

Basic Negative Strategy

The Bible in Proverbs says, “The first to present their case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” (Proverbs 18:17)

After “threatening” to talk about this for several lessons, we now come to the Negative (NEG) side of the debate. Many newer debaters find the NEG more difficult at first, but as they get more experience, they find the negative side more enjoyable *because* of the higher challenge of that side.

The job of the NEG is to cast reasonable doubt on the AFF ability to fulfill their burdens. This can be done in any number of ways, some of which we will explore here. But suffice it to say, the toolbox the NEG has is varied and the strategies can be simple to complex. Not every tool will be used in every round. Consequently, debaters will need to learn how and when to use the tools most effectively. And before we jump into the toolbox, it will be a good idea to discuss some concepts first.

Negative Concepts

There are several ideas and theory debaters need to understand for the NEG side that will help with strategy. It would also be a good time to let you know that in debate, everything is debatable, even debate theory. I am presenting negative theory that has stood the test of time though, but it is still debatable.

Presumption

Previously we have talked about how policy debate is comparable to a court trial. Here is another one. In court, the defendant is considered, or presumed innocent before being proved guilty. This is called the concept of *presumption* and is a benefit afforded the NEG team in policy debate. To put it another way, if neither team says anything during the debate round, this does not result in a tie, but the round would go to the NEG since they have presumption. The SQ is deemed innocent and in no need of change. In fact, there can be no tie. If there is reasonable doubt at the end of the round, the decision should still go to the NEG as they are typically advocating for less change, and that stance is the safest bet.

As the NEG, you should use presumption to your advantage. Remind the judge that this is solid debate theory, and that if there is enough doubt, they should vote NEG until more information is brought to light.

Organization

The first to speak has the highest burden of organizing the round, and that falls to the 1AC. And that makes sense as they have as much time as they desire to prepare. Their opening speech should be logical and flow nicely and easily.

The NEG is wise to follow the 1AC organizational structure. Whether they are presenting a Harms/Solvency, Comp/Ad, or other AFF structure, the NEG, especially if they are less experienced, should respond with their arguments in the same order. Jumping around causes confusion and leads to less wins.

However, the NEG will bring in new lines of argumentation as will be seen, and when that happens, they will have their own structure which should be followed by the AFF when they respond. For instance, if the 1NC is bringing up a Topicality press, that is a new line of argumentation. The 2NC is usually tasked

with bringing up Disadvantages which are also new lines of argumentation. Again, the AFF is best served by following the structure of those arguments for the sake of clarity.

The rule of thumb therefore is, whoever presents the argument for the first time determines the structure of that argument, and those responding to the arguments should follow the structure and typically the order of those arguments. This makes it easier for the judge to flow the round, which in turn makes it easier for them to come to a decision. I have seen it many times that the team who is most clear wins the judge and therefore the round.

On-case vs. Off-case

Remember when the terms Case and Plan were brought up? Here is another application to that. You will likely hear a NEG state that they will cover “on-case” arguments and that their partner will cover “off-case” arguments, or something to that affect. The on-case usually deals with all the reasons for change and are flowed next to the 1AC. Off-case are typically new lines of argumentation that are flowed separate from the 1AC. These would be Plan attacks, Topicality presses, and Disadvantages. Don’t worry if you don’t quite understand this, as we will get to these concepts right now.

Basic Negative Toolkit

Since the AFF has the burden to uphold the Stock Issues, if you have determined that the NEG uses these as a good part of their tools, you would be correct. Topicality, Inherency, Significance, and Solvency arguments are all opportunities for the NEG to cast reasonable doubt on the AFF. Technically, the NEG should only have to win one of these Stock Issues to win the round. However, since you have no idea what and how the judge will hear and weigh the arguments, it is best for the NEG to attack every weak area they see. In fact, most AFFs will have already anticipated the NEG attacks and will be ready with responses. Using as many NEG tools as possible then is the best way to dismantle the AFF. Most of these Stock Issues will work in conjunction with the others. Showing a weakness in one can open opportunities for attacks in the others.

Let’s look at the tools and how to use them, remembering again that debate theory is debatable. After these next sections on Topicality, Case-side, and Plan-side attacks, we will get into how to set up your arguments in the Arguments Lesson. For now, let’s get hold of all the tools available for you to use against the AFF.

Division of Labor

Before we explain the tools in more detail, it would be good to discuss the most used and probably the most logical division of labor for the NEG. By this I mean that each negative debater will focus on certain arguments, namely Case-side and Plan-side. Typical division will see the 1N addressing Topicality and Case-side arguments and the 2N focusing on Solvency and other Plan-side arguments as well as Disadvantages (DAs).

