



Stock Issues and the Five-Minute Explainer.

A plain-language tour of the classic stock issues that structure every policy round. Students can learn the framework in one sitting, then use the practice prompts to test it.

What are stock issues?

Stock issues are the standard questions any proposal must answer, much like a doctor checks the same basics before prescribing a treatment. Many coaches teach them first because they turn a confusing round into a short list of questions. In the traditional stock-issues approach, the Affirmative must prove all of them and the Negative can win by defeating just one. Not every judge uses this approach, so ask.

Think of it as a chair

The Affirmative case stands on several legs. If the Negative knocks out even one leg convincingly, the chair falls. That is why the Negative can focus on a single issue, and why the Affirmative must defend everything.

The issues, explained simply

ISSUE	THE QUESTION IT ASKS	EVERYDAY EXAMPLE
Harms (or ill)	Is there a real problem that matters?	Our school library closes at 3:00, so students without a ride home cannot study
Inherency	Will the problem continue if we do nothing?	The school has no plan to change the hours
Solvency	Does the plan actually fix the problem?	Staying open until 5:00 lets those students use it
Topicality	Does the plan fall within the resolution?	Is a library hours change the kind of action the topic asks for?
Significance	Is the problem big enough to justify action?	How many students are affected, and how badly?

Sources list the issues slightly differently. Some name significance, harms, inherency and solvency as the issues the Affirmative proves in its first speech, and treat **topicality** as a stock issue that only needs to be proven if the Negative challenges it. Ask your coach which version your league and judges expect. **Naming varies by coach and league.**

The five-minute explainer for a new teammate

Use this script to teach someone the framework in about five minutes. Read it aloud, then have the listener repeat it back in their own words.

- 1 **Minute 1, the problem.** Tell them: "Every plan starts with a problem. If nothing is wrong, nobody needs a plan." Ask them to name a problem in their school.
- 2 **Minute 2, the status quo.** Explain that the status quo means how things work right now. The Aff must show the problem will not fix itself. That is inherency.
- 3 **Minute 3, the fix.** The plan is the specific change. Solvency asks if it works, and how well. Evidence should show similar changes worked elsewhere.
- 4 **Minute 4, the rules.** Topicality asks if the plan fits the resolution. The Neg may argue it does not, like saying a team is playing the wrong sport.
- 5 **Minute 5, the weighing.** The Neg can argue the plan causes new problems. The judge compares the good against the bad and decides.

Practice: find the weak leg

Read each statement and decide which stock issue is under attack. Answers are below the list.

- 1 "This problem already went away last year."
- 2 "Your plan fixes a different problem than the one you described."
- 3 "Your plan is not something the resolution allows."
- 4 "The law is already scheduled to change next month."
- 5 "Only a handful of people are affected."

Answers: 1) harms, 2) solvency, 3) topicality, 4) inherency, 5) significance.

MAKE YOUR OWN: WRITE ONE ATTACK FOR EACH ISSUE

Want a plan built around your debater?

Scholar Coach coaches can walk your student through case structure and strategy. Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: DebateUS: The Basic Structure of Policy Debate · Model Diplomat glossary: stock issues, inherency, solvency (modeldiplomat.com). Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

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