



The Beginner's Guide to Flowing.

Flowing is the note-taking system debaters use to track every argument. This guide shows how to set up your paper, a starter shorthand table, and a drill to build speed.

Why flow?

A **flow** is a record of the round. You cannot answer an argument you did not write down, and judges decide partly on which arguments were answered and which were dropped. A good flow is also your best study tool after the round.

You do not need to write every word. You need the **claim** (what they said) and a few key words of the **support** (why). Many debaters use legal-size paper, which gives more room, and some use a laptop spreadsheet. Pick one system and stay with it.

Setting up your paper

Use a separate sheet for each major argument or section, turned sideways (landscape). Draw one column for each speech so you can read an argument straight across and see how it was answered.

SHEET	COLUMNS (LEFT TO RIGHT)	NOTES
Affirmative case	1AC, 1NC, 2AC, 2NC/1NR, 1AR, 2NR, 2AR	One sheet for the plan and one per advantage
Each negative argument	1NC, 2AC, 2NC/1NR, 1AR, 2NR, 2AR	One sheet per disadvantage, counterplan, topicality or kritik

- ◆ Leave a blank line between arguments so answers have room.
- ◆ Use a different color pen for each side if you can.
- ◆ Number your sheets and label the top of each one.
- ◆ Always write in the column of the speech you are hearing, even if the speaker jumps around.

Starter shorthand

Shorthand saves seconds, and seconds matter at speed. These symbols are common but not universal. Change them to suit you, and keep your own key at the top of your flow pad.

SYMBOL	MEANING	SYMBOL	MEANING
→	leads to, causes	↑	increases
↓	decreases	=	is, equals
≠	is not	w/	with
w/o	without	b/c	because
gov	government	US	United States
econ	economy	ev	evidence
Δ	change	X	cross out or answered

SYMBOL	MEANING	SYMBOL	MEANING
?	unclear, ask in CX	!	important, extend this

Tip

Draw a box around anything the other team said that you need to answer, and a check mark when you have. At the end of the speech, scan for any boxes without checks.

A 15-minute flowing drill

- 1 Pick a short video or audio recording of a round. Your coach can suggest one. Public tournament recordings and university channels are good sources.
- 2 Flow the first speech only. Pause when you fall behind and write what you missed.
- 3 Compare with a teammate. Did you both catch the same main claims?
- 4 Re-flow the same speech at normal speed. Shorten more words using symbols.
- 5 Count dropped arguments. Mark every claim the next speaker never answered.

Repeat this drill regularly; flowing speed builds with practice.

MY PERSONAL SHORTHAND KEY

Want a plan built around your debater?

Scholar Coach coaches can run flowing practice with your student. Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: New Mexico Forensics Club: Taking Notes in Debate (newmexicoforensicsclub.readthedocs.io) · DebateUS: The Basic Structure of Policy Debate. 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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