Preparation, Practice and Performance: The Art of the Debate Speech

Timothy M. O’Donnell, Director of Debate, Mary Washington University

One of the things the Wake Forest Summer Debate Workshops are most proud of is our efforts over the last decade to “put debate back into the debate workshop.” Our feeling has been that too many students spend far too much on workshops where they do very little debating. Here at Wake Forest, we have worked to change this by developing a sophisticated set of benchmarks which combine theory and practice for each of the speeches in a debate to help students maximize their potential as debaters. All of our students receive intensive instruction and practice in the art of each of the debate speeches. This essay offers step-by-step instruction on each of the speeches in a debate and grows out of more than ten years of collective staff wisdom on how to refine the art of the debate speech. The best way to use this essay is to create a checklist of things “to do” as you work to improve your debating. You can’t do everything all at once, but you can work to add one or two things every time you debate. Soon enough, these things will happen instinctively.

The First Affirmative Constructive Speech

The IAC is often the most undervalued speech in a debate. For the affirmative, at least, nothing could be further from the truth. There are several goals in the IAC. First, as the opening affirmative speech it is your opportunity to make a good first impression with the judge. Second, it is your opportunity to establish your offense (i.e. advantages). Third, it is an opportunity to inoculate yourself against or preempt your opponent’s offensive arguments. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is an opportunity to make subsequent affirmative speeches easier and better.

In terms of presentation, there are several things that ought to guide the IAC. As the only 100% pre-planned speech in the debate, delivery should be better than that of any other speech. Effective delivery makes a good first impression with the judge thereby adding a third member to the affirmative team: the judge. If the judge perfectly understands everything you said, then your offense is firmly established in the judge’s head. When your opponent makes arguments that the IAC already answered, your judge will think to themself, “That’s no good, the IAC Smith already answered that argument.” That way, when the 2AC simply responds to negative arguments by saying, “IAC Smith evidence proves no motive,” the judge will nod their head in agreement and you can move on confident that the judge knows why you are right. In fact, when the judge hears a 1NC argument that was clearly pre-empted in the IAC the judge will be skeptical and have a suspicious attitude toward the negative team. This inoculation effect can only work, however, if the IAC was entirely clear and digestible when presented. By speaking clearly and persuasively in the IAC you put an extra burden on the negative team which now has to fight against three opponents and you save time in the 2AC and 1AR.

In addition, there are several other things that you should do to enhance the presentation. First, begin even slower than you would any other speech. All speeches should begin slowly and clearly to get the judge used to your voice, your accent, and to allow you to warm up. Second, begin with a clear identifier that lets the judge know what your case is about. Often your opponent knows, but the judge neither knows nor really cares what case you run. At each stage of the speech you want to establish a context so that what follows is easier to understand. Just as a book has a title, the beginning of your IAC should establish the subject matter of your case. Third, know how to pronounce all of the words and names in your IAC. A quick way to lose your judges respect is to mispronounce words or names. Fourth, you should speak perfectly clearly and with expression all the way through the speech. Fifth, transitions and tags should use “catchwords” or “catch phrases” that capture key concepts and can be used in subsequent speeches to quickly refer to IAC arguments. Good transitions also make it easier to understand the evidence that follows. Sixth, pay particular attention to your transitions. Transitions between cards should clearly demarcate a card from the next tag, while transitions between parts of the IAC structure should be even slower than card transitions to allow time for paper to be turned and for the judge to think about the context of what follows. Seventh, the plan text should be read slowly and clearly. The question of the debate is: “Is the affirmative plan desirable?” If nobody knows what the plan does it is pretty tough to make a decision. Eighth, commonly used acronyms should be slowly introduced to allow time to write them and so that subsequent use is clear. Ninth, you cites should be very clear so that they can be easily written down. (Dunn and Dunn, Baldridge and Aldridge sound much alike). If the judge gets them right the first time, then your subsequent references to cards in later affirmative speeches will be effective. Finally, the speech should end just inside the time. Overtime is bad, so is having more than 10 seconds left. There is nothing worse than a rushed, unclear IAC that ends with lots of time remaining. Realize that the more you practice the speech the faster it will get.

While presentation is important, so is content. There are several things that you should consider when constructing your IAC. First, keep your inferences evidence minimal. You will rarely, if ever need it and too much inferences can either make the negative’s disadvantage very unique or it ends up generating links to disadvantages. Instead, use the inferences contention for topicality evidence or uniqueness evidence against disadvantages. Second, include your best advantages. Each advantage should have a bottom-line (or terminal) impact that outweighs disadvantages or kritics. In all cases, you should avoid links or internal links without impacts (e.g. random cards that say your plan will prevent terrorism without an impact to terrorism). You should also aim for multiple diverse advantages (as long as the number does not dilute the strength of your strongest advantages) that stand on their own and guard against easy negative cross applications. Third, you should answer the strongest negative arguments against your case. When you choose an affirmative, you should have thought about the negative’s strongest arguments against your case, whether they are advantage answers, case turns, or solvency arguments. Including preempts to these arguments in the IAC is one of the best ways to blunt the force of the negative’s standard argument repertoire. Fourth, you should emphasize solvency. This evidence will ultimately be the basis for your plan. In addition, your solvency contention should be designed to preempt negative counterplans and disadvantages. For example, this is a good place to put your “federal/U.S. action is key” cards. Fifth, you should consider having modular overviews or underviews that you would read in specific instances. For example, if you know that your opponent is going to shift the framework of the debate away from the question you are seeking to address in the IAC then it can be a smart move to begin by identifying and justifying the framework on which the opening affirmative speech act is based. Similarly, if you are worried about losing to a disadvantage that outweighs your case, then it makes sense to include a morality underview in which you lay out the reasons why morality is more important than consequences. Or, if you know that the negative is likely to run
a particular disadvantage, a uniqueness underview in which you piece together a string of uniqueness arguments about "the way the world is" to get a jump start against the negative's disadvantages. Finally, the principle of flexibility should guide content. Ultimately the 1AC is always and already a work in progress. This means that you will need to modify it for your judges, your opponents, and the natural evolution in argument that occurs over the course of a long season. You should be constantly modifying it to remove cards that the 2AC never uses, while plugging in evidence that the 2AC always reads. Your goal each week ought to be to make your 1AC better, stronger and more useful than it was the week before.

In terms of structure, the best guide is to keep it simple. While some substructure can be helpful to isolate independent scenarios, you should use it sparingly. The strength of your 1AC pivots on the narrative that you write. It should move the listener from the status quo, through the problem and consequences, to the solution. Which terminology you use (i.e. advantages, contentions, observations) is irrelevant. However, these terms do provide important cues that clue the judge into the need for a new sheet of flow paper. Whether or not you decide to break your advantages down into subpoints depends on whether or not the solvency applies to specific advantages. If it applies to all of your advantages, then keep it together in a solvency contention. Most importantly, you should not number each card (nor should you say "next" between cards). The structure for the flow on the case is established by the 1NC, not the 1AC.

Finally, once everything else is in place, you should write your plan. It should be tailored to the solvency evidence that you have and should avoid extraneous or indefensible aspects. If you are not able to defend, let alone answer cross examination questions about every part of your plan, then you should eliminate them. In general, you should avoid writing the resolution into your plan. The upside in terms of topicality is usually negligible, while the downside in terms of link generation for the negative is considerable. Many generic negative strategies hinge on the words contained in the resolution. If you have a topical plan, you should not feel compelled to provide the negative with a sure fire link to one of their best negative strategies. Over the years, too many affirmative teams have lost to plan-inclusive-counterplans that exclude one or more words in the resolution. You will need to make a decision about whether or not you wish to specify the agent, and which ever way you go, you'll need to be prepared to answer the negative's argument about agent specification. Finally, you should have an escape clause that gives you later flexibility by reserving the right to clarify.

The First Negative Constructive Speech

While the 1AC is the only 100% pre-planned speech in the debate, there are many things that you can and should be doing to prepare for the 1NC prior to a tournament. One of the best things that you can do before the season even begins is to read about the topic so that you can build an inventory of background knowledge. This pool of background knowledge will help you make informed decisions about the kinds of negative arguments you will need to have in your arsenal as well as the types of arguments that apply to particular affirmative cases. As the topic develops throughout the spring and summer (in handbooks and at workshops), you should work to gather information about the variety of affirmative cases that are to be run on the topic. Throughout the season, you will be adding to this list as you become aware of new cases. Usually this information is collected into what is called a "case list" and it includes the full text of the affirmative's plan, a list of the advantages, the cites (especially for solvency authors), and lists of 2AC responses to negative arguments. You should work with your teammates and coaches to maintain your caselist throughout the year.

