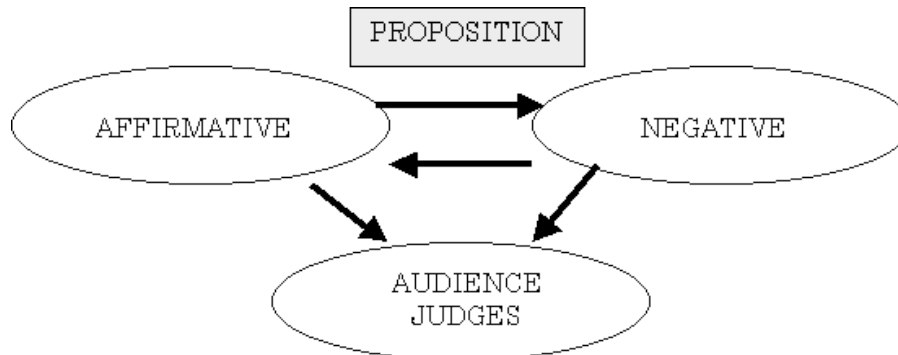


Basic Elements of Academic Debate

Participants

A verbal debate is primarily conducted between two teams: the affirmative side to support the topic and the negative side to oppose the topic. The speakers (debaters) from the two teams in give explanations for and against the topic.

The two teams are not only communicating with each other but also with a third party - the audience. The affirmative and the negative teams are trying their best to persuade the audience to believe their side. The audience may give a decision at the end of the debate.



There are officers who take care of enforcing rules (in this case, the professor). The officer's job is minimum in academic debate since the speakers are supposed to know when and how long they may speak. The officer enforces the strict time limitation of the debate. When the allotted time is over, the timekeeper calls the closing of the speech. If the speaker continues to speak, either the chairperson or the timekeeper will stop the speaker.

Proposition (Resolution, Topic)

Topics in debate are called with special names: Proposition or Resolution. The proposition is customarily written as a declarative sentence, as with the topics you were provided for this assignment. Listed below are 3 different types of proposition concerning facts, values, and policies.

Propositions of Fact : These are factual question about events in the past, in the present, or predictions about future events, such as:

Resolved: That UFOs are spaceships from another planet.

Resolved: That Yamataikoku was located in Kyushu.

Resolved: That the Hawks will win the Pacific League championship next year.

Propositions of Value: these are value judgments. If the value is of purely personal choice, we cannot really debate. We must decide the proposition so that the affirmative and the negative teams can give some reasons for their side. Examples include:

Resolved: That private high schools are better than public high schools.

Resolved: That watching TV is a waste of time.

Propositions of Policy: these are concerned with courses of action one can take. They are often actions of the central and local governments. It is phrased as "X (agent) should do Y (action)" or sometimes "Y (action) should be done." Propositions of this type are most often used in academic debate:

Resolved: That Japan should abolish death penalty.

Resolved: That the American bases should be removed from Okinawa.

Resolved: That the Japanese government should ban all genetically modified foods.

Criteria for Good Propositions

When we set up a proposition for debate, we must take care in phrasing it so that we can maximize educational benefits of academic debate.

- The proposition must be focused on one single idea. A bad example may be "Resolved: That Japan should abandon nuclear power plants and promote solar power generation." The two actions in the proposition are not necessarily paired together in discussing energy resources.
- The proposition must be expressed in an affirmative sentence so that the affirmative and the negative positions may not be confused.
- The proposition must be controversial. In other words, the arguments for and against the proposition must be more or less balanced.
- The proposition must be neutrally worded. The proposition like "Resolved: That Japan should abolish inhumane death penalty" is biased in favor of the affirmative side.
- The proposition must be suitable for participants in terms of interest and difficulty.

The Burden of Proof/Rejoinder

The affirmative team assumes the burden of proof, i.e., to prove that the proposition is probably true. The negative team assumes the burden of rejoinder, i.e., to attack the affirmative team's arguments. If the proposition is concerned with a policy, the affirmative team must be prepared to give reasonable details of their plan, that is a realization of the proposition. It must show that the plan would be desirable if adopted; it does not need to show that the plan would be adopted. If the negative team presents a counter-plan, it must assume the same burden.

Goals of this Assignment

This project has multiple goals that should prove of use throughout your college career. They include:

1. *Increasing your comfort with public speaking.* The best way to get over a fear of speaking in front of a group is to do it with some regularity.
2. *Developing collaborative research skills.* Working with a group of people on a project can significantly increase the quality of the final project because you have multiple "brains" working on a common problem. However, you also have multiple personalities, work ethics, interpersonal skills, etc. to deal with as well. Determining mechanisms for overcoming these negative aspects is an important component of professional development.
3. *Learning to phrase your arguments in a clear, concise fashion.* You will have a limited time frame in which to express your ideas. Therefore, you will have to consider your points in advance and practice with your teammates to ensure you are within the prescribed time frame.
4. *Thinking on your feet.* The audience (rest of the class) will have read the articles assigned by each team. They will also have listened to your presentations. They will then have time to ask you questions, and this is where you get a chance to show how much you learned about your topic.
5. *Arguing from facts.* Many of these topics are very emotionally charged. However, you will be expected to give a balanced discussion, providing research to back up your claims. You will be arguing from the head, not the heart – an important and powerful debate skill in many realms.