

CASE or CONSTRUCTIVE

The Case, or Constructive speech, is where you present your main arguments and evidence. You introduce your side of the debate. It is prepared in advance and read instead of delivered impromptu. Although the case is prewritten, the effort and energy required to create a good case are equal if not greater to the requirements of the other speeches.

My three PF Philosophies behind a great case are:

- 1. Introduce all the important information.**
- 2. Frame the round.**
- 3. Relate everything to the resolution.**

Introduce all the important information.

The case is the foundation of your debate. It presents your main arguments, the central ideas you want the round to be about, and the key evidence needed to prove your arguments. “Holding back” your best argument or piece of evidence does not work. Some debaters believe that you will outwit your opponents or fool them by withholding key evidence. While this may happen, you cannot leave out foundational information and expect your arguments to make sense. Always remember the judge ultimately decides who wins, and the judge must understand and believe the arguments you present. Not providing evidence or analysis to support your arguments also sets you up for failure. Do not start the round with holes in your case; this means you should provide evidence to establish all of your key points. Great debaters want their opponents to beat their arguments rather than try to pull a fast one and fool them. Repetition of ideas also helps the judge remember and be persuaded by your arguments. For that reason, introducing important information early allows for repetition throughout the round.

After writing your case, it is easy to forget your initial confusions that arose during research. Take time to remember these confusions and clarify them in your case. The judge is likely to have the same confusions as you. Remember that although you will have a working knowledge of the topic when you debate, the judge may not.

For all of these reasons, the case contains all the important information of the round. The case is like the foundation of a house – it must be laid with care and substance so that it can support the house itself.

Frame the round.

The case should also frame the round. Framing the round means you highlight the key issues and concerns at stake through an additional argumentative structure called Framework. Every case will make arguments. Great cases will inform the judge about why those arguments matter. Cases also should compare arguments and ideas that will clash in the round. You are not just presenting information; you are creating a cohesive story about your side of the resolution. Framework makes an overarching argument about how the round should be judged or how arguments should be weighed. This can help you dictate what arguments get the most speech time in the round, eliminate pesky arguments your opponent may make, and empower the judge with understanding rather than leaving them confused with the basic terms of the debate. Refer to the chapter on Framework for a full explanation

creating and using this structure.

Relate everything to the resolution.

As you are writing, you tend to focus on the logic of your arguments, integrating your evidence, and clearly stating your impacts. While all of these things are important, they are details of the case. With focus on these details, it is easy to forget the resolution. When writing and reviewing your case, always step back and ask yourself if you have linked the point to the resolution. A simple check is to see if the resolution's key terms are within your claim and impact. If not, you want to go back and make sure your case is connecting back to the resolution in each argument you make.

Writing a case isn't all about considering the resolution at a lofty level. It's a very practical approach in writing. Think about an argumentative essay you would write for your English class. You'll have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Each body paragraph would introduce a new idea that would support your thesis. A case is no different. The three parts of a case are the Set-up, the Arguments, and the Wrap-up. Each part serves a specific function in the case.

PART 1: THE SET-UP

Thesis

Introductory Material

Definitions

Observations

The set up should include the resolution. In all cases you should make a statement of your team's side (PRO or CON) on the resolution. This is your **thesis**. Phrases like "We affirm resolved:" or "My partner and I negate the resolution that" work best. They introduce the resolution smoothly as well as remind the judge which side of the debate you are on. The one exception to reading the exact wording of the resolution would be for the second speaking team. There is no need to repeat it after your opponents have read it. I cannot stress enough, repetition of your side should happen throughout the case and later speeches. Refer to you and your partner as the side you are on (We the PRO/CON) to help the judge associate you with your side.

The phrase "We stand in the strongest affirmation/negation of the resolved" is a common introductory phrase. I, along with many of my fellow coaches, am puzzled at what "standing in the strongest affirmation/negation" looks like. I even wonder what "standing in affirmation" means. Avoid awkward phrasing that will confuse your judge from the start.

Acceptable **introductory material** is something that varies district by district. I'm a minimalist. I prefer introducing the resolution and listing off the main ideas of my arguments. Some debaters are of the opinion that listing allows your opponents more time to prepare rebuttals to your arguments. I believe that listing aids the judge by previewing the case structure. Providing a preview is like looking at a map of where you are going; it will help the judge organize their thoughts as the case progresses. If 20 extra seconds of prepping rebuttals helps your opponents, your arguments need to be improved.

