rules” of this game are themselves debatable, making it an exciting and dynamic activity. Nevertheless, several tools have been employed for much of debate’s history. There are two burdens to consider in most debate rounds: burden of proof and burden of rebuttal. First, the Affirmative team must meet the **burden of proof**. To advance a compelling case for change from the **status quo** (debate resolutions are all worded so that the affirmative advocates a change from the current system), the affirmative must overcome **presumption**. Presumption is the idea that a judge would presume the current system to be functioning properly until a case proves otherwise (meeting the burden of proof).

The affirmative team can meet the burden of proof by addressing what are termed **stock issues**. These are the issues the affirmative needs to win to argue a new policy should be adopted. There are basically five stock issues. First, the issue of **topicality** is the question of whether the affirmative plan meets the words in the resolution. If the affirmative presents a strong case but does not meet the words in the resolution, the judge cannot endorse their plan. They are outside of the judge’s jurisdiction. Debates on topicality are sometimes technical and are debates about debating. For example, the negative says the affirmative is not a significant increase, and defines significance as 5%. The affirmative argues that this interpretation is bad for debate, and that significantly should mean “large in scope.” The judge must decide whose interpretation is better.

The second stock issue is **harms** (sometimes also described as “significance”). The affirmative must be able to show that a harm is occurring that requires action. They must show a felt difficulty—people must be suffering, the environment is being damaged, rights are violated, etc. If the negative is able to show that there is no harm or that the harm is inconsequential, there is no need for a plan.

The 5 stock issues:

Disadvantages
Solvency
Harms
Inherency
Topicality

The third stock issue is **inherency**. The Affirmative must show that the current system is not addressing the harm. If there is a harm but it is being adequately addressed, there is once again no need for action. For example, people may be victims of racism due to racial profiling, but *if* the negative could show that national legislation has just been passed, there would be no need pass it again.

The fourth stock issue is **solvency**. The affirmative plan must solve the harm they have outlined. If they can show a need for action but present a solution that will not address the need, action is futile. Negatives may attack the feasibility or workability of the plan, or may argue that the harm has alternate causes that make it difficult or impossible for the affirmative to solve.

The last stock issue is **disadvantage**. Here the question is: do the drawbacks to action outweigh the advantages. There are three main parts to a disadvantage. The **link** is the connection between the affirmative plan and the disadvantage. The **uniqueness** is the part where the negative shows that the disadvantage is not happening. The **impact** is the portion of the disadvantage where the negative demonstrates the consequence of acting. More than one link may be needed to get from “point A” (the affirmative plan) to “point B” (the impact). For

example, a negative might argue a disadvantage called federalism, where they take the position that the federal government should leave state issues to the states. An outline might look like this:

I. Disadvantage: Spending

- A. **Uniqueness:** Although they have not been cut yet, disaster relief aid is vulnerable to budget cuts.
- B. **Link:** the affirmative forces a trade off with disaster relief aid.
 - 1. The affirmative plan is costly.
 - 2. New federal spending will force cuts in other areas.
- C. **Impact:** Lack of disaster relief will cause massive deaths from natural disasters.

Remember that all takes for the negative to win is to win one stock issue. If they only attack the affirmative on topicality, for example, they will still win if they win their topicality argument. They may also win on a combination of issues. One of the most common negative strategies, for example, is to minimize the affirmative solvency and outweigh what the affirmative has left with a disadvantage.

The second important burden to be aware of is the **burden of rebuttal** (also called the burden of rejoinder). This burden states that a speaker (any speaker, on either side) has the burden to refute the arguments made by the other side, or else concede the arguments. Stated another way, in debate—silence means consent. This burden has several important implications. First, it means that debaters can use what is previous speakers have said or not said to their strategic advantage. They may capitalize on arguments that their opponents ignored, pointing out that these concessions should cost them the debate. They may employ a “spread” strategy of presenting a large array of arguments in hopes that one will get past their opponents. The other important implication of the burden of rebuttal is that the judge must carefully track arguments to be able to identify dropped positions. If a speaker claims a position was conceded, the judge must be able to verify this claim. The only way to do so is to take notes on all arguments made in the debate, to know what speech they were made in, and to be able to identify point of clash (so that it is clear which arguments answer other arguments).

In debate, silence means consent.

It is said that the negative has issue choice, while the affirmative has argument choice. This is because issues (that the affirmative must meet to meet their burden of proof) are made up of arguments (individual units of proof). In other words, if the negative wins one issue, they win. They may make strategic choices about which one they are ahead on over the course of the round. The affirmative can counter this by having an array of answers to each issue raised by the negative and focus on the strongest answer in rebuttal. They might make three different types of answers to topicality, for instance, arguing that they meet the negative’s interpretation of the topic, that the negative interpretation is not a good one, and that they have a better interpretation of the words in the resolution.

Notes in debate are taken on what is called a flowsheet (more frequently abbreviated a **flow**). Judges “flow” the arguments by writing each claim in the debate down in the column in which the speaker makes the argument. Abbreviations, shorthand, and small handwriting are suggested. Because many arguments are made in a debate, and cramped flows can become messy, judges tend to use at least one sheet of paper for each stock issue presented in the first speech (usually labeled as “observations” “contentions” or “advantages”), as well as one sheet for each major negative position (disadvantages, topicality and similar important arguments are often labeled “off case” arguments). Debaters will sometimes present **roadmaps** before they begin their speeches to help the judge organize their flowsheets.

1AC	1NC	2AC	2NC/1NR	1AR	2NR	2AR