Once you have an idea about the range of cases that you are likely to debate, you should write a frontline (a frontline is a series of diverse arguments organized from strongest to weakest that you will use to refute a position) against all generic harm/advantage areas as well as a frontline of generic solvency arguments. Generic frontlines which anticipate a range of possible affirmatives are particularly useful early in the year. In addition, you should fine tune the shells to your disadvantages and kritiks as well as your topicality arguments so that the links and violations are specific to the case you are debating. In any given debate, you will need to insert specific links and write specific topicality violations to apply to the particular case you are debating. Keep in mind, that you should alter the impacts of your disadvantages to leverage or turn the case. You should conclude this part of your preparation by timing the shells to your off case arguments so that you know precisely how long it will take you to present each one in the 1NC. Based upon the number of arguments that you will need to make in this speech to have a coherent strategy later in the debate, you may need to modify the number of arguments you will present according to time.

Finally, and most importantly, you and your partner need to have an ongoing strategy discussion. You should determine how you will divide the labor between the 2NC and the 1NR and each negative debater should have a few generic arguments that are their specialties. And although you may wish to modify these changes after hearing the 2AC, it is important that you know in advance which arguments each of you will be extending in the negative block. Another part of this discussion should involve devising a 1NC strategy that gives you multiple ways to win the debate. You should have at least 3 or 4 potential voting issues. For example, you might want to have a topicality argument, a disadvantage with case takeouts and turns, a counterplan with a distinct net benefit, and a kritik. Although you will probably not want to keep all of these options alive in the negative block, it is a good idea to give yourself the option of having multiple ways to win the debate. Each independent strategic option should be a complete strategy. For example, if you decide to go for a disadvantage your disadvantage should outweigh the case and you should combine this with case takeouts and/or turns to minimize the advantages of the case. Too often the negative goes for its disadvantage but fails to reduce the case which usually means that the disadvantage does not outweigh the case. One word of caution about counterplans: if you are going to run one, the text should be prepared carefully. Under no circumstances should the exact text you will read in the debate be scripted in advance. While portions of it may be, you can only complete the task after carefully inspecting the affirmative plan. Too many negatives have lost debates they should have won because they either failed to model their counterplan after the text of the affirmative plan, or they were sloppy in copying the relevant portions of the affirmative's plan.

Once the 1AC starts, the real work of listening begins. Both partners should listen to the 1AC, flow it carefully, and think critically about the arguments that are being presented. There will be time to pull additional files later. Listen to the evidence presented in the 1AC and anticipate the ways that the 2AC will try to use 1AC evidence to answer your arguments. Since a good 1AC is designed to answer negative arguments you should modify your arguments accordingly or else risk having the 2AC point out how your arguments were pre-empted in the 1AC. Listen to the arguments presented in the 1AC and identify affirmative traps. For example, many affirmatives will hide decision rules in their advantages that won't be pointed out until the 1AR or the 2AR. It is imperative that the 1NC identify these types of arguments and respond to them accordingly. Finally, listen for what is missing from the evidence and arguments presented in the 1AC and write out arguments that you can make in the speech the identify holes in the affirmative's case. Powerful 1NC arguments include "they have no evidence which says..." or "there evidence doesn't say..." However, you won't know to make these arguments if you don't listen carefully to the 1AC.
Once you are done listening to the IAC, you should modify and adjust your strategy based upon changes to the plan or the advantages presented in the IAC. In addition, you should think about the consistency of your positions. Are there contradictions or double turns in your various positions? Along these lines, you should avoid the urge to throw in another argument at the last minute to fill up time. These late additions usually get you into trouble because they haven’t been carefully examined for consistency with your other arguments. Most of all, you should use very little prep time—if any—for this speech. Use the cross-examination time to pull your remaining blocks, write out arguments, and organize your blocks. If you are burning prep time to do these things, you are substantially reducing your chances of winning the debate because you’ll need that time for your final rebuttal.

Presenting the INC is relatively straightforward. You should be clear, efficient, and complete. Begin by standing offering the judge a brief road map for the speech. You need to tell them how many pieces of paper they will need for off-case arguments and where you will be going on the case. For example, you might say: “There will be three off case positions and then I will go to advantage one and advantage two.” You should not disclose what your off-case positions will be. The speech should begin with your off-case arguments and end on opened-ended arguments on the case. If you put an off-case argument last, you risk not finishing the argument before time expires. For example, if you put a disadvantage last you might not get to the impact and the affirmative will say that there is no impact and they reserve the right to answer the position until an impact is presented. If you put opened-ended arguments last it doesn’t matter if you make eight or nine arguments against the second advantage to the case (assuming of course that you prioritized your arguments). And of the off-case arguments you are presenting, you should start with your theory arguments (e.g. agent specification) and topicality arguments. Then present your disadvantages. Then present your counterplan. Finally go to the case. You should end your speech by refuting the weakest part of the case (e.g. the affirmative’s weakest advantage). When you are on the case, remember to number all of your arguments because you are creating the structure on the flow that will be referenced by all subsequent speeches.

There are a few things you should avoid. First, you should avoid having extra time. Bring extra evidence against the case to read in a situation where you get through everything. Remember, every second counts. Second, avoid redundant or repetitive arguments on the case. Instead, aim to present as many different arguments as possible. If you make the same argument two or three times, the 2AC will group the arguments together and answer them once, thus gaining a significant time advantage in their speech. Third, avoid the urge to save substantial arguments for later in the debate. All of the main lines of argument you will present in the debate should be in this speech. Saving arguments for the negative blocks risks either a lack of development or straight turns in the IAR.

In terms of each of the major arguments that the INC initiatives, there are a few things that you should be doing. Topicality arguments should be organized according to the following scheme: A) our interpretation of the topic is... (this is where you provide definitive support for your understanding of the words in the resolution, B) The affirmative doesn’t meet our interpretation because... (this is sometimes referred to as the violation), C) Our interpretation of the topic is good (this is sometimes referred to as the standards), and D) Topicality is a voting issue because... (here you need a precise and specific reason that identifies one or both of the debate values – education and competition). Topicality arguments should be presented slowly and clearly in addition to being sufficiently developed. As a general rule, you should avoid multiple topicality arguments because you risk identifying contradictory sets of topical affirmative cases.

Disadvantages: Disadvantages should begin with a clear label. For example, you might say “Politics,” “Bush,” “Business Confidence,” or some other such word that informs the judge about the nature of the argument. Arrange the disadvantage in the order of uniqueness, link, and impact and recognize that you may need several pieces of evidence for a complete link or impact story. Several rules of thumb should guide your selection of disadvantages. First, run disadvantages that will outweigh the case and include the final impact in your shell. If the disadvantage will not outweigh the case, then you will need to spend considerable time reducing the case advantage. Second, run disadvantages with different link and impact stories. If you run a disadvantage with a similar link or impact story, you are making the 2AC’s job easy because many of the arguments they make against one of the disadvantages will also apply to the other. Third, run disadvantages that will help you leverage the case or turn the case advantage. Disadvantages can be the best case takeouts that you have. For example, if one of the affirmative’s advantages protects the environment and you have a disadvantage with an economic impact, it is useful to have evidence that says the economic declines hurt the environment. This gives you the opportunity to argue that the affirmative plan will not only hurt the economy, but it will also hurt the environment, thus mitigating any advantage to doing the plan. In contrast, you should not run disadvantages that depend on solvency for the link because you’ll need to spot the affirmative a huge advantage before you can even begin to get your disadvantage into the game. Second, don’t run disadvantages that are inconsistent with each other or your solvency turns. Third, don’t throw in last minute disadvantages to fill up time, that you are unprepared to extend, or that you unfamiliar with. Finally, be sure to protect your disadvantage ground by advancing complementary theory arguments if the affirmative is evasive in cross examination. For example, you could run agent specification if the affirmative refuses to specify their agent.

Kritiks: As for kritiks, many of the principles that govern a disadvantage also apply. However, according to most judging philosophies, you have an additional explanatory burden. Both the link and the impact should be clearly explained. At the end of the kritik, the judge should have a good grasp on how you think this argument functions in the debate. Is it a solvency take-out? Is it a harms take-out? Is there a discursive impact? How does the plan make the problem worse and how much worse does it make the problem? Should it be evaluated prior to the substantive arguments introduced by the affirmative in the IAC? What is the alternative and is there a text? Finally, depending on your judge, you need to ask yourself whether or not there is a performative contradiction between the kritik and the other arguments introduced in the debate. Among judges, there seems to be no clear consensus regarding whether or not the INC may contain such contradictions. Some say no. Others say they have no problem with it. The point is you need to know your judge.

Counterplans: To run a counterplan effectively, you first need to be able to explain the nature of your counterplan. If it is an agent counterplan, you need to be able to articulate the reason why your agent is preferable to the one endorsed by the affirmative plan. If it is a plan inclusive counterplan, you need to be able to explain which parts of the plan you do, and which parts you exclude. Second, you need to be able to clearly identify the net benefit(s) to your counterplan. Net benefits can be thought of as disadvantages that link to the plan, but not the counterplan. They are reasons to reject the plan. For a counterplan to be "net beneficial" it needs to be more desirable than the plan and any combination of the plan and the counterplan. The formula is: CP > P and P + CP. Third, you should not run the counterplan conditionally (or dispositionally) unless there is a good reason for doing so. Too many negative teams have lost conditionality debates on counterplans that had no rationale for being conditional in the first place. Fourth, make sure your counterplan text is tailored to the affirmative plan. If the affirmative does not offer you a copy of
their plan prior to the debate, you will need to take prep time to finish writing your counterplan. Precision here counts for a lot. On last year’s intercollegiate debate topic, too many negative teams lost when they accidentally switched up a word or two when writing their counterplan and ended up with a counterplan that reduced fossil fuel emissions even more than the plan. Finally, present the counterplan after you have presented all other off-case arguments. You don’t want to tip your hand early in the 1NC as to what your counterplan does. This only gives the 2AC additional prep against your most strategic argument.

