

How to write a case - PF

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

Boil the resolution down to the simplest elements

Figure out what the topic is about

Parse the resolution

Break into subject / verb / object

adjectival and adverbial clauses show where the nuance is

Participate in brainstorming meetings

Take notes

Preliminary research

Is there something in the topic that's easy to track

(e.g. Cap Pun, Rt to Privacy)?

Then Google it

And set up a Google Alert

Get a sense of the topic overall in the real world

Try it out on reasonable adults outside of debate (e.g. parents).

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.

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?

Crystallize the sides: clarity is essential.

Start with one side and write down that side's objective

In one all-encompassing sentence.

Do the same for the opposite side. Boil it down to one all-encompassing sentence.

The rest of the work is easy -- explaining those all encompassing sentences.

Decide on your framework. A framework provides a way for the judge to evaluate the debate. A framework says, We will run a CBA case, and whoever has the most benefits, wins. Or, We will run a case based on preserving individual rights, and whoever best preserves rights wins. Framework explains what you're doing.

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

Does the framework arise from your all-encompassing sentences about the sides of the resolution?

Does your framework really allow the judge to weigh the round?

It is possible that you can write a whole case and come up with the framework 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 framework, 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 provides a clear way to make a decision. The judge has to weigh everything said in the round. Does your framework make it easy for the judge to do that weighing (in your favor)? **DO THE JUDGES' JOB FOR THEM!**

Also remember, frameworks 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 opponents are not following their framework, or that your framework is better, the framework is only a tool of argumentation and not an argument in and of itself. **You should be arguing in such a way that everything you say leads back to (and emanates from) your framework—that's good debating (and case writing).**

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 finish debating the topic).

Write your case. You are now sitting at the keyboard. Just start. You already have plenty of material; just put it down thus:

Write down your one all-encompassing sentence. (You'll replace this with the opening materials later.)

Explain and define your framework. You've already given it a lot of thought.

Work out the contentions. What you'll do for the rest of the writing is take it step by step, analyzing what you've already said in your all-encompassing sentence, using your framework 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.

Start at the beginning, and when you get to the end, stop.

An argument begins with a premise or claim. State the premise/claim.

Followed by the warrant. This explains why the claim is true.

Followed by the impact. This explains how the claim applies to the resolution.

Example: The resolution is that everyone should become a vegetarian.

You argue: a) fish is bad for you (claim); b) Dr. Josephus Blowcephus explains in "Fish Are Friends Not Food" that 98% of all fish eaten in Boston rips the stomachs out of human 12-18 year olds, leaving them dead bloated corpses (warrant); c) because we don't want to strew the streets of Boston with deceased teenagers, we should not eat fish, and that leads us to a vegetarian diet (impact).

Logic—and case-writing—is a step-by-step business. At the end of each sentence, ask yourself the question, Why? Then write your answer down. The number of steps in a contention is inconsequential. It can be multiple claims and warrants leading to an impact. What is important is that you use the tools of logic correctly. That is, you could follow the warrant above with another argument about the harms of eating meat, and then another about the benefits of eating beans, and then finally go to the impact of vegetarianism > flesh-eating.

1. Fish is bad for you
2. Meat is bad for you
3. Veggies are good for you
4. Therefore, we should support vegetarianism to both avoid the harms of flesh eating and achieve the benefits of bean-eating.

Remember, your case is about your framework being achieved through your contentions. If you're using a cost benefit analysis, your contentions should demonstrate the harms of the opposition and the benefits of your side. If at the end of every constructive argument you ended with a reference to your framework, you would be an excellent case writer.

Don't over-quote. Judges want to hear you, not just your evidence. You need to make the arguments yourself. If A → B. If B → C. If C → D. You use quotes to support your case, not make it.

Do it right: Tag. Citation including source's credentials. Quote.

Tag: "Capital punishment kills the innocent.

Citation: "As G.W.Bush, noted executioner from the state of Texas points out in KILL THE BUGGERS,"

Quote: "92% of all people on death row are innocent of any crime. Ever."

Add opening. (This will replace the all-encompassing line.)

We affirm/negate the resolution: "Zxxxxxxxxxxxxx."

Next, define the necessary terms.

Defining entire concepts is usually better than defining simple words,

Definitions must be fair to both sides.

Prepare definitions for pro and con, but as the second side to speak, only use your defs if your opponents have questionable defs.

Otherwise say, "We accept our opponent's definitions." (If you say nothing about definitions, that implies acceptance. Remember, no one likes a definitional debate.)

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. Observations are of the nature, "Because of such-and-such, we stipulate this or that." For example, "Because the resolution specifies no agent of action, we must presume that the actor is the government.". Or, "Although the resolution specifies no locale, it makes sense that we argue only the US." Or any sort of specific detail about the argumentation per se. It should not be abusive, of course.

Do a preliminary timing of what you've done

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.

If you have less than a minute remaining, just expand your ideas a little when you're rewriting -- and don't read your case too fast!

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 general and intrinsic evils on the other side.

MORE NOTAGE: And if a res is an evaluation of two goods, don't make the other one sound bad, just less good

Practice

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.

Rewrite it. Then rewrite it. Then rewrite it