An opening quote, anecdote, or analogy is also common in the introduction. These

introductions may be persuasive, but they also take away crucial speech time. It is unlikely the judge will decide the round based on the introduction, unless you integrate the material into your later speeches. Most debaters do not integrate the anecdote or quote; it only served as pretty introductory material. Unlike an essay, you don't necessarily need a "hook" for your case. You would be better served citing more evidence rather than quoting a politician or philosopher in your introduction. If you find a compelling anecdote that highlights a key argument or humanizes your case, limit it to a few sentences. If you would not repeat the material in Final Focus, it is not going to serve you in the round.

"Formal" introductions should be avoided at the beginning of your case. These include introducing your partner and yourself by name, greeting the judge and your opponents, showering everyone with your gratitude for showing up on a weekend to support the noble activity of high school debate. I do not care for these introductions and it seems to be the general consensus among coaches I have met. As a debater they were annoying; as a judge, they never affected my perception of a team. If you are in a district where the culture is to include formal introductions, by all means continue. If you are not, you don't need to include them. You always thank the judge after the round. While debaters should always be polite, it is unnecessary often over the top to start out the debate with formal introductions.

Next, the set-up contains important **definitions**. Introduce definitions with a phrase or sentence such as, "We'd like to define the following terms..." Never define all the words of the resolution. The clock is ticking and you don't want to waste any precious time on a word that everyone understands. There are three types of definitions to consider including in the set-up. For examples I will refer to the 2013 September/October Topic **Resolved: Unilateral military force by the United States is justified to prevent nuclear proliferation.**

Key words: words from the resolution that should be defined to clarify their meaning or to provide a certain view of the topic. Key words are worth defining because they shape the judge's understanding of the topic and may be helpful in building your arguments.

Example key words: justified, nuclear proliferation, possibly unilateral depending on your case

Terms of Art: words that only scholars in the field of study would know. A recent example is "failed nation". In scholarly publications, the term is actually "failed state." But either term is something that the average person would not know the meaning of. In this case, you need to define the term for the general clarity and comprehension of arguments.

Example terms of art: nuclear proliferation

Key terms not in resolution: Sometimes there will be terms that you use in arguments that do not occur in the resolution, but nonetheless warrant defining. To determine if you should define a word, look for frequently used terms in your case that would confuse a non-debater. Also include acronyms you will substitute in your case for lesser known organizations or ideas.

Examples of other key words: NPT (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty), dual use technology

Key words that don't need to go in case: Sometimes there will be words in the resolution that may or may not shape the round. It's always a good idea to have these words defined, but on a separate document than your case. That way if there is conflict on a definition, you can read

the actual definition rather than relying on speculation.

Examples of non-necessary key words: unilateral, prevent

With all definitions provide a source citation. This generally is the publication alone. While Merriam Webster is a great go to, using topic specific dictionaries like Black's Law Dictionary will trump general definitions. With a citation you should have a prepared justification for why your definition should prevail in the case that your opponents provide a different definition. This justification is for support, not to be read in your case.

Please note that definitions **DO NOT WIN DEBATE ROUNDS**. While you may have to argue about them, winning a definition is not like winning an argument. Winning a definition establishes a specific reading of the resolution. Often, a definition debate establishes a non-essential term to the resolution – helping no one. These debates just create a mess and distract from arguments. Don't do not let your round devolve into a definition debate.

Finally, **Observations** are the PF structure for introducing Framework and Burdens. An Observation will explain some important perspective on the resolution that you want your judge and your opponents to be aware of as they listen to your arguments and evaluate the round. A format for Observations would go as follows: "We would like to make a few (or a specific number) observations. Observation 1...Observation 2..." For an in-depth look at observations and how to write them, please see the Framework chapter. That chapter also discusses Burdens.

A concise set-up is best. However, there is no perfect length. You want to leave as much time as possible to establish your arguments, provide evidence, and explain your impacts. You also want to establish your Framework and provide sufficient analysis for it to function in round.