Debating the case: Debating the case is one of the most important, yet too often underdeveloped aspects of the negative’s attack. Negative teams that cede large chunks of the case usually lose (counterplans that capture the case don’t cede the case). Begin by grouping each chunk of the case and list arguments numerically. If you want to make an argument against one of their pieces of evidence incorporate it into the numerical structure. DO NOT GO OFF EACH PIECE OF EVIDENCE. Your job on the case is to set up the structure of the flow for the rest of the debate. Second, avoid making redundant arguments. Every repetitive argument you make just gives the 2AC a good time tradeoff. They only need to answer the argument once and say they already answered the argument the next time they get to it. Third, make thoughtful analytical arguments. For example: “They have no evidence which says...” Or, “Their plan can’t solve for all of their advantage because...” Many affirmative cases have considerable holes that a few well placed non-carded arguments can exploit. You don’t want to be in a position at the end of the debate where the judge says “you didn’t even need evidence to beat this case if you had only said...”. Fourth, make sure you are answering the 1AC. An effective 1AC will be designed to answer many of the arguments on your frontlines against their case. You need to listen to the 1AC and modify your blocks accordingly. Fifth, compare evidence on crucial issues. “Their evidence from the 1AC says — but our evidence is better because...” Sixth, run offensive arguments against the case (e.g. solvency turns). Seventh, run defensive arguments against the case (e.g. arguments which minimize the impact of the case). Eighth, counterplan, if the status quo is indefensible in order to reduce the affirmative’s advantage. Similarly, run counterplans to solve the impact to particular advantages for which the plan isn’t the only necessary and sufficient solution. This will allow you to neutralize one affirmative advantage so that you can concentrate your offensive fire power on advantages that are unique to the plan’s action. Finally, minimize the affirmative advantages with multiple arguments (status quo solves, link takeouts, internal link takeouts, link turns, impact turns, impact takeouts, no solvency).

Second Affirmative Constructive Speech

Several goals should direct you as you prepare for the 2AC. First, give yourself multiple ways to win. Part of your responsibility is to set up the 1AR with options so that they have choices. Your job is to make sure that ample supplies of winnable arguments are on the flow. Second, make it difficult for the negative block. Make arguments that are time intensive to answer. Examples include: theory arguments, add-on advantages, and turns. Third, think in terms of offense. You want to have more advantages to your case at the end of the 2AC than you did at the end of the 1AC. You can do this by turning a disadvantage, reading an add-on advantage, or both. Fourth, acclimate the judge to your case. The more you explain why your plan is desirable, the less work the 1AR will have to do. Fifth, cover. You are doomed if you drop arguments in the 2AC, so be sure to answer every 1NC argument. Seventh, read a few arguments on the case as possible. This means that you should milk the 1AC for all its worth. Instead of reading a new card to answer every argument, apply the evidence of the 1AC. For example: “1NC #1 — they said states undermine solvency, but this was already answered by the Smith evidence read in the 1AC. It’s the 3rd card on Contention II. Smith says...”

As you prepare to give the 2AC, there are a few general things that you should remember to do. First, read critical pieces of negative evidence (links, solvency turns) as well as the counterplan text and the topicality violations. Have the first affirmative retrieve these before the CX of the INC starts. Second, spend a few seconds considering whether there are any tensions between the negative’s arguments. Is there a contradiction within a disadvantage? Is there a contradiction between disadvantages? Etc. Third, think about how you can group similar arguments on the case together. If you are running out of time at the end of the speech, group entire advantages and list off a series of answers. Finally, avoid lengthy introductions. Generally, you should start with “1. we meet” (if it is a topicality argument) or “1. not unique” (if it’s a disadvantage). However, you could have a small introduction that does something like this: “We’ll win that the disad is only one shot deal versus the systemic ever present and unavoidable risk of the case impact.”

Presentation during the 2AC is very important. There are several things that should be instinctual and that you should do in every 2AC. First, stand up and give the judge a road map. Do this quickly and put your sheets of paper in order before you do this. Tell them how to organize their flows. For example: “The order is topicality, politics, solvency, advantage 1, and advantage 2.” Second, avoid the urge to explain evidence after you read it — the judge heard it the first time assuming that you delivered the tag and the evidence clearly. Third, label or identify your arguments with a debate term on off-case arguments before delivering the tag. For example: turn, not unique, no link, no internal link, no impact, and no threshold. This will help the judge understand the nature of your argument and will help them listen, Fourth, be organized. Go through the arguments on the flow in order. Don’t jump around (i.e. from the #2 to the #10 and then back up to the #1). Cross-hatch your blocks so that you can move smoothly from one major argument to the next. Fifth, use catch-phrases when referring back to your evidence that were set up in the 1AC. Sixth, number your arguments. On off-case positions initiated in the INC, you are setting up the structure on the flow. You should use a simple numerical structure for each argument: 1) no link, 2) not unique, etc. You should not go off each card in their disadvantage shell. Seventh, take more evidence than you can read. You don’t want to end up with extra time at the end of the speech. Remember, the goal is to make the negative block work. The fewer arguments you make, the easier you make their job. Eighth, don’t refer to your opponents. Refer to their arguments. If you refer to your opponents you should use gender neutral terms. You should never call a he a she and a she a he (e.g. “he said” when he was a she). Ninth, never try to read cards that you have not read and highlighted before. Trouble looms for those who just pick up cards and read them. You could either read a piece of evidence that was improperly blocked and mis-tagged, or you could waste a lot of time reading parts of the card that do not need to be delivered orally. Ninth, if they call something a voting issue, make sure you answer it, regardless of the situation. Explain why it is not a voting issue. Finally, answer their arguments, and give them credence, but don’t go so far as to explain their arguments more fully than they did.

Time allocation in the 2AC is also important. There are two ways to improve your time allocation. The first begins with effective block writing. Your frontline answers to negative arguments should be frontloaded so that the best, most important arguments appear first on the blocks. As you become more sophisticated and skilled at the 2AC you’ll be able to make adjustments which allow you to sneak the best argument somewhere in the middle or at the end. But when you are new to the game, make the best arguments first. In addition, you should practice reading your frontlines and get a time on them so that you know precisely how long it takes you to read the key arguments. Second, effectively allocating your time involves ordering your approach and having a pre-speech mental calculation of exactly how
much time you can afford to spend on each negative argument. To do this, you need to have some sense of your greatest vulnerabilities, your opponent’s major strengths, as well as their tendencies. If they are a team the likes to go for topicality and have done so eight out of their last ten negative debates, then that should give you a pretty good idea that you will need to spend more time on topicality. In general, the order for the speech should look something like this: Answer procedural arguments early (topicality first, agent specification or some other spec argument comes next). Then, proceed to win your critical advantage. Think about it like this you need to establish your offense before you can play defense. After you have done this, you can then answer their off-case positions from strongest to weakest. You can finish the speech on either an expendable advantage that you can kick out of if you are running out of time or open-ended argument (e.g. their weakest disadvantage) where if you only have time to make a few arguments you will be more than covered. The one thing you should never put last is solvency, especially when the negative’s solvency arguments apply to all of your advantages. You are likely to drop a few arguments as time expires and this is one of the surest ways to lose the debate (or at least severely undercut the IAR’s strategic options). Finally, some experienced debaters like to end on the negative’s strongest argument (e.g. the criticism or the disadvantage they have a reputation for going for). While it may seem tempting to blow through the rest of the negative’s arguments quickly, leaving yourself three minutes to spend on their strongest argument, only the most disciplined 2AC’s should attempt this because the risk of under covering is too great.

Answering topicality: Too often, 2AC’s burn time needlessly on topicality. The essentials of a proper attack include a few basic arguments. First, you should say “we meet” and then explain how you meet their interpretation (if there is a reasonable way for you to meet their interpretation). Second, you should say “their interpretation is flawed” and then explain why. Third, you should introduce a counter interpretation and explain how you meet the counter interpretation. Beware of the double turn here, however. You don’t want to identify an interpretation that you don’t meet. Fourth, argue that your interpretation is a good one. Fifth, make an argument for reasonability by explaining that good is good enough and that competing interpretation is a bad method for adjudicating topicality. Finally, you could make one of a variety of “T is not a voter” arguments like “no abuse,” “no in-round abuse,” “literature check,” “prior notice,” etc. For some judges, the “no in-round abuse – they have lots of ground” argument is persuasive. However, recognize that these are just “T is not a voter” arguments in disguise, and they are unlikely to be decisive if your judge thinks topicality is a voting issue and the negative’s violation has well articulated rationale for why topicality is a voting issue.

