

Policy debate

Two teams of two debate one policy resolution all year, with plans, counterplans and evidence. Also called Cross-Examination (CX) debate. 2026-27 resolution: "The United States federal government should establish national health insurance in the United States."

2 vs 2

Affirmative and
Negative

8

speeches: 4
constructives, 4
rebuttals

8 min

each
constructive

5 min

each rebuttal

3 min

cross-ex after
each
constructive

8 min

prep per team
(NSDA)

Speech order

- 1 1st Affirmative Constructive (1AC) 8 min
- 2 Cross-ex: Negative asks 3 min
- 3 1st Negative Constructive (1NC) 8 min
- 4 Cross-ex: Affirmative asks 3 min
- 5 2nd Affirmative Constructive (2AC) 8 min
- 6 Cross-ex: Negative asks 3 min
- 7 2nd Negative Constructive (2NC) 8 min
- 8 Cross-ex: Affirmative asks 3 min
- 9 1st Negative Rebuttal (1NR) 5 min
- 10 1st Affirmative Rebuttal (1AR) 5 min
- 11 2nd Negative Rebuttal (2NR) 5 min
- 12 2nd Affirmative Rebuttal (2AR) 5 min

Prep: 8 minutes per team under NSDA rules, used between speeches. Many local leagues use 5; college uses 10 with longer speeches. The 2NC and 1NR together are the **negative block**.

Stock issues

- **Harms:** is there a serious problem now?
- **Inherency:** why does current policy (the status quo) not fix it?
- **Solvency:** will the plan solve it?
- **Topicality:** does the plan fit the resolution?

Negative arguments

Topicality (T): the plan is outside the resolution.

Disadvantage (DA): the plan causes a new harm (link and impact).

Counterplan (CP): a competing policy that solves better.

Kritik (K): challenges the assumptions behind the Affirmative (link, impact, alternative).

Case: direct attacks on harms and solvency.

Cross-examination

- 3 minutes after each constructive, asked by the opponent who does not speak next.
- Clarify the plan, expose weak evidence, set up your next speech.
- The questioner controls the time. It only counts if a later speech uses it.

What each speaker does

AFFIRMATIVE

1AC

Presents the plan and the stock issues with evidence, often as one or more advantages. Usually prepared in advance.

NEGATIVE

1NC

Sets out the Negative strategy: off-case positions (T, DAs, CPs, Ks) and on-case attacks.

AFFIRMATIVE

2AC

Answers every 1NC argument and rebuilds the case. Anything dropped here is hard to win back.

NEGATIVE

2NC

First half of the block: extends some 1NC positions in depth.

NEGATIVE

1NR

Second half of the block: takes the positions the 2NC did not. No new arguments from here.

AFFIRMATIVE

1AR

Answers 13 minutes of block in 5. Must be fast and efficient.

NEGATIVE

2NR

Collapses to the one or two best arguments and explains why they win.

AFFIRMATIVE

2AR

Last speech. Answers the 2NR and weighs: why the plan's benefits outweigh the risks.

How judges decide

A judge (or a panel in elimination rounds) votes for one team, with no ties, based on the flow: which arguments were extended and won by the end. Dropped arguments are usually treated as true. Judges differ: some vote on stock issues, some weigh costs and benefits like a lawmaker, some welcome kritiks. Each debater also gets speaker points.

Tips and common mistakes

- **Flow everything** on separate sheets.
- **Don't drop arguments** in the 2AC and 1AR.
- **Collapse** in the final rebuttals.
- **Weigh impacts:** size, likelihood, timeframe.
- **Clarity beats speed.**

Before the round

- ☐ Read the judge's paradigm on Tabroom
- ☐ Flow paper ready, one sheet per argument
- ☐ Plan text and 1AC (or 1NC shell) printed or loaded
- ☐ Answers ready for likely T, DAs and CPs
- ☐ Prep time plan agreed with your partner

Key terms

Plan

The Affirmative's policy proposal.

Status quo

The world now, without the plan.

Fiat

Assume the plan passes; debate whether it should.

Card

Evidence: tag, citation and quoted text.

Extend

Carry an argument into a later speech.

Paradigm

A judge's written judging philosophy.