

DEFINING THE TOPIC, MODELS AND TESTS

1. Introduction

This guide is intended to provide an overview of definitions, models and tests. These aspects of debating are challenging and it is difficult to give a single set of rules for all cases. When in doubt, teams should propose definitions, models and tests that are reasonable and in the spirit of the topic. More information on these issues can be found in the *Australia-Asia Debating Guide* and the *SADA Guide to Adjudicating*.

2. Defining the topic

It is the duty of the affirmative team to define the topic in every debate. The definition should be reasonable, balanced and in accordance with the plain-English meaning of the topic. Dictionary definitions should not be used; common-sense explanations should be given for the important or ambiguous words or phrases. For example, the affirmative would not need to define 'Australia' in the topic 'that Australia is a good global citizen'. However, the affirmative should explain what 'a good global citizen' is.

2.1 *Challenging a definition*

Definition challenges should be extremely rare. Definition challenges are best saved for when the affirmative's definition is unfair or renders the topic un-debatable. Definition challenges must occur at the first negative. The first negative should clearly state that a definition challenge is being mounted and explain why. The first negative should then propose an alternative definition and explain why it is superior. Additionally, if possible, the first negative should rebut the affirmative's case on the assumption that the affirmative's definition is valid.

If the negative team challenges the affirmative's definition, the second affirmative can either accept the negative's definition or defend his or her team's original definition. The second affirmative should then rebut the negative's case on the assumption that

the negative's definition is valid. Subsequent speakers from each team should engage in a similar process during their rebuttal.

3. Tests

Empirical topics ask teams to debate a question of fact, e.g. 'that our education system is failing students'. For empirical debates the affirmative team should provide a test (i.e. a set of criteria) by which the teams' cases can be measured. As with definitions, the test should be reasonable and applicable to both teams. Elements of the test for the above topic could include: literacy and numeracy standards and the proportion of students completing secondary school. It would then be for each team to show that the education system was or was not producing students which met accepted literacy standards etc. Teams should seek to explain why their arguments satisfy the test and why their oppositions' arguments fail to satisfy the test.

The negative team may wish to adopt the affirmative's test, suggest additional elements of the test or propose an entirely new test.

4. Models

If the topic gives rise to a policy debate, e.g. 'that we should cut taxes', the first affirmative must provide a model by which it explains how the advocated policy will be implemented. In the example above, an affirmative team could argue, among other things, for cutting income tax to low income earners, or it could argue for cutting all taxes. In some debates, the negative team (through their first speaker) may wish to provide a model. For example, for the topic 'that we should assassinate terrorists' the negative team may wish to argue that tougher anti-terror laws which give police powers to detain suspects is a better policy.

Models should be brief and provide an illustration of the kind of policy the team is endorsing. Teams should be wary of focussing too much on the model(s). Whether a team's model is viable or practical is only part of the debate, each team must also prove their side of the topic in principle. In the terrorism example above, it would not be enough for the negative team to show that the affirmative's model for assassinating terrorists would not work; the negative team should also seek to prove that assassinating terrorists is a bad idea regardless of the model. Unlike definitions and tests, models only need to be applicable and advantageous to one side of the debate.

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