Case Structure

Guide for Penn for Youth Debate Lesson Plan 2

Note: This lesson plan is intended to familiarize students with the structure of a case and what elements are included. Lesson Plan 4 provides more detailed instruction on how to write a case. It may be helpful to go through the current topic after presenting the contents of this lesson plan. Students can discuss which parts of the resolution they think they should define, as well as ideas for contentions.

When debaters are preparing for a tournament, they'll need to write a case that outlines their main arguments for both sides of the topic. The first speaker from each team will read their case during their 4-minute constructive speech. Every debater has their own specific way of writing their cases, but all good cases should follow these basic outlines. Sometimes partnerships will split up how they write their cases. Common ways of dividing the workload involve having one partner write the Pro case and the other write the Con case. The students may also choose to each work on 1-2 contentions for both sides.

This lesson plan will focus on:
- Definitions
- Framework
- Contentions
- Research

Definitions

Definitions are read first at the beginning of the case and are used to ensure that all the debaters and the judge are on the same page. Sometimes debate topics involve complicated ideas and it is necessary to define them so that the judge understands what is being discussed. Debaters can choose which words in the resolution they want to define. Definitions should be from reputable sources, such as Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Having definitions in your case is also helpful in case your opponent tries to use skewed definitions to make the debate favor them.

Oftentimes only the first speaking team in the round needs to read their definitions. The second speaking team doesn't need to read their definitions if they agree with the

definitions set forth by their opponents. This is useful because then the second speaking team has more time to read their case.

Framework

Frameworks are used by judges to decide who won a round. Debaters can choose to present a framework that will help the judge decide what to focus on in the round. Sometimes it is helpful to think about framework as a lens that the judge will use to view the round.

It is not necessary to have a framework. Debaters can choose to use frameworks when they feel like there is something in particular they would like for the judge to focus on when making their decision. Good usage of framework will have two parts:
1. The debaters must first explain why their framework is important and should be used for the round. If both teams have a framework, then each team will have to prove why their framework should be preferred over their opponents' framework.
2. The debaters must then weigh everything in the round under their framework. The framework is initially presented in the constructive speeches but should be used throughout the round.
3.

For example, if one team wanted to use a framework that involved focusing on the long-term impacts of a policy over the short-term impacts, they would first have to explain why it is necessary to prioritize long-term impacts over short term impacts. They would then have to then discuss what the long-term impacts actually are and why they should win the round because of the long-term impacts of the policy.

If a team doesn't have a framework for their case, they will have to adhere to their opponents' framework or explain why that framework is abusive or not relevant and shouldn't be used in weighing the round. To effectively use the other team's framework, the debaters should address how the impacts they argue for achieve the framework better than their opponents' impacts.

Frameworks can be hard to use and inexperienced debaters may have a difficult time using them effectively. It is not necessary to have a framework. Framework can be discussed with your students just so they know what it is if they see it in round, but they don't need to have frameworks in their cases unless they feel like they can effectively argue with one.

Contentions

Contentions make up the bulk of a case. Each contention focuses on one key argument and should work to persuade the judge as to why they should affirm or negate the resolution. Each contention should have evidence and logic to back up the debater's claim. Public Forum cases will typically have 2-3 contentions per side.

There are three basic components of an argument: claim, warrant, and impact. The **claim** is whatever the debater is trying to prove is true. The **warrant** is how or why the claim is true. Warrants should involve both reasoning and evidence. The **impact** is why the claim matters. Evidence should be used throughout the contention whenever necessary and should always be properly cited.

Claim - Topic sentence (Tagline)
> *Ex: Economic sanctions are ineffective*

Warrant - Cited evidence, data, and logical reasoning that supports the claim
> *Ex: Example of failed sanctions: embargo on Cuba*

Impact - Explain the effects/risks - why does this matter?
> *Ex: Innocent civilians will be harmed by sanctions*

For beginning debaters, it may be helpful to use the provided "Basic Case Outline" template that has them fill in each part of their argument where appropriate. Beginning debaters will sometimes have the hardest time with writing their warrants. This is a great opportunity to talk through logical links with them - what is the logic behind their argument? What are possible holes in their argumentation, and how can they defend their claim logically? This is also a good chance to discuss research methods with them.

Research

Since topics are often relevant to current events, debaters will learn to use either credible news sources or academic literature.

PFYD and ASAP will provide "briefs" to each team monthly. Briefs are documents released monthly by organizations like Victory Briefs Institute that are filled with research on each topic. These are often helpful to use when students are first getting familiar with a topic or are new to debate. The briefs will have plenty of evidence that can be used by both sides. However, since the briefs are being provided to all schools partnering with ASAP and PFYD, this means that many debaters will likely be familiar

with the evidence in them. As such, it is a good idea to challenge students who want to do well in competitions to find their own evidence.

When doing research, students need to make sure to have proper citations for their evidence and have these stored someplace that will be easily accessible during a round. Typically, debaters will include the author, date, and institution/source in their case as they read evidence. This is a great opportunity to talk to the students about looking for credible sources - how do they know that a source is credible? What sources are unreliable because of possible vested interests in the topic at hand? Is a more recent source more credible than a source from fifteen years ago?

One of the most helpful skills a debater can learn is being able to do research efficiently and sort through unreliable sources, as it has many applications outside of and after a student's debate career. Coaches can choose how much they want to talk about this, and what personal tips they have for doing research.

Lesson Plan 3 will discuss in further detail how to determine the credibility of a source and how to store evidence citations.

Case Outline

This basic case outline of a pro case can be used to help novice debaters write their first cases.

My partner and I strongly [affirm/negate] the resolution: Resolved: [resolution].

To clarify the round, we offer the following definitions:
[definitions with sources].

We offer the framework of [framework] because [justification/explanation of framework].

Contention 1: **(Claim)** [tagline]
(Warrant) [logic and evidence to support the claim]
(Impact) [impacts of the claim with supporting evidence]

Contention 2: **(Claim)** [tagline]
(Warrant) [logic and evidence to support the claim]
(Impact) [impacts of the claim with supporting evidence]

Contention 3: **(Claim)** [tagline]
(Warrant) [logic and evidence to support the claim]
(Impact) [impacts of the claim with supporting evidence]

For all these reasons, we [affirm/negate].