PART 2: THE ARGUMENTS

Point #: Tagline

Claim

Warrant with citation

Impact

Arguments are the meat of the case and of the round. You should aim to spend at least three minutes on arguments. Pay attention to your word choice, evidence use, and structure of each argument. Your case will generally have three or four central arguments. It is difficult to provide enough analysis and support to establish more than four arguments. Some teams like to run seven or eight arguments to make the round impossible for the other team to win; it is difficult to refute that many arguments in four minutes. For advice on answering cases written this way, see the Rebuttal chapter. I strongly suggest not writing such a case. You are better off defending a few good arguments than losing a lot of shallow ones. For these reasons, most cases have three or four arguments. One or two arguments tend to not establish a wide enough debate to give you strategic options in the Second Half. You want to have choices for voting issues at the end of the round. Well-written arguments use this structure:

Point #: Tagline

Claim

Warrant with citation
Impact

Sometimes, points will be subdivided. I suggest only using this structure if you have two very distinct points that fit under a general topic. The downside of using sub points is that your opponent may try to collapse them into one point. Because you have grouped two claims the judge may view a rebuttal to one as a rebuttal to both. If you choose to use sub points, use the following structure:

Point #: Tagline
Sub point A: Tagline
Claim
Warrant with citation
Impact
Sub point B: Tagline
Claim
Warrant with citation
Impact

Let's take a closer look at the argument structure.

Point #

You should always number your points. It clearly organizes your speech and allows you to consistently refer to your arguments throughout the debate. Numbers are clearer than referring to arguments as the "next" or the "last" contention. Some teams call Points "Contentions", or "Arguments." All three work, but Point is the most concise option. We want as much clarity as possible in the most concise way. For this reason I prefer "Point One" to "Our first contention is that." 2 syllables versus 7 syllables leave Point the victor. When you read your case, read it as "Point One" or "Point Three."

Tagline

A point without a tagline is like a book without a title. The judge needs to be told what they are about to hear. Taglines alert the judge to the central idea of your argument as well as provide an argument title. Taglines should be concise and be clear. A confusing tagline will leave the judge pondering about its meaning while you move on; you will have lost the judge's attention when you want it on your actual arguments. For this reason, the best taglines are complete sentences. This means the tagline should include a **subject + verb + object**. The tagline "The Economic Effects" does not provide clarity. It only provides a vague idea of what is coming. The tagline "X Policy will Create Jobs" succinctly describes an actual argument that will follow. The best taglines introduce the impact of the argument and express and complete idea.

Claim

Claim is a fancy word for "explaining your argument." Given the resolution, what will happen? Given the goal of the resolution, why is the action good or bad? Should we support the resolution? Each argument should directly connect to the resolution and explain why your side of the debate is preferable. The claim should be a few sentences walking through the logic of your argument. Don't forget to explain the steps in order and in detail for someone without knowledge of the topic to understand. Too many arguments presume the judge already knows information only debaters who have researched the topic know.

Warrant with citation

To prove that your claim is valid, you should provide credible evidence. A chapter is dedicated to Evidence and the Research chapter is also useful when thinking about evidence. Here evidence will be discussed in terms of case writing. After selecting evidence that proves your claim, you need to integrate it into your case. Evidence will be called a warrant in this chapter.

Practically, you first give the citation for the warrant and then a quote or paraphrase the material that supports your argument. For the citation, provide a minimum of the Publication Title and the Year of Publication. For example, New York Times article published February 13, 2013. You may also want to include the author's name if it is a name the judge would recognize; for example, the Dalai Lama. An alternate to a Publication title is the Author's Name and his or her professional title. Next, provide the warrant and integrate it in to your argument. Do not simply copy and paste something from an article. Effective evidence requires an introduction and analysis of how it proves your claim. For the evidence itself, you can either quote or paraphrase the cited source. Quoting is the easiest, but not necessarily the best strategy. Sometimes the article will be written in easy to understand terms and digestible; here you may find quotable sections. However, one or two selected sentences may not capture an effective warrant. Paraphrasing requires more work but is often more effective at supporting your argument.

Example of Paraphrasing from Sample Case:

“Furthermore, Voeten’s findings suggest that the US has a statistically significant positive impact on the creation of democracy when intervention occurs. He predicted that intervention would retard democratic reform, but US intervention was the sole example that showed positive effects (3).”

