How to Break Down a New Resolution into Contention Level Ideas

Introduction: In debate, the *resolution* is the topic you are debating. As a debater, you need to find arguments for both sides of the resolution, but first you need to figure out what the resolution even means. Here we discuss what strategies you can use to understand a resolution and find arguments for it.

For the rest of this, we will use the April 2017 resolution as an example:

"The United States ought to replace the Electoral College with a direct national popular vote."

Step 1: Understand all the words

If you look at the resolution and don't understand any terms, you should take those words and put them into a Google search. For example, what is the Electoral College? If you don't know, you should look up "what is the Electoral College" which will not only give you information you need to know about the resolution, but also might lead you to some arguments for or against it.

Step 2: Findings more arguments

Now that you understand what all the words in the resolution mean, we are trying to find arguments to use for both sides. Here are some tips you can use:
1. **Tip 1: Look for Existing Opinions:** Topics usually already have lots of people writing online about their opinions. Look at debate forums (procon.org, pf.debate.us.org, or debate.org.) or google search terms in the topic with different "opinion" words like "Electoral College good" to see what is out there.
2. **Tip 2: Add common topics or outcomes to see what the resolution might lead to:** In general, most topics will also have some association with the following topics/words
    a. Examples include: jobs, economy, environment, military, trade, relations, deaths, poverty, etc. Given what you know about the resolution's terms, add words that you think might happen because of the resolution.

The below video demonstrates these strategies.

https://youtu.be/dKHV4Wd_hII

Scroll down for the activity!

Now that you have seen how the process plays out, try it yourself!

Use the steps above to break down your own topic. The point of this activity is to become familiar with the process of understanding a topic and beginning to find arguments. It is okay if you don't know what everything in the topic means or if you can't think of any arguments off the top of your head. That is what Google and research is for!

Analyze the following resolution from February 2016:

Resolved: The United States federal government should adopt a carbon tax.

For this resolution:
1. Find 1 key term of the resolution and define it or describe what it means
2. Find 1 argument on the resolution (for or against a carbon tax) from debate forums (procon.org, pf.debate.us.org, or debate.org.)
3. Find 1 new argument on the resolution (for or against a carbon tax) from google searching using "opinion" words to find different articles.
4. Find one "topic" that the resolution relates to and do additional research on how it affects it. For example, the sample topic related to inequality because the Electoral College meant that some people's votes counted more than others.