The reason this is desirable is that it helps develop arguments that have better support. If the 1NC tried to reply to the entire 1AC, there may be multiple arguments that are poorly developed, or “a mile wide and an inch deep.” The fact is, both the 1NC and 2NC are constructive speeches and they can and should both present new lines of argumentation.

The rebuttals should bring more depth to the arguments and not just repeat what was previously stated. Extending arguments through giving more explanation and deepening the impacts keep the round

interesting. If everyone tried to answer every argument in each speech, students quickly run out of new things to say. With a good division of labor, each argument can be developed much more fully without repetition.

I have seen, especially with novice debaters, the 2NC answer the 2AC arguments rather than attack solvency and introduce DAs. Since new lines of argumentation is not allowed in the rebuttals, the 1NR has little to nothing to add to what the 2NC has already said. They can't present DAs as this would be new arguments. So, they typically repeat in 5 minutes what the 2NC just did for 8 minutes.

However, if the 2NC brings in Solvency and DA lines of arguments and the 1NR responds to the 2AC, the 1AR now has a harder job ahead of them; having 5 minutes to respond to 13 minutes of NEG arguments. This is why the NEG block is so powerful and is considered one of the advantages for the NEG side. Use it to the full and divide the labor between the 1N and 2N.

In the following lessons we will look first at what is traditionally the job of the 1N, which is Topicality and Case-side arguments. Next will come the Plan-side arguments typically reserved for the 2N, which is Solvency and DAs. If Topicality is an issue, both the 1N and 2N will address it carrying it through to the rebuttals. In rare cases, where the 1AC is more confusing, the 2NC may bring the initial Topicality press in their speech, but that should not be the norm. It is best to initiate the T-press in the 1NC to have time to really develop it.

Also remember, the NEG has multiple tools at their disposal. The more you can use, the better. Also remember that the Stock Issues tend to work together, an issue with one will lead to issues with the others. This will be how you develop a winning NEG strategy that will have the AFF on the ropes from the first Cross-Ex through the 2NR.

Topicality

Topicality

Okay, so after I just made a big deal about using multiple tools, the first one I will discuss is really a stand-alone issue, and that is Topicality.

A Topicality press (T-press, and sometimes just referred to as T) is argued by the NEG when they believe the AFF Plan does not fall within the bounds of the resolution. There are several reasons why this could be the case.

Definition Issues

This T-Press will be based on the definition of a certain word or phrase in the resolution as defined by the AFF (or maybe even the NEG). As you may recall, the resolution is made up of words that have meanings and fall within certain grammatical constructs (thanks mom!).

The NEG will attempt to convince the judge that these words or phrases, as defined, render the AFF plan outside the bounds of the resolution. The usual suspects are the words, *substantially (or other descriptive word that modifies the amount of change or reform to the SQ)*, *reform (or other word that states the action)*, and *the policy category being changed*. I have also seen a T-Press on the word *its*.

To be prepared for this, it is a good idea to have several definitions of words and phrases pre-prepared for a T-press. And if the AFF does NOT offer a definition, the NEG can strategically offer their own

definitions to *reasonably* narrow the scope of the word or phrase. Even if the AFF does define the words, the NEG can contest the definition and offer a counter definition if they have a good enough reason to prefer their alternate definition. However, this can be a double-edged sword. The NEG is essentially saying that if the judge accepts the AFF definitions then the plan IS topical in that context.

When the NEG presents a counter definition, there is now a new side-debate over which definition to accept. The burden is on the NEG to show that the AFF definition is somehow *unreasonable*, but the NEG's is *reasonable*. I use these words carefully as there have been times when the NEG will argue that their definition is merely *better* than the AFF, however, that usually won't get you too far in the debate over words.

The NEG should also give a "reason to prefer" their definition over the AFF showing reasonability and superiority. If, however, you can run a T-press using the AFF definitions, that can be stronger. For, if the NEG can show that the AFF is not topical even according to their own definition(s), they have a better chance of winning that argument.

Once the terms are defined, the NEG needs to show how the AFF plan fails to uphold this Stock Issue. Some debaters will call this the "violation." Let's look at an example using this resolution:

The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its transportation policy.