Evidence can also be historical fact or general knowledge. In many districts PF is becoming a “card war” where debaters must have a card for every claim. It doesn’t have to be that way. Because PF deals with current events, you don’t need to prove the existence of historical or current facts. If your claim depends on general knowledge, you don’t need a citation. The litmus test for needing cited evidence is: if you knew it before research on the resolution no evidence needed. If you did not know it, provide evidence.

When citing statistics and numerical evidence, please limit yourself to one or two numbers. A chain of numbers is impossible for a judge to remember or comprehend. Select the most important statistic. You should illustrate both how it proves your claim and the significance of that number. Always consider how tangible your numbers are. Often, you’ll need to translate the number into a more relatable context. For example, evidence may state that the GDP will rise by X%. This doesn’t mean much. One translation would state how many billions or trillions of dollars that X% would be. This is often beyond the judge’s imagination too. What if you said that that was the equivalent of the economy of California? Or that a GDP increase would increase tax revenue enough to pay for a substantial domestic program? Those are things the judge can imagine because the image is more concrete, yet still illustrate the evidence. Always consider alternative ways to present numbers and find the most persuasive method.

Impact

Impacts are perhaps the most forgotten and misunderstood part of arguments. Many think of impacts as those Policy things that talk about nuclear war and species extinction. Yes, those are impacts, but every argument has some impact. Impacts are not unique to Policy. **Impacts explain what the result of an argument is, the effect that argument would have on the world, or even why the argument matters within the resolution.** PF impacts are more “real world” than Policy and tend to involve less links within the argument. Policy style and structure allows for the reading of cards to support such impacts, whereas the style and structure of PF lends itself to more immediate effects.

The PF impact also must cater to the variety of judges that debaters will encounter. The impact not only should explain the effect of the claim, but also should illustrate for the judge why he or she should care about the argument. Make impact relatable and tangible. How would it affect the judge personally? The state you live in? The daily life of an American? Localizing large-scale effects is the most effective way to humanize impacts that are hard to imagine.

Consider having a warrant for your impacts. If you can provide evidence of the impact occurring or evidence that predicts/measures the impact’s effect, include it. If there is no evidence, at least explain the likelihood and magnitude of the impact. You will have to defend the impact as plausible and significant, just as you would a claim. For a more in depth look at impacts, please see the chapter on Impact Calculus.

Example of an Impact from the Sample Case:

“If this mentality is not adopted, the US risks missing the opportunity to have a successful intervention. As the RAND Corp reported in 2007, “Democratization tends to occur in waves, with a series of clustered openings followed by a period of retrenchment.” This can be seen in Syria, where the US and other actors have been reluctant to intervene (5). Without a posture of intervention, the US will miss the democratic waves and therefore miss the opportunity to put our successful intervention into play when these struggles occur.”

ARGUMENTATIVE STRATEGIES

Structuring your arguments is the first step of case writing. For a great case must also be strategic. Years of writing cases and reviewing others’ cases have taught me a few important lessons:

Before you write your case, do your research. Arguments written before doing research are easy to spot; the evidence used to support the argument will not directly support the claim. The evidence may be relevant to the argument or prove one part. Relevant evidence relates to your argument – it does not prove your argument. If you are knowledgeable, you will write knowledgeable arguments. Get knowledge before you write arguments.

Use your third idea, not your first. When you are thinking of arguments, the first ones that come to mind will also be the first ones that come to mind for your opponents. I’m not saying that your first ideas will be inherently bad arguments. They will be expected arguments. You should aim to nuance common arguments so that your case is more difficult to refute to. Also, your second and third wave of arguments will come after you have done your research, therefore these later arguments will be more knowledgeable and supported by evidence.

Read and understand your evidence. If you don't know what your evidence is about, who authored it, or why it is credible, your arguments will be easy to refute. You set yourself up for failure if the first time you read a case is in a round. This happens if one partner writes a case and the other does not read it until the debate. You should be able to list off your arguments and impacts by memory. This is a good test if you "know" your case.

Don't put all your argumentative eggs in the same basket. If all of your arguments rely on a single claim but illustrate different impacts, your case will fall if the claim is refuted. If all of your arguments are on the same subject, such as economic effects, your case is prone to being collapsed and therefore easier to refute. You want a mix of qualitative and quantitative arguments as well as a mix of impact types, such as social, economic, and political effects. You should strive to have distinct arguments and diversify your case.

