



The Negative Toolbox.

Disadvantages, counterplans, topicality and kritiks in plain English. Use it to understand what the Negative team might say and how to pick the right tool.

The four main tools

The Negative can attack the Affirmative's case directly, and it can also bring its own arguments. Most of those arguments fall into four families. Many rounds use two or three of them.

TOOL	PLAIN-ENGLISH IDEA	SHORT EXAMPLE
Disadvantage (DA)	The plan causes something bad	Extending library hours takes money from the sports budget
Counterplan (CP)	A different solution is better than the plan	Instead, give students free bus passes
Topicality (T)	The plan does not fit the resolution	The plan is not what the topic asks teams to debate
Kritik (K)	The Affirmative's assumptions or language are flawed	Their way of framing the problem leads to worse thinking

Parts of a disadvantage

A disadvantage argues that the plan causes harms that outweigh its benefits. Coaches commonly teach it as a chain with links, and if one link breaks, the argument fails.

- 1 Uniqueness.** Right now things are fine, or headed in a good direction.
- 2 Link.** The plan changes that by doing something specific.
- 3 Internal link.** That change leads to a bigger effect.
- 4 Impact.** The final result is bad enough to outweigh the plan's benefits.

Example chain: the budget is balanced now (uniqueness), the plan costs money (link), cuts hit other programs (internal link), and students lose services (impact).

Counterplans, topicality and kritiks

Counterplan. It offers an alternative. To win, the Negative usually must show the counterplan is better than the plan, and often that it does something the plan cannot do alone. Judges expect it to be different from the plan in a meaningful way, and many coaches teach that it should not be a simple copy of the plan.

Topicality. It is a rules argument. The Negative gives a definition of a word in the resolution, says the plan does not meet it, and explains why a fair debate needs the limit. Many coaches teach topicality in four parts: interpretation, violation, standards (why this limit is better) and voting issue. Ask your coach which structure your team uses.

Kritik. A kritik questions an idea, word or assumption the Affirmative relies on. Because kritiks can be abstract, they are often saved for older students, and debaters disagree about whether they belong in policy rounds at all. Some divisions and leagues limit or discourage them. Ask your coach and your tournament if they are allowed.

A beginner team often does best with solid case attacks, one disadvantage and one topicality argument. Learn the basics well before adding more.

IF THE AFFIRMATIVE CASE IS...	CONSIDER...	WHY
Very broad or unusual	Topicality	The limit may be a real issue
Expensive or politically tricky	A disadvantage	Costs and side effects are likely
Solving a real problem in a debatable way	A counterplan	Offers a cleaner fix
Strong evidence, few weaknesses	Case attacks plus one DA	Pressure on solvency

- Scholar Coach can help your student build a negative strategy that fits their strengths. Book a free consultation at the link below.

NOTES

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

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