Answering case arguments: If you can answer arguments against your case efficiently and effectively, you are likely to end up with more time to spend on the negative’s best off-case arguments. If you are unable to answer arguments against your case efficiently and effectively, you will find yourself losing both the time allocation battle, as well as substantially weakening your case. There are several steps you should follow in answering each negative argument against your case. Step 1: Identify the argument you are answering (after locating the judge on the proper sheet of paper): By # and a short tag. “1 NC 1, low risk of terrorism.” Step 2: Transition to your answer (“that’s wrong”). Step 3: Review your evidence from the IAC and apply it by pulling out a warrant in your evidence. “Anti-American sentiment makes the risk high. That’s the Smith evidence, the second card on Advantage 1.” Notice the order: tag, author, and then location. Help the judge flow from onloading your answer with the warrant instead of the author. Too many debaters list names and fail to provide warrants. At the end of the debate, who said it isn’t as important as what they said. Step 4: Refute their evidence. Explain why your evidence is better than theirs. “Our evidence is better because it considers recent events in Iraq as well as the Bush’s continued penchant for unilateralism as demonstrated by the Bolton nomination.” Step 5 (if necessary): Read additional evidence. Since a strong 1AC contains evidence that has clearly established warrants that preclude negative arguments you should not need to read additional evidence. However, if you don’t already have a card in your IAC that answers the negative’s argument, then you will need to read evidence. Be sure that the evidence you read actually answers the 1NC argument and evidence and avoid presenting redundant evidence (more evidence that says that same thing won’t get you very far). Being able to efficiently exploit the rhetoric and evidence of the 1AC is the best way to make the task of answering case arguments easy.

Answering disadvantages: Since you are able to anticipate most of the disadvantages you are likely to hear, the real work begins prior to the tournament when you are writing frontlines. There are a few general things that you should do. First, number the frontline (your arguments). Second, put like arguments together (group uniqueness arguments, link arguments, and turns), although you will need to allocate your time well. If you have four uniqueness arguments at the top of your frontline and only have time for four arguments, then you will need to move down your blocks to ensure argument diversity. Third, arrange your arguments in a fashion that mirrors the order of the disadvantage: uniqueness, link, and impact. Fourth, diversity your arguments. Your frontline blocks should contain a variety of different arguments. There are many options here. 1) Not unique (the way the world is now, the link or impact will happen regardless of the affirmative plan). Notice, there are two types of uniqueness. There is uniqueness for the link and there is uniqueness for the impact (the most complete 2AC answers will contain uniqueness arguments against both). 2) No link (the plan doesn’t cause the impact). 3) No internal link (there is a missing linkless in their chain of reasoning that moves from the plan to the final impact of the disadvantage). You should always make an internal link argument even if you aren’t exactly sure what the missing internal link is. This gives the IAR enormous latitude for finding missing internal links. 4) No threshold (the degree of the link caused by the plan won’t push us beyond the point where the impact will occur). 5) No impact (the impact won’t happen, other things prevent it, it is not that bad). 6) Link turn (the plan solves the impact or impact turn (bad is good). Be careful here. You don’t want to do both or else you’ll end up double turning yourself. 7) Case outweighs (even if they win their disadvantage, the plan is still desirable because the net advantage outweighs the net disadvantage).

Successfully turning a disadvantage is an art. Let’s consider link turns first. To link turn a disadvantage, you need to argue that there is no link, the link is not unique, and the turn. So if you were answering a federalism disadvantage, you might say something like this: 1) No link – the plan doesn’t undermine federalism (insert warrant). 2) Not unique – federalism is in decline now. 3) Turn – the plan boosts federalism. This is the simple version of a link turn in which the uniqueness argument proves the link isn’t unique while also proving that the turn is unique. However, one uniqueness argument doesn’t cut it in all cases. You need to make sure that you are controlling uniqueness for both the link and the turn. That is to say, you need to prove that the link is not unique, while the turn is unique. If you were answering a politics disadvantage which argued that the plan undermines Bush’s ability to push through a free trade agreement, you would need to make sure you had locked down uniqueness for both the link and turn. For example, your answers might include; 1) No link – the plan doesn’t decrease Republican support for CAFTA. A) The plan doesn’t alienate Republicans (they like it). B) Republicans are not key to CAFTA. 2) Link is not unique – Republicans are angry with Bush now. 3) Turn – The plan increases Democrats support for CAFTA. A) The plan is popular with Democrats. B) Democrats are key to CAFTA passage. 4) Turn is unique – Democrats are alienated
from Bush now.

Impact turns, also contain several elements, all of which need to work in harmony. Consider a bottom line economic impact to a disadvantage (i.e. the Mead impact). To impact turn this disadvantage, you will need to make a few arguments: 1) No Impact - depressions don’t cause war. 2) Turn - Depressions are good because they slow economic growth and save the environment. 3) Turn is unique - economic growth is hurting the environment now. It does no good to just read an impact turn if you don’t establish the uniqueness for your turn AND if you don’t take out the negative’s original impact.

Answering counterplans: The best way to answer a counterplan is to isolate the net benefit and beat it. If you beat the net benefit, then for all intents and purposes you don’t even need to answer the counterplan. However, since you may not be able to win 0% risk of the disadvantage, the net benefit may not be clear and/or there may be multiple net benefits, there are several things that you should do to answer a counterplan. First, start with a permutation. You should always make at least one, and at the very least it should be “do both.” While “do both” is not technically a permutation, it is a good idea to get this argument on the flow. It forces debate on the central question raised by the negative’s introduction of the counterplan which is “having done the counterplan, would we still want to do the plan?” If you are able to say more than “permutate - do both” you should have at least one non-controversial permutation (i.e. one that includes all of the plan, some part of the counterplan, and nothing else). Third, if you have time and the theory background to defend it, you may make an “abusive” permutation that squares with your theory arguments (assuming you don’t have a judge that will vote against you immediately for doing this). When you make theory arguments your impact claim that “their counterplan is illegitimate because it justifies affirmative...” (see below) should explain what acceptance of this illegitimate practice allows the affirmative to do. This permutation simply enacts this “illegitimate” theory practice back on the affirmatives side of the ledger. This way, if the negative wins that it is a legitimate practice (which they will need to do to win their counterplan); you will have a permutation option in the debate that levels the playing field. Finally, one increasingly popular, although theoretically suspect permutation, is the “permute - do the counterplan” permutation. This option is yours if you can defend it.

Theory arguments are an important part of the affirmative’s counterplan answers toolkit. Their strength derives from the fact that they are pure offensive and thereby consume a good deal of the negative’s time in the block. There are many different types of theory arguments, including: conditionality/dispositionality is bad, plan-inclusive counterplans are bad, the flat of the counterplan is illegitimate, and agent counterplans are illegitimate. To execute any of these successfully, you need to have both 2AC and 1AR blocks ready to go. The 2AC structure for these arguments is straightforward: Identify the illegitimate theory, provide an appropriate impact (it is a “voting issue” or it “justifies affirmative...”), and then provide reasons why it is bad. For example, “the counterplan uses illegitimate fiat and it is a voting issue because...” Your goal in presenting theory arguments should be to have well developed, clearly articulated, and easily flowable theory arguments.

In addition to permutations and theory arguments, there are at least three other things that you should consider doing against a counterplan. First, argue that there is a solvency deficit to the counterplan. This means that the counterplan can’t solve all of your case and flags the portion of your advantage that only the plan solves for. This solvency deficit becomes what you might call a disadvantage to the counterplan. If it is an agent based counterplan, you should have a series of arguments about why the agent the plan uses is crucial to solvency, while the agent the counterplan uses is insufficient. For example, if it is a states counterplan, you need reasons why the states can’t/won’t solve. This type of argument helps supercharge your illegitimate flat arguments because when the negative says “flat solves this,” you can say that just proves how unrealistic the flat employed by the counterplan is. Second, run disadvantages to the counterplan. You should have a series of disadvantages ready to go against the most popular types of counterplans. For example, against a states counterplan, a California or Schwarzenegger disadvantage has become particularly popular (i.e. if governor Schwarzenegger does the plan, it will cost him political capital which is critical to his reform package that is critical to California’s economy and California is key to the world economy). Carefully crafted disadvantages to counterplans can catch the negative off guard and ultimately may force them to abandon their best strategy altogether. Finally, you should always find some way to argue that the net benefit also links to the counterplan. For example, if it is an agent based court counterplan with a politics net benefit, you could argue that the president gets the blame for court decisions.

H having covered the major affirmative responses to likely negative arguments, what should you do if you can’t answer an argument? There are two things that you should not do. First, don’t panic. Stay calm and think carefully. This is likely to happen, especially at the beginning of the year. Think about how you can use the various pieces of your arsenal to generate some offense against the negative position. Second, don’t give it to your partner and say “can you come up with some answers to this.” You can invite them to help and confer with them, but ultimately you are the one that needs to give your speech. So what should you do? First, get the argument and read it as soon as possible (although remember, you shouldn’t stop flowing). Second cycle through the generic categories of types of arguments that you can make against each type of negative argument and try to write a quick block that includes at least one argument of each type. Third, have a set of general uniqueness arguments ready to go against disadvantages. If you can control the way the world is now on a variety of issues, then you should be able to use those arguments to non-unique the negative’s position. Fourth, avoid “novice” blips. Don’t just say “no threshold, no scenario, no impact, no brink...” These are debate labels, not well developed arguments. Fifth, focus on their evidence and make arguments against it. You would be surprised at the number of arguments you can generate against their position if you just read their evidence. Sixth, read add-on advantages, especially if the add-on solves the impact to their disadvantage or kritik.