Build preemptive statements into your arguments. If you can anticipate common rebuttals to your claim, warrant, or impact, point out the common response and explain to the judge why the response is flawed. Preemptive arguments can also compare your impact to an impact the other side is likely to bring up. This cuts down on what your opponents can say in rebuttal. It also makes your argument more thorough and begins impact analysis early. Judges will take notice of your consideration of responses. Judges will also benefit from the repetition of this comparison.

Placing a "time suck" argument in your case is only as effective as the debater who uses it. A "time suck" argument is one that is written for the purpose of the opponent being forced to spend time refuting something that, for the team running the time suck argument, will not be a voting issue. Time sucks only work if you remember to explain to the judge why: 1- the argument is not central to the round, 2- the time suck that cannot be turned into an offensive argument for your opponent, and 3- you stop talking about the time suck after rebuttal. If your time suck argument takes up your time, it accomplishes the opposite of what you want. A time suck should not be used if it takes up case time that you should use to substantiate other arguments.

I personally prefer to place the best argument last. This is not absolute advice. If you have an argument that it is a bit trickier to refute and your opponents most likely will answer the others first, placing an argument last will take advantage of debaters who don't manage speech time well. Most debaters refute arguments in the order they are presented. This means without good time management skills, your opponents may not get around to refuting your last argument or not finishing his or her refutation. This is a tip and not something that works for everyone. If you struggle with time management in your case I would not place the best argument last.

Don't save a key argument for the rebuttal speech. No good will come of it. The more important the argument, the sooner you should introduce it and the more you should talk about it; this means all important arguments should come in your case. Saving an argument "strategically" to avoid your opponent's rebuttal is weak debating and not effective.

Flex-casing can be effective, depending on the resolution and your debate ability. Flex-casing is when you have prepared more arguments than what will fit in one case with the purpose of changing your case between rounds. Before each debate, you and your partner would pick

which arguments to run that will fit in the four minute time constraints. For example, you would prepare arguments A, B, C, D, and E. One round you would run A, B, and C and another you would run A, D, and E. This can serve a few different purposes.

Flex-casing can allow a second speaking team to tailor their case to their opponent's arguments and begin refutation during the constructive if there is open time.

Flex-casing can remove predictability at tournaments where you are likely to hit teams from the same school or teams that have heard your case.

Flex-casing can be useful if you are trying out arguments at one tournament and plan to debate a later tournament on the same topic. This is worthwhile if the first tournament is helping you prepare for a second, not if the first is an important tournament.

A variant of flex-casing is when the second speaking team chooses to leave a portion of their Case speech time open. The First Speaker would begin refuting the opponent's case in the remaining time. For example, you would read three minutes or arguments and begin the rebuttal in the last minute. This works if the second speaking team's resolutional burden is more about refuting the other side rather than establishing independent reasons to vote for their side. This also only works when it is planned. Don't just stop reading your case and begin a rebuttal. This pre-emptive rebuttal works well if you have planned beforehand what argument you are going to attack or what you will discuss with your partner. If you decide to do an impromptu rebuttal you risk coming off as unpolished as well as appearing like you simply did not have a long enough case to fill up 4 minutes.

PART 3: THE WRAP-UP

The wrap-up is the case's conclusion. Recap your arguments and give some type of concluding statement. The recap at its simplest is repeating the taglines of your arguments. The recap can also remind the judge of the Observations and Framework that were presented at the beginning of the speech. No new ideas, arguments, or evidence should be presented in the wrap-up. The concluding statement alerts the judge one more time of your side. Examples are as follows:

For these reasons, my partner and I affirm/negate the resolved.

For the aforementioned reasons, we urge a negative ballot.

Some transition phrase that alerts the judge the speech is over and states your side

Remember, no standing in firm or strong affirmation/negation!

GENERAL TIPS ON CASE WRITING

The case isn't merely a list of facts and arguments – it is a speech. Be persuasive and keep the judge interested. Take a note from oratory and original advocacy: employ rhetorical strategies such as anaphora, metaphor, simile, analogy – all of these will help the judge relate to your content and stay interested. Anecdotes tend to suck up speech time and don't ultimately leave an imprint on a judge. You can use anecdotes, just keep them to two to....