



## 14.5 Single Issue Debates

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*This activity develops and builds advanced skill at debating single issues (such as a disadvantage, a topicality violation, etc.). In this activity, small groups of students debate a single issue through a course of speeches. The affirmative team will defend a particular case against the specific argument forwarded by the negative team. Or, the affirmative team will defend a specific component of their affirmative case (for instance, solvency) against a 1NC block. The students will debate a set number of speeches, concluding with rebuttals. This activity works best as an after-school activity but can also be used in a classroom setting.*

### **Time Allotment**

The time allotment will vary depending on the format of the Single Issue debates and the number of Single Issue debates you conduct. Single Issue debates can be a regular feature of a class or of an after school practice. Or, you can set aside a class period or two and have every student participate in a Single Issue debate.

### **Goals**

By the end of this activity, each student will:

- gain familiarity with the process and techniques involved in responding to and defending a specific issue (such as a counterplan or a topicality violation).
- improve speech delivery, line-by-line argumentation, flowing, and critical thinking skills.
- improve general knowledge of the specific argument around which the debate centers.

### **Materials and Preparation**

To complete this activity you will need basic familiarity with the issue being debated and the affirmative case being defended. the following materials and preparation:

- Paper, pens, and a timer.
- Basic familiarity with the specific issue being debated.
- Photocopies of the affirmative case being defended.
- Photocopies of the evidence and argument shells for the specific issue that is being debated. You will need one to two sets of evidence for each mini specific issue debate.
- If available, it may be helpful to have case specific 2AC blocks or negative frontlines.

Specific issues that may be debated include:

- A specific disadvantage.
- A specific topicality violation shell.
- A specific counterplan shell.
- A specific critique shell.
- A specific advantage scenario.
- A solvency contention.
- A particular theoretical argument (for instance, conditionality of counterplans).



## Method

First, you should decide upon a format for the single issue debates. In general, a single issue debate might follow the format of a normal debate round, but have reduced time constraints (this is because the students are only debating a single issue). One example of a format for a single issue debate is as follows:

First Negative Constructive:	2-3 minutes
Second Affirmative Constructive:	2 minutes
First Negative Rebuttal:	2 minutes
First Affirmative Rebuttal:	1-2 minutes
Second Negative Rebuttal:	2 minutes
Second Affirmative Rebuttal:	2 minutes

You may want a format without cross examination, in order to save time. Or, you can add a cross examination component. You may also choose to shorten or lengthen these speeches or to add second rebuttal speech.

Next, agree upon an affirmative case that the students in the class will be defending.

Break the class up into groups (of four students or larger). Each group should divide into an affirmative and a negative team. Tell each team that they will be preparing to stage mini practice debates on single issues.

Distribute, or ask students to take out of their files, the shell or frontline relating to the specific issue they will debate. This issue may be a specific topicality violation, a solvency contention, etc.

Once you have assigned issues to teams of students, have them begin to prepare. For example, the student on the negative team might read over a disadvantage shell while her opponents on the affirmative team would read a 2AC block defending their case against that disadvantage.

If one team does not have pre-blocked answers, the team should examine the shell of the argument and list as many answers as it can which do not require evidence to challenge the assumptions of the argument.

Once the students have drafted responses to the shell, the mini single issue debates should begin. The debates begin with the primary argument (in this case the disadvantage shell, the 1NC solvency block, etc.) being read. The students on the other team (and any students observing the debate) should flow all speeches. Then the affirmative team will respond to the argument. From there, the debate will unfold according to the format.

The audience for the debate can either be the entire class or the other students in the group. If the entire class observes the debate, the whole class should flow and there should be time allocated for a post round discussion. If the debates happen in small groups, you should ask students to turn in their flows from the debates. You may even have student observers evaluate the rounds.



### Follow Up:

Once students have completed one single issue debate, you have students to switch sides. If a student was affirmative, she would become negative on the same issue. You may even have the student who delivered a constructive speech deliver a rebuttal. If you have students switch sides, this variation allows students to focus on mastering clash on specific issues and emphasizes depth and analysis-heavy debate.

### Variation:

You can vary the number of 2AC or 1NC arguments to make it more appropriate to the debater's experience level. For beginning debaters, have the debate center around fewer arguments and focus on line by line debating.

### Variation:

For topicality, have the affirmative team run a can that has questionable topicality. And have the negative team prepare and deliver a topicality violation for that case. Also, if a team has lost affirmative rounds to a particular topicality violation, have them conduct single issue debates defending their case against that violation.

### Variation:

Before a disadvantage mini debate begins, have each group practice telling the link story of their disadvantage in ways that alternately increase and decrease the credibility of the argument. Have students practice assessing the impact of the disadvantage as compared to the impact of the affirmative case.

### Variation:

Practice debating a particular issue (a critique, a counter plan, etc.) twice, each time assuming that the judge holds a different paradigm. For instance, in different mini debates assume that the judge is either a policy maker, a hypothesis tester, a games player judge, a stock issue judge, etc. Conduct the same mini debates (or even the rebuttals of the same mini debates) as if you are debating the same issue in two different rounds in front of two judges with different paradigms.