The first affirmative also has an important role to play in making the 2AC effective. Since the 1A cross examines the 1N, your partner can set up arguments during the CX of the 1NC that you can then make in your speech. Have them write those arguments down and give them to you prior to your speech. In addition, so that you can maximize your prep time, have the 1A get the evidence that you need to see at the beginning of the cross examination period. A responsible partner will be able to do several things during the 2AC. First, they will have their own timer and will help you with time allocation. The two of you should have subtle codes worked out between the two of you to indicate that it is time to move on. For example, saying “good” or calling the time out at odd times “1:43” is one way of saying “you’ve covered, move on.” Second, they will trust their partner and refrain from interrupting them. Constant interruptions are distracting for the judge and the 2A. Generally, the 1A should reserve comment unless something egregious is about to happen (for example you are about to drop a disadvantage). Third, the 1A should backflow (i.e. create a second flow of the 2AC’s arguments) for the 2A and they should start as early as possible. You should hand the 1A your flows prior to the 2AC, so that they can make two copies. The 1A should start with the 2AC answers to the negative’s off case positions because the 2A will be totally lost once the negative block begins without a flow of their 2AC answers.
The Negative Block (2NC and 1NR)

You should think of the negative block as one long constructive speech and it involves several different goals. First, it requires teamwork. You should work as a team to divide the labor and sustain multiple ways to win the debate. Along these lines, it is particularly important that the 2N view the 1NR as a relevant speech that can pack offensive punch given the extended prep time that this speech has. One of the worst things you can do as a 2N is to dump off arguments that you didn’t cover because this seriously erodes the offensive firepower of the 1NR. Instead, think of the 1NR as the most devastating negative speech in the debate. Second, be reasonable. As a team, you need to predict what each speaker can reasonably cover. This eliminates the need for the 1NR to spend the first minute of her speech cleaning up after the negative. Third, emphasize versatility. You should kick out some of the 1NC’s arguments, but still preserve multiple ways to win. Fourth, anticipate. You need to be able to anticipate important 1AR arguments and close down these choices. Finally, and most importantly, develop your story. The negative block is the positive’s only shot at explanatory argument development. The 1NC is just a skeleton, while the 2NR has too much to do if they are following a powerful 1AR. This is your time to get the judge on your side.

There is much to do in terms of pre-tournament preparation for the 2NC. First, you should design a playbook that includes multiple generic strategies against the types of cases that you expect to debate over the course of the season. You should make it your goal to add generic strategies as the season evolves, while continuing to add case specific strategies against the cases you are most likely to debate. Second, you should prepare for the negative block by writing “answers to” blocks against every possible affirmative answer. Use both your flows and your squad’s collective scouting resources to build your “blocks to write to do list.” Rarely will you need “extension blocks” because they are merely more cards that say the same thing. Instead, it is the “answers to” blocks that are the most battle ready because they anticipate the affirmative’s answers. Third, your evidence should be filed well and highlighted. If you are reading a block for the first time in a speech, you haven’t done your pre-tournament preparation. Block writing, filing, and highlighting, are three of the most important ways to conserve prep time. If you are the 2NC, you should make it your goal to give a “standing up” 2NC. While this may be an unrealistic goal, especially early in the season when you don’t know what the affirmative’s answers are likely to be, it does point you in the direction of exactly how prepared you need to be to be effective in the negative block. Every second of prep time that you don’t need to spend preparing for the 2NC is more time that you will have for the 2NR when you are trying to put together a round winning speech.

Presenting the negative blocks begins with having an exact flow of the 2AC’s arguments. Missing (or even ignoring) just one argument can render all of your efforts to extend a round winning argument moot. In addition, there are several other things that you should be doing. First, divide up arguments between the two speeches so as not to clue the affirmative in to what you will be going for in the 2NR. In this regard, you should place a premium on preserving multiple ways to win the debate because predictable negative debating is dangerous. Second, utilize the evidence from the 1NC. If the affirmative’s evidence doesn’t answer the 1NC evidence, point that out to the judge and explain why. You should only read new evidence when your original evidence is insufficient to answer the warrants contained in the affirmative’s cards. Third, stick to the flow. You should always debate “line-by-line” according to the 2AC structure on off-case positions and the 1NC structure on on-case position. (The formula for refuting 2AC off case arguments is the same formula that the 2AC uses for answering 1NC on case arguments discussed above). Fourth, should you make new arguments? The answer to this question depends on your circumstances. You do make new arguments when you respond to 2AC arguments (unless, of course, they failed to answer your arguments). For example, when you are extending a disadvantage, you should read multiple new and diverse links. Similarly, some 2AC answers may create links to entirely new disadvantages. You should avoid advancing major new arguments that can be straightforward in the 1AR. For example, if you run an entirely new disadvantage in the 2NC, a smart affirmative will force your hand by only reading. If you read this disadvantage as a time waster, you are now stuck spending a considerable portion of your 2NR extricating yourself from the mess the 1AR has created for you. If you ran it as an argument you thought you could go for, you won’t have time in the 2NR to fully develop it in ways that you otherwise could have had you introduced it in the 1NC. However, the caveat here is that you might need to introduce an entirely new position if, after the 2AC, you realize that you are going to lose the debate given your initial 1NC positions. The point here is that you should make a last ditch effort to win the debate, if you are going to lose anyway. It can’t hurt to try. All major new arguments should be introduced in the 2NC since the affirmative doesn’t have the opportunity to cross-examine the 1NR. If the 1NR stands up and reads new arguments, most judges are likely to find the 1AR’s appeal that these arguments are “new” and should be disregarded. Fifth, your presentation should constantly compare and assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the evidence presented in the debate. Compare your evidence to the affirmative’s evidence and draw out the ways that your evidence beats their evidence.

The 1NR has several duties that are specific to this speech. First, you need to know what the 2NC is doing and what they expect you are doing. Are they leaving anything out? Did they expect that you would kick the disadvantage you aren’t going for? Are you kicking the disadvantage that isn’t a net benefit to the counterplan the 2NC is extending, and going for the disadvantage that is the net benefit to their counterplan? Too many negative debates have been lost over the years because the 2NC and the 1NR do not communicate. Second, do not use prep time. You aren’t allowed to have any. You have already had all of the 2NC’s prep time, the eight minutes of their speech, and the three minutes of cross examination. Third, do not drop arguments. Put the most dangerous/important arguments first. If you are extending an off case position make sure that you cover all of the 2AC’s arguments. You could do a great job extending a disadvantage through the first 12 2AC answers, only to drop the last few arguments. In this event, you have essentially wasted your whole speech. Fourth, be prepared for 2NC errors. If you are finished prepping for your speech, you might consider preparing the last few answers on the last position the 2NC is going for. Always ask yourself “is the 2NC dropping arguments at the bottom of the flow that you need to cover in your speech” (and therefore need to prep during the cross examination of the 2NC)? If you are unsure about what you need to pick up from the 2NC, you should take prep time before the cross examination to consult so that you can use the three minutes of cross examination productively. Third, you must provide offense or destroy the case. This speech should be a force in the debate for several reasons. First, you have more prep time for this speech than any other speech in the debate (except, of course, for the 1AC). This means you can read and compare all of the evidence presented in the debate. It also means that you can write out extensive portions of this speech verbatim. Second, there is no cross examination after this speech, which means the affirmative can’t pick apart your arguments and they will have less time to examine your evidence. Third, the 1AR has minimal time to prepare to answer your arguments. Their prep time starts as soon as your speech time expires.

So what arguments should the 1NR extend in their speech? Keep it simple. The less is more principle works here because explanation is at a premium in the block. Unless you are unusually fast and
You should take one major off-case argument. In my many years of watching some of the best college debaters, I have seen only a few debaters capable of extending both a disadvantage and a topicality argument in the 1NR. As a general rule, you should extend arguments that fall within your area of expertise. If you don’t have such a specialty, you should develop one (or several). You also need to be strategic. Far too many affirmative teams get caught thinking the 1NR’s arguments are less important. And they do this for good reason. In countless debates the 2NC disregards the 1NR’s arguments. Too often, 2N’s like to go for the arguments they feel comfortable with. It is your job as the 1NR to do such a good job extending your arguments that the 2N will want to go for your arguments. Moreover, the affirmative team won’t have an opportunity to cross examine you. The lack of a cross examination after the 1NR is one reason why so many teams put the politics disadvantage in the 1NR (a powerful cross examination will successfully make serious inroads against even a well extended politics disadvantage).