If you recall from the Debate Theory lesson, we used this for Topicality. There was an AFF to abolish Daylight Saving Time. There were T-Presses run almost every round. I mean, how is *Daylight Saving Time* within the realm of transportation policy? Since the AFF defined transportation policy as anything that the Department of Transportation (DOT) has authority over, they were able to show, oddly enough, that Daylight Saving Time is one of those things. The NEG would try to use a more "common man" idea and say that this is not really transportation policy. However, as the AFF was usually able to explain, the reasons why the DOT has this policy is due to transportation scheduling of planes, trains, and ships. There needs to be uniform time standards so that transportation can operate more safely. Consequently, the AFF usually won T in these debates.

Another T-Press on this policy came from the definition of *substantially*. Is abolishing Daylight-Saving Time a substantial reform? This is where having an alternate definition for *substantial* comes into play. If the NEG can show that this is truly not a substantial reform, the judge may rule in their favor.

Concerning arguing over the word *its*, this could be used if the policy in question is handled more so by the States than the Federal government. The NEG would argue that the USFG is not changing ITS policy but attempting to change State policy. This can be effective if you are well versed in the Constitution.

The definition-style T-Press will be the most run, and in fact will overshadow even the rest of the topicality arguments in one way or another.

Effects Topicality

A good word picture for effects topicality is a combination pool shot. The cue ball hits one ball which hits another before going into the pocket. The AFF plan begins something that will, in a couple steps, effect the harms in the SQ. In other words, the Plan puts into motion something that will lead to something else that will do something about the harms. The problem is that there is usually no guarantee the Plan will directly solve the problems. For instance, in the year this resolution was run

The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its policy toward Russia

there was an AFF plan to audit the World Bank. The thought was that once the audit happens, they will find issues concerning Russia, and that will lead to a policy change toward Russia. This presents an effects topicality issue. What if the audit doesn't find any issues? If that is the case, then no policy change happens. Even IF they find something, there is no guarantee a policy will change.

With effects topicality, the NEG should ask themselves, and ultimately the judge, "What is **guaranteed** to happen if the Plan is passed?" (The AFF should ask that of their plan as well.) In the above plan, the only guarantee was an audit of the World Bank. Since they are not owned or operated by Russia, this is not a direct policy toward Russia. Argue as they might, that they *know* that Russia is doing evil things behind the scenes, the Plan as written had effects topicality problems that many brought up in the round.

As for the definition aspect to this type of press, the words *reform, its, toward, and even Russia* can be called into question. An audit of the World Bank isn't reform unless they find something; *its* comes into play as this is a policy toward the World Bank, not US Policy toward Russia; which then also brings into question the words, *toward, and Russia*.

An effects topicality press can be quite powerful if you argue it well.

Extra-Topicality

When the AFF plan includes but also goes *beyond* the resolution, this is *extra-topicality*. Extra-Topicality isn't against the rules or debate theory, however, historically debate theory states that the AFF can't claim any advantages for extra topical mandates. Here's an example,

The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its trade with one or more of the following countries: China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea.

One of the AFF plans wanted to have the US sign the *Transpacific Partnership* treaty (TPP). However, the TPP included more than these four listed countries. Any country outside of these four would be considered extra topical. So, even if our trade increases from the TPP and the US makes more money, only the trade with the listed countries can be counted as advantageous. The NEG could use this to press what the non-listed countries would bring about in terms of trade, and then exclude that from the overall advantages.

As stated before, funding usually falls within the extra-topical realm. For the NEG, you can't win a T-Press in this area, however, you can bring up any disadvantages arising from any extra topical mandates. Funding can cause DAs in several ways, and the NEG can win those arguments if there is ample proof of harm.

Topicality Conclusion

Hopefully you can see how the NEG could press Topicality in these different areas. If you win Topicality, technically all the other Stock Issues fall as well. With losing Topicality, the AFF loses their *fiat* power, so they can't pass their Plan. Therefore, Solvency falls, so the Harms remain, and Inherency remains as well.

One last thought; please do NOT run topicality unless it is fairly strong. You can lose some credibility by running weak or frivolous T-presses, especially against AFF's that most believe are topical. As a result,

some seasoned judges don't like Topicality presses in general. But, if you save these arguments for when you have a stronger case, you can win even these judges. You will come to recognize the opportunities the more you debate.

Case Side Arguments

If you will recall, case is defined as the *reasons for change*. When the NEG is arguing in this area, the words, "Therefore, there is no reason to change," or something similar, should come from their lips several times during that speech. The Stock Issues for case-side are, Significance, Inherency, and Advantages.

