

## How to write a case

At any point in the following, if the step you're on isn't working, go back to the preceding step.

### I. Boil the resolution down to the simplest elements

- A. Figure out what the topic is about
  - 1. Parse the resolution
    - a) Break into subject / verb / object
    - b) adjectival and adverbial clauses show where the nuance is
  - 2. Participate in brainstorming meetings
    - a) Take notes
  - 3. Preliminary research
    - a) Is there something in the topic that's easy to track (e.g. Cap Pun, Rt to Privacy)?
      - (1) Get a sense of the topic overall in the real world
    - b) Try it out on reasonable adults outside of debate.
      - (1) They will have a broader view in general that may be more what the framers were thinking in the first place. And, such reasonable adults may be a large number of your judges.

**II. Define the sides.** In other words, what are the aff and neg about? What is your strategy? What are you going to argue? Until you have this, you have nothing. If you don't understand your cases, who will?

- A. Crystallize the sides: clarity is essential.
  - 1. Start with one side and write down that side's objective
    - a) In one all-encompassing sentence.
    - b) Do the same for the opposite side. Boil it down to one all-encompassing sentence.
- B. The rest of the work is easy -- explaining those sentences.

### III. Decide on your value.

Focus in on your value before writing your case. A clear case has a direction, and the value provides that direction. Always decide what direction you want to go before starting a debate journey!

- A. Does the value arise from your sentences about the sides of the resolution?
- B. Is your value really achievable if you follow your sentence about the resolution?

It is possible that you can write a whole case and come up with the value later. It's sort of like writing backwards, using the writing process to clarify your thoughts. That's okay, if that clarification is really what you're doing, but don't just do it because you don't understand values, or you haven't figured out your one all-encompassing sentence yet.

And never forget: Judges -- be they coaches, college students, parents or recent escapees from the local lunatic asylum -- always like a case that clearly supports the stated value.

**I. Focus in on the criterion.** As the criterion is (or should be) inextricably linked to your value, this may or may not be a separate step from #3.

- A. Once you know your value, how are you going to achieve it?
  - 1. The mechanism of achievement is your criterion
    - a) E.g., we will achieve justice through due process
  - 2. Your arguments will, in essence, be a logical explanation of your criterion

Remember, values and criteria are NOT arguments. They are the explanation of your arguments, the direction of your arguments, the plan of your arguments. While you may point out in a round that your opponent is not actually achieving his value or implementing his criterion, or that your value is

"higher" (which always strikes me as rather dubious), you will mostly give mere lip service to the V/C line in going down the flow. **You should be arguing the V/C in every aspect of constructive/rebuttal.**

*Confluent with all of the above, you have been doing research, a different issue altogether. You have been visiting libraries, surfing the internet, reading books, reading magazine articles, taking notes, copying evidence. At some point you will feel that you have enough to begin (although you'll never actually have enough--research on a topic continues until you begin researching the next topic).*

**I. Write your case.** For the first time, you are now sitting at the keyboard staring at a blank screen. Just start. You already have plenty of material; just put it down thus:

- A. Write down your one all-encompassing sentence. (You'll replace this with the opening materials later.)
- B. Explain and define your Value. You've already given it a lot of thought.
- C. Explain and define your Criterion. You've already given this a lot of thought too.
- D. Work out the contentions. What you'll do for the rest of the case is take it step by step, analyzing what you've already said in your all-encompassing sentence, using your value and criterion to provide the foundations of your explanation: that's what a case is all about. All you do, while building a case, is explain the sentence you originally came up with.
- E. Start at the beginning, and when you get to the end, stop.
  1. An argument begins with a premise. State the premise.
  2. Followed by, if this premise, then that.
  3. Followed by, if that, then the other thing.
  4. Followed by, if the other thing, then the conclusion.
- F. The number of steps in "e" above is inconsequential. What is important is that you use the tools of logic correctly.
  1. Since it is important that your listener accept your premise (otherwise they won't accept anything that follows), this probably requires some sort of evidence.
  2. Logic is a step-by-step business. At the end of each sentence, ask yourself the question why. Then write you answer down; that's probably the next of the steps.
  3. Remember, your case is about your value, being achieved through your criterion. If you're using due process, or protection of rights, or government legitimacy as your criterion, your contentions should be about those things. And the conclusion you're attempting to draw is that through this criterion, applied via your contention, we shall achieve your value. If at the end of every constructive argument you ended with a reference to your value, you would be an excellent case writer.
  4. If you have research to support anything you're saying, put it in. But remember, LD is not about research, it's about the arguments. You should make the arguments; your evidence should provide warrants (preferably some factual datum) for your premises.
    - a) Don't over-quote. Judges want to hear you, not your evidence.
    - b) Do it right: Tag. Citation including source's credentials. Quote.
      - (1) Tag: "Capital punishment kills the innocent.:
      - (2) Citation: "As G.W.Bush, noted executioner from the state of Texas points out in KILL THE BUGGERS,"
      - (3) Quote: "92% of all people on death row are innocent of any crime. Ever."

## **II. Two things to think about while writing your case**

A. Thing 1: Logic

1. This is a syllogism
  - a) If A then B
  - b) If B then C
  - c) Therefore, if A, then C

- (1) As long as A is a solid premise, this should be all you need to know
- B. Thing 2: This is a case
1. Explain the situation
  2. Explain how the situation requires you to do what you need to do (criterion)
  3. Explain how what you need to do (criterion) leads to the value

**III. Add opening.** (This will replace the all-encompass line.)

1. Put in a short, relevant quote from a good source. Remember, the first thing the judge hears from you is your quote. Try to make a good first impression.
  - a) Good sources:
    - (1) A philosopher whose writings support your side
    - (2) A relevant expert from good articles/books you've worked on in your case. Often a good "expert" quote is more impressive than a philosopher; it makes it sound like you've really dug.
  - b) What are some bad sources?
    - (1) Alternative rock bands, films, Homer Simpson, etc.
    - (2) General quotes from someone else's case that sound good but are as common as white in a snow farm.
2. Next, define the necessary terms.
  - a) Defining entire concepts is usually better than defining simple words.
  - b) Definitions must be fair to both sides.
    - (1) Prepare definitions for aff and neg, but only use the neg defs if your opponent has questionable defs. Otherwise say, "I accept my opponent's definitions."
3. If there's some real bogus stuff floating around a topic, here's the time to add an observation, to keep said bogus thing from affecting you.

**IV. Do a preliminary timing of what you've done**

- A. If you have the space, that is, over a minute remaining, you may need another contention -- although never more than 3 altogether. If you've got more than 3, you've got a shopping list, not a debate case, and you need to deepen your analysis.
- B. If you have less than a minute remaining, just remember to expand your ideas a little when you're rewriting -- and don't read your case too fast!
- C. Need a third contention? After you've said good stuff about your side, look at the alternative, i.e., point out the bad results of choosing the other side of the resolution. NOTE: Don't assume a neg will run a particular case. Just point out intrinsic evils on the other side. MORE NOTAGE: And if a res is an evaluation of two goods, don't made the other one sound bad, just less good

**V. Practice**

- A. Read your case aloud and time it. Note anything you have trouble reading; either rewrite that part in more comfortable wording or practice it more (your call). Adjust for time; trim or add as necessary. Any case that doesn't use all the available time is not as good as one that does.

**VI. Rewrite it. Then rewrite it. Then rewrite it**

- VII. (For reasons that elude me, I was totally unable to overcome the erratic outlining, so while the indents are correct, the numbers are pure science fiction)