Perhaps, the best way to summarize the strategic importance of the 1NR is to tell the story of one of my teams in 2004-2005. Knowing that we wanted our major negative strategy on the energy policy topic to be the business confidence disadvantage, we decided to make our more experienced debater the 1N. In almost every negative debate last year, he extended business confidence (and only business confidence). The sheer force and complexity of the arguments developed in the 1NR, made the 2NR easy. It is certainly one of the reasons why that team’s negative winning percentage of 82% was 6th best in the nation!

To be successful at extending a disadvantage (many of these suggestions also apply to krills), there are several things that you need to do. First, start with an overview at the top of the flow that explains the thesis of the argument, solidifies its uniqueness, and fills in all of the steps from the link to the final impact. Trickly negative debaters will often insert a few things into their overview including: additional links, internal links, a new impact, and an explanation for how the disadvantage’s impact leverages (turns or takes out) the case advantages. Second, go through the line-by-line in order and don’t drop ANY arguments. Judges often consider dropped 2AC arguments as absolute takeouts (frequently giving them more credence than they are really worth), so work through the flow with precision and care. If you missed a 2AC argument, mid-speech is not the time to discover that fact. Use prep time to fill in the holes by either asking the affirmative team, or getting their 2AC blocks (although be careful not to waste your time answering arguments that are on their blocks but which were never presented in the debate). If for some reason you discover that you missed an argument mid-speech, don’t ignore it and hope it goes away. Ask what the argument was. Often, either your partner, or even the other team, will say what the argument was and you can answer it on the fly. If you need some additional evidence, ask your partner to find it; alert the judge that you will come back to it, and DO come back to it after your partner has retrieved the appropriate evidence.

Third, flag flippity, unwarranted, and unexplained 2AC arguments for what they are. Failure to do so, gives the 1AR tremendous leeway to make new arguments. One favorite affirmative past time is to make an undeveloped “no internal link” argument, and then figure out by the 2AR precisely what the missing internal link is. You need to close down the possibility. Fourth, “control” uniqueness. You need to answer every uniqueness answer the affirmative makes by either disproving their claim, or showing that it has a negligible influence on the link or the impact. There are two basic kinds of uniqueness that you should be concerned with: link uniqueness and impact uniqueness. To win your disadvantage, you need to be able to control both. Advanced debaters that find themselves without the evidence to answer a strong affirmative uniqueness answer may want to consider what is often called “counterplanning in uniqueness” for the disadvantage. It works something like this: The affirmative has identified a flaw in the status quo that will result in the disadvantage. The counterplan fixes that problem, which puts you back to the question “would we still want to do the affirmative plan?” The obvious answer is no, because it would now cause the disadvantage. If you decide to go this route, you need to be able to defend your counterplan on theoretical grounds.

Fifth, develop and spin the link story. Insert new links to diversify your link story, offer solid, detailed, answers to the affirmative’s “no link” arguments, and fill in with internal link arguments to shore up your story. Insert these arguments on the flow, in places that contain similar arguments (put new uniqueness arguments with the affirmative’s uniqueness answers, new link arguments with the affirmative’s link answers, etc.). Sixth, answer their link turns (either link or impact turns) This means you need to control uniqueness, establish the strength of your turn, and refute their turns. There are four things that you need to do to answer their turns: 1) you need to win your link/impact, 2) you need to prove that your link/impact is unique, 3) you need to defeat their link/impact turn, and 4) you need to prove that their link/impact turn is not unique. Failure to do any one of these things will mean that you are unlikely to win your disadvantage. Give the link turn credibility because good teams will have stellar 1AR cards. Seventh, develop your impact. If the affirmative hasn’t answered your impact you probably don’t have much work to do here if your 1NC shell fully impacted the disadvantage. Eighth, use the impact of the disadvantage to leverage the case. That is to say, your disadvantage is often the best case take out you have. For example, if the impact to the disadvantage is economic contraction, you might want to read additional evidence to prove that when the economy declines, mental health budgets are the first to be slashed. This means that if you win your disadvantage, the affirmative can’t solve because the plan, while providing a short term boost for mental health care funding, will trigger an economic decline that will result in the long term decline in mental health resources.

Finally, and most importantly, you need to answer the question “how does the disadvantage beat the case.” There are a few options here. The easiest and most straightforward way is for the magnitude of the disadvantage to outweigh the magnitude of the advantages of the affirmative plan. If the net impact to your disadvantage doesn’t outweigh the affirmative case, then you need to reduce the case advantage. If you can’t do that, then you should consider a different disadvantage. A second way for your disadvantage to beat their case is for the impact of the disadvantage to come before the impact to the case. This approach is particularly strategic if you can claim that the impact to the disadvantage short circuits the plan’s solvency. This can only be effective if you can prove that there is a short term impact to the disadvantage, while the case advantage is long term. Finally, a third, and weaker option exists if the magnitude of the case impact and the magnitude of the disadvantage are relatively equal. In this case, you might try to argue that the disadvantage is more likely than the probability of the affirmative’s solvency. This is an uphill battle and you are more likely to be successful if you stick with either (or some combination) of the first two options.

Often overlooked, but, perhaps, equally important, is kicking a disadvantage. Failure to kick out of a disadvantage properly can cause you to lose a quick decision. First, you need to recognize that you’ll need to spend some time preparing to kick the disadvantage. It is not something you can or should do on the fly in the middle of the speech. Second, admit that you are conceding the disadvantage. It is embar-
The First Affirmative Rebuttal

To become a better 1AR, there are several pieces of strategic advice that apply to most circumstances. First, avoid the "stand-up" 1AR. Too often these days, 1ARs are tempted to stand up immediately after the 1NR finishes his/her speech. While it is good to save prep time, utilizing a little bit of prep time can prevent you from losing the debate due to carelessness. Take a few seconds to consult with your partner and incorporate their thoughts on your flow, think about the order, fine tune your answers on key arguments, read crucial pieces of negative evidence, and select the evidence that you will read in the speech carefully. Second, you need to know the 2AC's blocks. Work with your partner to write 2AC blocks and study these blocks. Pay particularly close attention to improving your understanding of their best arguments. In addition, you should study the evidence on the 2AC blocks because it is your job to extend this evidence and to do so you need to know what it says so that you can evaluate it and compare it to the negative's answers. Third, write 1AR blocks. The best 1AR's have accouterments stuffed full of battle ready 1AR blocks. Writing 1AR blocks involves both an awareness of the 2AC's arguments as well as anticipation of what the negative will say in the block. You should have 1AR blocks to extend key 2AC arguments against all viable negative arguments. In addition, 1AR theory blocks are particularly useful if they are well written because they can be used to pressure the 2NR in an area where they would otherwise prefer not to have to spend any time. Fourth, recognize that your prep time begins as soon as the 2AC finishes. After backflowing the 2AC (i.e. copying your flow of their answers onto your flows) it is time to start prepping your speech. This means that you should be preparing your speech even while the 2N is taking prep time. There is a great deal of work that you can be doing during this time, including selecting arguments to extend, getting the extension of those arguments into the 1AR column on the flow, and starting to write some of the warrants that you will use to support your case.

Fifth, write the 1AR during the block. The best 1AR's don't flow the entirety of the block. Instead, they listen and then flow their answers. There are several steps involved here. First, prepare your flow by writing out the 2AC tag on your flow in the 1AR column during 2NC prep time. It involves writing out "extend (or off) 2AC..." (insert the tag). You only need to do this on 2AC arguments that you will be extending. Second, listen to the block and write down your answer using their words to start your argument. (e.g. they say: "the plan reduces investor confidence" and you write down "the plan boosts investor confidence because it..."). Third, listen to the text of their evidence and write down arguments that identify its weaknesses compared to the evidence your partner presented in the 2AC. Fourth, if you don't know how to answer the argument, you should flow that portion of the block on the column on your flow dedicated to the negative block. This has the effect of creating a nice "to-do" list for your prep time. Since most of your speech will be written out because you have written your answers, you can use your prep time to go back and fill in the holes. Fifth, circle arguments that the negative has dropped. During the speech, you'll want to remind the judge that these arguments were conceded. Sixth, write in full sentences and use all of the remaining space on your flow. This makes it easier to simply read large portions of the 1AR which makes you more efficient thus conserving precious speech time. Seventh, pay attention to how much time they spend on each major argument. As a general rule, their time allocation in the block ought to give you an idea about the importance they place on a particular argument. Finally, don't let your partner talk to you during the negative block. Since you are writing your speech while the negative is speaking, you can't afford to listen to both your opponent and your partner. The 2A should learn to make notes on things they want to tell you to include in your speech and then during prep time they can inform you of their thoughts.

