

Actor Debates

Identifying Actor Debates

Actor debates are topics that include the phrase “as x” where x is the actor. An actor is simply an individual or group with the power to make some decision.

For example, “That, as school students, we should not do our homework” is an actor debate where school students are an actor with the ability to choose not to do their homework. However, “That school students should not do homework” is not an actor debate because it does not include the phrase “as school students.”

Interpreting Actor Debates

Actor debates can be interpreted as: “That the actor is incentivised to make a particular decision” or, in other words, “That the actor is benefitted by making a particular decision.”

For example, the topic “That, as an energy company, we would stop burning fossil fuels” could be interpreted as “That an energy company is incentivised to stop burning fossil fuels” or “That ceasing the burning of fossil fuels would benefit an energy company.”

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Differences with other debates

In most debates you are required to consider how the implementation of a particular policy affects society as a whole, and it is acceptable to raise harms and benefits that affect any group in society. However, in an actor debate, you are required to consider only how the implementation of a particular policy affects the actor in question.

For example, in the topic “That energy companies should stop burning fossil fuels” it would be acceptable for an affirmative team to say that this would be a good model to implement because it would lead to less greenhouse gas emissions, leading to seas rising to a lesser extent and hence preserving more coastal human settlements.

However, in the actor topic “That, as an energy company, we would stop burning fossil fuels” this argument would not be acceptable because it does not show how ceasing to burn fossil fuels benefits the energy company, only how it benefits coastal communities.

When deciding whether an argument is relevant in an actor debate, teams should consider what the actor’s motivations, interests and needs are. They should then make arguments that demonstrate how the actor making this decision does or does not align with these motivations, interests and needs.

For example, in this debate, the energy company might be motivated to make decisions that improve their profits. Therefore, any consequences of the decision that might affect the company’s profit margin would be relevant to raise in this debate. However, as the energy company is not motivated to preserve coastal human settlements, the earlier argument is not relevant to the debate.