Significance

Significance speaks to the intensity of the Harms whether qualitative or quantitative. If attacking this area, the NEG can do several things; either state that the Harm doesn't really exist or is not as bad as the AFF says it is. Of course, this will need to be backed up with either evidence, or a Cross-Ex admission which we will get to in a later lesson.

One thing to consider is the inverse relationship between Significance and Solvency; as one gets stronger, the other gets weaker. So, if there are massive Harms that appear verifiable, it will be harder to solve them. If the Solvency is really strong, it's a good indication that the Harms themselves are not very intense. That will give you an idea whether to focus on a Significance press or not.

One thing to be alert to is the use of a strong emotional plea from the AFF when presenting their harms. There have been a number of times when the 1AC will attempt to pull on the heartstrings of the judge to gain their favor. And for the NEG to then argue against this can make the NEG look cold or heartless.

Most of the time, with these particular cases, you will NOT want to argue significance. You may want to get some quantification (numbers), but the NEG will want to argue more in terms of Inherency and Solvency. These emotional cases will typically be *qualitative* in significance which plays to the AFF's favor. But remember, when the harms are strong, solvency is more at risk. More on that later.

Inherency

As I researched for this writing, I found something very interesting, Inherency was really where the debates were won and lost, back in the 1940s and 50s. It has since lost some of its luster and seems to not be as understood as it once was. I would like to make Inherency a stronger NEG tool in the coming years. In fact, there is something to be said about being different that will catch the judge's attention.

Once again, Inherency first asks, "*Has the problem in the SQ been diagnosed correctly?*" and then, "*Is there a need for the affirmative plan or is the SQ all we need?*" Another illustration might help here. Remember my truck analogy? Here is another picture.

Suppose you go to the doctor (hey, I'm a nurse, and I think in medical examples) and you have the following interaction,

"I have had a headache that seems to be getting worse over the last 6 months."

The doctor responds, "Have you tried aspirin?"

"Yes."

“Tylenol?”

“Yes.”

“Advil?”

“Yes.”

“Aleve?”

“Yes.”

“How about Vicodin?”

“No. I haven’t tried Vicodin.”

“Okay then. I’ll write you an order for Vicodin.”

What seems to be missing here? The doctor didn’t seem at all interested in **WHY** you are having the headaches. Why didn’t he order any tests? Why isn’t he searching for the reason behind the headaches? I mean, there could be some grave underlying condition causing your problems, but all he seems interested in is alleviating the symptoms.

This is the heart behind the Inherency press from the NEG. The AFF may list off several valid harms, and the USFG has tried fixing those harms to no avail. So, the AFF is going to prescribe a more potent “pain killer” to at least take away some of the symptoms. The problem may be that they haven’t really looked at the true cause of the problems. There is no proper diagnosis. And this is where good Inherency research will gain you some advantages.

If you can find the true cause, or an alternate actual cause of the harms, that will not only give you a valid inherency press but lead to some very strong argumentation in other areas. Let’s look at an example from a previous resolution concerning foreign military presence and/or commitments that happened in a real debate.

One of the commitments the USA had concerned giving military aid to foreign countries who were using child soldiers, and sometimes on the front lines. The AFF painted a pretty disturbing picture of kids as young as 10 years old being killed in combat. The reason child soldiers were being used, according to the AFF, was that they were easy to get, and were expendable. There were lots of young kids around, and many were willing to do this work because their families were hungry. The Plan was to withhold military aid until they stopped using child soldiers.

The NEG argued Inherency. The true problem was that adult soldiers cost more than kids, and with the limited resources the foreign military had, kids were cheaper, and you could get more for your money. The Plan **took money away** from the foreign military and therefore would make the problem worse. Not only will the Plan NOT solve, with less money, they would in fact need to employ *more* child soldiers, making matters much worse. This then led to multiple disadvantages. This is what a strong Inherency argument will do; not only show there is no reason for change, but also lead to strong Disadvantages should the Plan be passed. This normally requires deeper research but is well worth it when you find those Inherency nuggets.

When the AFF misdiagnoses the true problem, this will necessarily lead to solvency issues too. If you can't solve, you keep the Harms, and you gain even more problems with disadvantages. Because of that, I strongly encourage you to spend time finding the real reason for the Harms, and why they are not being solved by the SQ. Even if the AFF has part of the diagnosis correct, if there is something else that is also causing the Harms, you have a strong Inherency attack available called "alternate causality." Let me explain.