In terms of presentation, there are a few things that should...
guide you in the 1AR. First, order the speech strategically. Topicality should almost always be first. Second, you need to answer new arguments that were presented in the block (e.g., new solvency arguments). The rest of the order is a little bit more flexible, but in many instances you might move next to things that you are in trouble on and that are likely to cost you the debate if you fail to answer them correctly. After doing this, you can then proceed to your major offensive positions and then play defense against the negative’s offensive positions. Finally, you should consider ending on a time flexible argument like a disadvantage where you won’t hurt yourself by extending only a few arguments. If you have a few additional seconds, anything else that you extend is a bonus. Second, go for theory against a counterplan. This is one area where you can really put a great deal of time pressure on the 2NR even if you don’t intend to go for it in the 2AR. Here, theory is pure offense. If the negative loses it, they lose the debate. This forces the 2NR to spend an enormous amount of time answering every one of your clearly articulated 1AR arguments. Of course, the 2AR doesn’t need to go for these arguments, but the time trade-off gained by forcing the 2NR to devote so much time to the theory is likely to increase the chances of an affirmative victory. Think about it like this: If the 2NR has to spend one minute playing defense on theory, the 2AR has 1 minute more than the 2NR on why the plan/ permutation is desirable relative to the counterplan alone. Third, extend offensive arguments against offensive negative positions (disadvantages and kritiks). If you fail to extend offensive arguments the 2NR can simply kick the argument with very little effort. Alternatively, they can go for the argument and claim that they will always win some risk of it despite your defense because there is zero risk of a turn. Fourth, don’t spend too much time on a counterplan. Remember, to beat a counterplan you need to beat the net benefit. Too often, 1AR’s spend so much time reducing the solvency of a counterplan that they run out of time on the net benefit. If the case outweights a severely reduced net benefit, then the affirmative will win. If the net benefit comes close to outweighing the case and the counterplan solves enough to make the difference, then the negative wins. The point is you need to beat the net benefit. Fifth, read evidence. Successful 1AR’s read evidence that refutes the evidence presented in the negative block. Given the time pressures of the speech, this evidence should be relatively short and should contain specific warrants that can be mobilized by the 2AR to point out gaping holes in the 2NR. Sixth and perhaps most importantly make new arguments. Of course, the 1AR shouldn’t make new arguments that appear to be new. However, there are all kinds of places on the flow where “new” arguments can be inserted that don’t give such an appearance. Successful 1AR’s are able to strategically insert arguments so that they appear to be merely logical extension of 2AC arguments. Seventh, answer all voting issues. Negative debaters frequently tag arguments as voting issues in the negative block in response to theoretically questionable 2AC answers to counterplans and kritiks. At other times, they might insert a new implication to their kritik, a new impact to their disadvantage, or a new violation on their topicality argument. You need to be sure to answer each of these arguments. Here, your partner can serve as a good double check to make sure that you caught them all. One thing that is often helpful is a “theory is not a voier” block that you can read once to address their three poorly asserted voting issues. Finally, be efficient and economical. Now is not the time for elaborate overviews or lengthy impact comparisons. Instead, your job is to move through the flow as efficiently and precisely as possible. Time is of the essence in this speech. You have five minutes to answer thirteen minutes of negative arguments. It helps to group arguments, or group major chunks of the flow. In addition, it helps to list as many warrants as possible. Warrants chew up 2NR time and they can often be listed succinctly and precisely.

The Second Negative Rebuttal

Many consider the 2NR to be the most difficult speech in the debate. To be successful, requires effective time management, strategic thinking, and technical precision. The 2NR is the second-most time pressured speech in the debate (the 1AR is the most). After a thirteen minute negative block, you have to compress all of the arguments in the debate into a 5 minute 2NR. Respond to all 1AR arguments, answer likely 2AR arguments, and provide intricate assessments that guide the judge to a decision. To manage your time effectively, there are several things that you can do. First, avoid lengthy 2NR overviews. A global preview of all the arguments you think you are going to win in the debate is usually a waste of time. Instead, think more locally. Overviews that address relevant magnitude, risk/probability, and timeframe comparisons or provide insight into the relationship between the disadvantage and case are much more strategic. Second, make choices. Going for everything plays into the hands of the 2AR, who can then be more selective about which answers to extend. You should make a strategic choice in the first 30 seconds of your 2NR prep time about what you need to do to win the debate. Third, prior to your speech, make a plan for how you will allocate your time on each major issue and then stick to it. Fourth, be selective on the case. Extending a couple well developed takeouts is better than mechanically extending every argument with no additional analysis or impact assessment. Finally, and most importantly, win your offense first. Winning defensive arguments does not do you any good if you do not get to your offensive argument (disadvantage, kritik, or case turn) with enough time to win it. Many debaters have good intentions. They think they can quickly answer the case which will leave them a lot of time to spend on their round winning argument. In reality, these plans usually backfire. If you win your offensive argument first, you can be selective about what offensive case answers to extend. You do not have the same luxury of being selective on which arguments to answer on your disadvantage.

Positioned between the 1AR and the 2AR, there are several strategic considerations that should guide you. First, capitalize on 1AR mistakes. This is often the path of least resistance. Although it may force you to go for an argument that you had originally intended to kick out of, in many instances it increases your chances of winning. Second, anticipate potential 2AR arguments. Since you will not have an opportunity to speak after the 2AR, you need to say everything in this speech that you would want to say if you did have a 3NR. Preempt new 2AR answers with a theory argument about why new 2AR explanations are illegitimate and make arguments about why potential 2AR claims are false. Third, do not hesitate to go for 1NR arguments. If your partner has done his/hers job, there should be a well developed round winning argument coming out of this speech. In this instance, your job is even easier because you will have a precise flow of everything the 1NR said (as opposed to your hurried backflow and spotty memory about what you said in the 2NC). Finally, be sure to emphasize the relative strengths and weaknesses of both teams evidence on critical issues. Evidence assessment is a great way to introduce new arguments into the debate (without them seeming new), and is really helpful to judges who examine evidence after the debate (because that is exactly what they will be doing as they work to make a decision).

Once you have managed your time and thought about your strategy, all that remains is execution. Technical proficiency requires you to do several things. First, you need to be precise in refuting 1AR arguments on the line-by-line of the flow and you need to make sure that you cover all of them. Second, you should extend key pieces of evidence from earlier speeches by referencing them by author, tag, and location. These are cards you want the judge to call for after the debate and your reference is an invitation to them to read the evidence (i.e., you don’t need to say “read this evidence”). Third, get in the habit of
saying "this argument was dropped by the 1AR." There are likely to be several places where the 1AR drops or fails to sufficiently cover well developed arguments presented during the negative block. You need to flag these dropped arguments and explain the implication of their concession. Fourth, compare links and turns and draw conclusions about which way uniqueness is going. The phrase "we are controlling uniqueness which means there is only a risk of a link and no possibility of a turn" is often used in the 2NR. While it’s never an all or nothing thing because uniqueness is rarely absolute, the logic of this view gives you something important to shoot for. You need to spend time sharpening up uniqueness for your links. Fifth, hedge your bets. Consider the possibility that the affirmative will win some arguments (they usually do) and play the "even if game" on those portions of the flow. For example, "even if they win this argument, there is no impact because..." or "our link outweighs their turn."

One final piece of advice: be patient. Learning to do the 2NR successfully can be one of the most difficult and trying transitions that any debater goes through. I’ve seen many highly successful high school debaters have long losing streaks on the negative early in their college debate careers because of the 2NR. Don’t worry if you find yourself in a negative rut. If you work hard and practice your 2NRs by doing rebuttal re-do after rebuttal re-do, the 2NR will soon be not only easy, but also fun!

**The Second Affirmative Rebuttal**

The overwhelming goal for the 2AR is to win the debate. As a persuasive enterprise, it doesn’t get much better than this speech because you get to speak last. Consequently, your arguments are the last thing the judge hears before he/she makes a decision. Thus, a second goal is to cement a lasting favorable impression in the judge’s mind that completes the process begun in the 1AC. To be successful requires both strategy and tactics. First, you need to have an order that makes it easy to win the debate. Begin with an overview if it is appropriate. In cases where the 2NR has an overview it is necessary because their overview contains arguments that you need to answer. Then build up your offense. Think of yourself as accumulating advantages by establishing the net impact of your advantages (including turned disadvantages) and the probability that your plan solves for those advantages. Conclude on defense by taking specific and concrete shots against the negative’s offensive arguments. Second, you need to exhibit a strategic attitude. The 2NR has made choices. Your job is to demonstrate those choices were strategic and that an affirmative bullet is inevitable. Focus your energy on dismantling their choice by mobilizing the overwhelming superiority of your case (in terms of magnitude, probability, and time frame) against their offensive arguments.

Third, evaluate the quality of the debating from the 1AR and the 2NR. The advantage that the 2AR has is that they get to function just like the judge who arbitrates the dispute between the 1AR and the 2NR. Think about what judges do when they make their decision. They trace the debate on key issues from the beginning to the end and then offer a judgment about which side wins the debate. Thus, the phrase “the 2NR says... but the 1AR said...” needs to be a stock phrase that you use repeatedly throughout the speech. In particular, dropped 1AR arguments that are flagged and developed by the 2AR have a devastating impact on the negative’s chances. Completely tracing the debate through the flow on crucial issues involves the following formula: A) Identify the argument you are extending. "Extend 2AC number three. We said ‘flat solves the link.’" B) Explain the negative’s answer in the negative block. (Did they answer it incorrectly? Did they ignore it? Did they devote insufficient time to it? Did their evidence beat your evidence?) C) Isolate the 1AR’s answer to the negative’s response. (“But the 1AR was really good on this point because...”). D) Answer the 2NR’s answers. (“The only thing they said in the 2NR was...” “It wasn’t until the 2NR that the negative figured out how to answer our argument and when they did, they made a series of new arguments and new arguments in rebuttals are bad because...”) E) Explain the significance of your winning this argument and what it means for the larger argument at hand. (“If we win that flat solves the link, then these are zero risk of a link to this disadvantage which means that you should vote affirmative because there is at least some chance that we will solve for our advantages.”)

