Evidenceman on T:

Part One of a Four Part Lesson on:

How to Win Debates About Topicality

Topicality Arguments are arguments that say the affirmative is off-topic. Since the topic of policy debate is called the resolution, we will start by reminding everyone that in order to be on topic you have to know that we came to argue over the following statement:

Resolved: The United States Federal Government should substantially decrease its authority to either search without probable cause or detain without charge.

To my mind there are two types of T argument that debaters on the affirmative have to worry about.
- Topicality arguments that focus on one of the words or phrases in the resolution
- Topicality arguments about the overall relationship between the plan and the resolution

In this article I will just focus on the first kind of topicality, and just from the perspective of the NEGATIVE TEAM. Feel free to print it out and give it to novices on your team. This article is for those who are about to run a topicality argument to try and win on the negative.

Usually, Topicality has four parts and is run by the negative in their 1nc speech. The four parts are like this:

1. The definition of the word that you think is in question, say

Substantial
or
Probable Cause

is defined, either by dictionary

("the websters dictionary 2004 definition of substantial reads...")

or
by some reference to the word or phrase in a context that matters, for example,

("The Supreme Court defined probable cause in the yada v yada case as meaning yada yada...")

Introducing: Evidenceman and Kritik Womyn!

2. After the negative has laid down a definition that it sees fit to make the argument with, they must argue about what the VIOLATION is.
For example:
The affirmative plan is not substantial enough to meet this word, or
The affirmative plan is not doing "either/or", you are doing both, or
The status quo does not violate "probable cause"

3. So why is this VIOLATION such a big problem? This third part of the T argument is kinda like its impact. This is usually called grounds or standards or often (sadly) not named or elaborated upon at all. Yet to my mind it is the crux of the matter, whatever the words that you use. Why is it IMPORTANT that we stick to this topic, and stick to it so carefully? There are several strands of arguments including, but by no means limited to...
...Fairness, we came to play this game it is unfair to give the affirmative all the power to define this debate
...Grounds, if you allow all sorts of flexible thinking about the definitions of the resolution you end up getting a huge topic and THAT is not fair. Its like making the playing field to big. The aff only has to prep one case, the neg has to be ready for a thousand possible cases? I don't think so.
…Bright Line, there is a line drawn in the sand with this word's definition. We clearly point out where the "bright line" is and they step right over it. You would not let a football player step over the "bright line" of the sideline and keep going. Judge, stop this case from being heard!
...Education, straying too far from the topic we came to debate is bad for education and has in-round impacts on you me and the judge who is flowing this dinky little argument.

4. The last thing you got to say is "Hey judge, you should vote for this argument, even before you vote on other arguments, you should vote that our topicality argument wins the debate."
Here you could try and give as your reason for such a statement:

... procedure comes before substance in a game
...precedent is important, the aff should not be allowed to get away with this plan because it is a bad precedent for the rest of the season.
…topicality is traditionally a voter and we should adhere to all "traditions"
…One of the above is the most commonly used, yet is the least convincing. Can you guess which one?

Two of Evidenceman's archenemies:
Apocolypso and Dr. Drop

In my next article I will be explaining how the affirmative can beat back down the topicality argument, THROUGH PREPARATION AND HARD WORK. Until then, this is Evidenceman, signing off.