The stronger the Harms, the more likely there are multiple causes to those Harms. Very rarely is only one thing the cause of major issues. The cause of the Harms may be totally outside of the resolution which plays to the NEG advantage because the AFF can't mandate something non-resolutional to fix the problem. With that being the case, only part of the Harms can be solved. But if we don't know how much can be solved by the plan, how much of the harms will remain after the plan is passed? If this is unknown, the AFF has an Inherency problem. The AFF hasn't diagnosed the problem correctly and the NEG should get the ballot. Let's look at an example with this resolution

The United States Federal Government should substantially reform the use of Artificial Intelligence technology

In a final round where I was one of the judges, the AFF plan was to use an open-source AI program that would help the Federal Reserve (Fed) predict recessions. With the ability to predict recessions, the Fed could implement policies to help mitigate the predicted coming recessions in the future. The AI program had been studied and was shown to be 99+% accurate at predicting recessions when fed data prior to previous economic downturns from 1972-2017. The NEG argued Inherency in that the Fed used Keynesian rather than Classical economic theory to make their decisions. They were able to show that Keynesian economics was more of the cause of recessions than lack of good data; that in fact, decisions by the Fed were the problem, and giving them this data would institute a self-fulfilling prophecy. When given a recession forecast by the AI, the Fed would then implement policies that would hasten a recession rather than prevent it.

Classical economic theory would have the Fed, and even more so, the whole USFG take a *laisse faire*, or a hands-off approach, and let the free-market handle the problem on its own. Any manipulation by the government brings about the harms they wanted to avoid, and therefore, the world is not made better by the plan. The AFF, by misdiagnosing the true problem, could not solve, and valid disadvantages would occur should the Plan be passed.

Inherency and Emotional Cases

As stated in the *Significance* section, you will in all likelihood face highly emotional cases which deserve some special attention in your approach as the NEG team. While you will most often NOT want to attack significance for these cases, Inherency can be a good tool, especially when the AFF case concerns human rights abuses.

Please understand that I am in no way wanting to sound cold or heartless here. Human rights abuses are very real everywhere in the world, and some of the atrocities committed are beyond our comprehension. That being the case, attempting to solve this type of a case using an 8-minute 1AC in a high school academic debate round, is, to put it rather bluntly, a bit simplistic and unrealistic. This is where Inherency comes in.

Remember the significance/solvency inverse relationship? The stronger one is, the weaker or harder the other becomes. Human rights abuse presents a very strong harm, which makes solving the harm all the more difficult. But I thought we were talking about Inherency here. We are. Human rights abuse is both simple and very complex. It is simple because there are people out there that are just evil. It is complex though because there are multiple causes and ways that these people operate. Trying to pin the problem on one or two or even three things, saying that if we only did “x” we could solve this, is pretty naïve. Think about it. You have two 12–18-year-old debaters who have done a search on Google and have proposed to have solved an issue that police have been trying to solve for decades. Are you saying that the authorities have never considered the option proposed in the 1AC? The issue at hand is a vast web of lies and deceit, but if we pass our plan, it will all come tumbling down? Just vote AFF? Really?

For this, the NEG needs to research the things that have been tried in the past to solve this issue. This should not be too difficult. Sometimes, the AFF will show that the system or plan they are proposing is being used in some states or countries and it is working so far. If so, great! One of the worst things the federal government can do at this point is to mandate its use everywhere. The best thing to do is to let the several states experiment with many different ways to solve the problem. Fifty active studies are WAY better than forcing everyone to use one way, the USFG way (because we all know they always make the right choices and pick the winners the best). This method gives us the best chance to find what works and what doesn't. This argument falls under Inherency because the SQ is working on the solution, and if the AFF now forces everyone to use only the one system the USFG says is right, no good can come from that: only disadvantages.

This needed said somewhere, and now seems a good time. The USFG doesn't exist to try to fix every problem, to force everyone to do things their way, or to try to manage everyone's day-to-day lives. They aren't there to protect us from ourselves, to make sure we live active healthy lives. Their job is outlined in the Constitution, and it is very limited. It's a fairly easy read. Take 30 minutes and read the whole thing. Probably won't even take that long.

As you can see, and as I have hopefully begun to prove, Inherency is at the heart of academic policy debate. If the AFF can prove Inherency, then Significance, Solvency, and Advantages should easily follow. However, if Inherency is missed by the AFF, the NEG should be able to show that Solvency and Advantages both fall, and a NEG ballot is warranted. As you find the harms in the system, diligently search for the true cause(s). If it is a big harm, multiple causes are likely. Then, if the AFF gets the diagnosis wrong, press Inherency, then solvency and DAs.