Fourth, have pre-scripted overviews and modify them for the particular circumstances of each debate. There is no reason why you can’t predict in advance they types of 2ARs that you will have to give. For example, you are guaranteed to have 2ARs that compare the case to a politics disadvantage, the case to a kritik, as well as a 2AR on topicality. Since this is the case, you can develop overview templates that are mostly pre-scripted but which have room for inserting specific details relative to the particular debate you are engaged in. You can do quite a bit of work during 1AR and 2NR prep time to fill in some of the specific details. These overviews should always consider the three ways in which impacts are weighed: magnitude, probability, and time frame. In addition, you should have pre-scripted explanations that compare and contrast these alternative methods for weighing impacts that you can plug in as necessary. For example, you should have explanations for the following: time frame is more important than magnitude, magnitude is more important than certainty; certainty is better than magnitude, and so on. Generally, your 2AR overviews should follow four basic rules of thumb. First, they should be short and to the point. Overviews are nice and provide you an opportunity to highlight critical decision making criteria, but they can be overdone. Too many 2ARs have lost debates because their overview went on and on and on and they never made it to critical parts of the time-line. Second, answer the 2NR’s overview. Judges look back at what the 2NR said and you need to have specific, on-point answers to the arguments advanced in their overview. Third, talk in specifics, not global generalities. The 2AR overview should not be a preview of coming attractions. If it is just that, don’t do it. A 2AR is unlike an extemporaneous speech in that you don’t have the time or need to preview “what we’re gonna hear.” The judge is flowing your speech. Too often 2ARs give overviews that do little more than highlight the future of the speech. If you do this you are wasting your time. Instead, you would be much better off if you focused on some crucial evaluative aspect about how the judge ought to assess the offensive arguments presented by both teams. Finally, play the “even if...” game. Begin with the assumption that your opponent will win some portion of their offense because it is a rare occasion when the negative wins zero risk of the major offensive argument they are going for in the 2NR. More importantly, if you alert the judge to this fact, and show how you are winning despite their success in scoring some points, you are speaking in a language that judges love to hear. You are essentially giving them room to say to the 2NR “I think you did a pretty good job and won some risk of your disadvantage, but it doesn’t outweigh the case because as the 2AR said...” Thus, you should say things like: “Even if the negative wins the full-weight of their business confidence disadvantage, you should still vote affirmative because the impact to our species advantage is global extinction while the unwarranted Mead evidence has no specific concrete scenario for war, let alone one that would escalate globally and involve an all-out nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States.” To do this, you need to think about how the impact to your major offensive argument outweighs the impact to their major offensive argument. Thus, even if you conceded the full weight of their position, the judge would still want to vote for you.

A fifth element of 2AR strategy and tactics involves knowing both your opponent and your judge.

Negative teams are, for the most part, predictable. Some 2NRs always go for their own arguments. Some 2NRs always go for politics or their favorite kritik. Some 2NRs like to go for topicality. Some
2NRs always go for the 1NRs arguments. The point is, with proper scouting (both before and during a tournament) you should be able to predict with some degree of certainty what the 2NR is likely to do. Similarly, you should attempt to know the predispositions of your judges. Do they like to vote on kritiks, politics disadvantages, or topicality arguments? Or, do they hate topicality debates and theory debates? Knowing their hot-button issues in advance is likely to give you a leg up in terms of thinking about what you need to do to win the debate.

Sixth, manage prep time. You should save a lot of it and you should use every possible second. This means that the 2NRs prep time is your prep time. This is not the time to be starting out in space thinking about your next debate. Instead, you need to be anticipating the negative’s choices and starting to prepare answers. While the 2NR is preparing you should do a few thing. Begin by observing what they were doing during the 1AR and what they are doing during their prep time. Are they asking for specific cards? Are they consulting with the 1NR? These sorts of things tend to tip the 2NRs hand. Of course, you need to watch out so as not to get sucked in by purposeful misdirection. Next, begin to circle key arguments. On any given flow there are only so many key arguments — arguments that can either win or lose the debate. You should spend this time identifying those arguments and start getting some of the key warrants for your side in your 2AR column. After identifying key arguments, start modifying your overview. This is the time to take that generic template and start inserting the specifics that apply to this particular debate.

Finally, and most importantly, weigh issues. Jarrod Atchison, a former Wake Forest debater and current coach at the University of Georgia, was easily one of the best 2ARs of the last decade. Jarrod was so successful because he had a litany of stock phrases (some his own, others learned from watching other debaters) to weigh issues from which he could draw as circumstances warranted. Here are some of the phrases that I have heard him remind students of in his lectures about how to be a successful 2AR which you can incorporate into your speeches. There are four basic types of weighing (or comparisons) that can happen in the 2AR (as well as the 2NR). The first involves cost-benefit analysis (magnitude of the impact x the probability of the impact): “Because of the 2NR time allocation, we have a 100% risk of winning the species advantage which has an impact of global extinction. The politics disad has been beaten down with the link and impact answers to a generous offer of a 25% risk of the original disad which only describes a limited war that might kill a couple of million people. It is clear that cost-benefit analysis demands an affirmative ballot.” A second weighing tactic involves evidence comparison. When your offensive argument does not outweigh their offensive argument you need to focus on comparing the competing impacts. For example, “our evidence is more qualified, it comes from... There evidence on the other hand is from... which is terribly unreliable, because...” Or, “our evidence is more recent and recency matters in this case because...” A third involves impact comparisons. “It would be better to die in the quick and painless wrath of a nuclear war than to die the slow painful death of starvation...” A final set of comparisons involve the quality of the debating. For example, “the negative team has barely given this advantage any time.” Or, “the negative hasn’t been able to explain the warrants in their evidence. Don’t read it for them.” Or, my personal favorite is “the negative hasn’t done any impact assessment so give us some extra credibility.” As judges, we usually do, whether the 2AR asks for it or not.

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McLuhan and Debate: A Welcoming

**Jim Lyle, Director of Debate, Clarion University**

Marshall McLuhan was a thinker who... well, is hard to define. Although he possessed very clear and influential ideas, McLuhan’s place in any one discipline is hard to assess. His work cut across many disciplines, including: anthropology, communication, philosophy, politics, science, and sociology, along with many others. McLuhan can probably most easily be described as a scholar of media studies. When people hear his name, one saying immediately jumps out, “The medium is the message.” McLuhan’s arguments centered on the importance of understanding the various media that influence our lives over the specific content within those media, and to this day, the work of Marshall McLuhan remains important and has influenced many contemporary thinkers. That said McLuhan has managed to remain unrecognized by much of the debate community, even though his ideas seem particularly relevant to the activity. The goal of this article is to welcome Marshall McLuhan to the world of debate. Specifically, there are two goals which this essay will address. First, it aims to give debaters some understanding of the ideas that underscore the significance of McLuhan for the study of communication. Second, the article will attempt to offer possibilities of deployment for those in debate. It is worth noting, however, that this piece makes no claim to be a comprehensive analysis of Marshall McLuhan. Furthermore, I do not seek to say that there are certain ways that McLuhan’s ideas should be used in the world of debate. The idea behind this article is to offer debaters a bit of history about an individual and his ideas, show some degree of applicability, and turn the reigns over to you, the debater. As you will hopefully see, Marshall McLuhan might have something useful to say for us, we just need to figure out if we have something to say to him.

A History Lesson

There are a few ideas of McLuhan’s that section of the essay will seek to develop. I will explore the ideas that the medium is the message, that the medium is the message, and that media are hot or cold. From there, we will look at History as McLuhan sees it, and try to understand why he finds these phenomena to be significant.

The medium is the message. According to Marshall McLuhan, media are extensions of the self via technology. McLuhan says that we use technology, all technology, to extend our senses and intensify or amplify them. For example, clothes are an extension of the skin, glasses are extensions of our eyes, and knives are extensions of our teeth. The purpose of the extensions is to maintain equilibrium with our environment. Eyewitness deteriorates and we get glasses as a corrective measure to the new environment that we visually experience. Additionally, these technologies have significant impacts on people by influencing how we think and live. They shape how we think, act, and communicate. What is important in the world to us is based on our understanding of usages and usages of various forms of technology. Using the example of clothes again we can see that clothes allow us to do more because they can provide protection from various weather conditions. Clothes also enable us to change who we are creating possibilities of appearance.

This idea of media as technology is significant because of the ways the mediums influence us independent of their content. The medium is the message. McLuhan states that we get too caught up in the specific content within various mediums and spend all of our time focusing on them in our efforts to find meaning in things. We spend too much energy worrying about the consequences of wearing a shirt