

CASES

Motions proposing a change:

Affirmative

1. PROBLEM – why do we need a change? What is the problem we should address?

2. SOLUTION – What is the solution to the problem?

3. MODEL – How is the solution to be put in place? How realistic is this? What is the timeframe for the solution? Will it happen overnight?

4. CAUSAL LINKS – How is the solution linked to the problem? Why will it work?

5. AIM / ONUS – What do we expect from the solution? Should it 'solve' the problem or merely improve the situation? If so, how much improvement is acceptable? What is the aim of the solution?

6. COST / BENEFIT ANALYSIS – Does the Solution have other consequences? Are these positive or negative? How do they support the adoption of your model? How can negative consequences be minimized?

Example – That we should decriminalise marijuana.

1. Problem – marijuana industry is part of the black market, with corresponding negative effects on society (bearing costs of illicit use and associates crime, health effects on individuals) the economy (loss of tax revenue) and the police (enforcement costs)

2. Solution – decriminalisation.

3. Model – legislation: no criminal penalties for growth and use in a licensed cannabis café, for those over the age of 20, with requisite photo-ID. (Note: possession outside these contexts remains illegal, though penalties are reduced to fines without blemish on the criminal record.)

4. Causal Links? – will allow open education about drug use and break the monopoly of the gangs upon the issue, as well as freeing police time and opening the economy to tax revenue, which will help to pay the costs of use.

5. Onus – not claiming to prevent marijuana use – this is impossible – rather aim to reduce costs of use.

6. What about underage users? What about home growers? Will it encourage use – how much and is this acceptable or not?

Negative

1. PROBLEM – is there really a problem? Is it bad enough that it need attention?
2. SOLUTION – make sure they have one.
3. MODEL – Is it practical? Are there any gaps in the affirmative model which can be construed unfavourably or questioned?
4. CAUSAL LINKS – Will this really solve the problem?
5. ONUS – will it be enough to solve the problem (if the affirmative set out to do this or ignore it altogether) Alternatively, is the improvement the affirmative aims for too small to make a real difference?
6. CBA – Are the benefits of the solution outweighed by any negative consequences of it?
7. BETTER ALTERNATIVE – Is there a more appropriate solution which will solve the problem better, or at less cost, or both? If so, set out the model for it as above, and make the appropriate causal link. A good strategy is to compare the two solutions so that it clearly attacks the affirmative case.

To return then to marijuana.....

1. Problem – probably accept that there is a problem but might paint it differently by associating it more with the use of marijuana and health costs than with contingent costs such as gangs etc.

2. Solution – Yep

3. Model – Question gaps such as problems with photo-id's and home users and growers. Note that because of licensing there are still costly enforcement issues.

4. Causal links – the affirmative really have not attacked the problem. They cannot show that their measures will decrease marijuana use, nor that it will keep it within legal and thus taxable channels. Rather that are being permissive. This will only lead to increased use (see Amsterdam) The costs of this cannot be met by tax revenue as people can grow marijuana at home, not simply in large economic plantations.

5. Onus – have to show significant change – at best, this will increase use while generating tax revenue to counter this. Hence, the affirmative arguably do not meet their onus.

6. Better alternative – might say status quo as the law deters dome users (yes I know this is blatantly wrong, but it is arguable). Alternatively you might advocate tougher penalties and more invasive practises. However, this is clearly difficult, as you would have to set out exactly what the model is.

The Judgment Debate

Affirmative

1. DEFINITION – decide what the issue or thing you are making a judgment upon is.

2. CRITERIA – decide how to make the judgment. One technique is to consider what we expect of the thing we are judging. This works well for success/failure debates. Alternatively you might ask what you would have to prove for the judgment to be true.

Whatever you choose, explain (at least briefly) why you think it is appropriate.

Examples :

That Private schools are better than state schools.

Possible criteria = academic success, life skill development (ie the various roles of the secondary school)

That gun control is mind control

You might ask when would gun control be mind control and set this up as your criteria.

Hence, a good criterion might be that 'the affirmative must show that gun control represents an unjustifiable limit on the freedom of choice because it does not limit harm to others caused by guns.

That Labour has it right

What is the purpose of government? Of course there is no consensus on this. Choose a reasonable purpose that seems appropriate to your case.

Given this is a centrist government, an appropriate purpose might be the balancing of social provisions with economic stability and growth.

3. ONUS – how do we decide if it meets the test?

Examples :

That private schools are better than state schools

One idea would be that the private school is better in the majority of cases. (Note this does not mean that the debate is decided on examples. Rather you must propose external/independent reasons why, logically, private schools are better in the majority of cases, such as financial or social reasons.)

That gun control is mind control

Here you might state that you have to prove that gun control would not lead to a significant reduction in crime using guns – only a few, fringe cases would be affected.

Thus, the standard is said to be 'in typical cases'.

That Labour has got it right

Here a cost benefit analysis might be appropriate.

Negative

1. CRITERIA – Consider what the affirmative criteria are. If you can prove that they don't meet them, accept them.

If the criteria exclude key elements of your case, you may broaden them but justify why you are doing this and remember to argue on their criteria as well in case yours are not accepted, unless they are clearly truisitic.

NB: Always know what criteria you want in case the affirmative don't actually propose any.

Examples:

That private schools are better than state schools

If academic success were chosen then you might suggest that the role of the school is wider than this and we have to look at life skills development as well, with academic success merely as part of a total package.

That the UN has failed

If the affirmative criterion is conflict resolution then you might argue that the UN has other roles as well such as health as the World Health Organisation has been a great success.

2. ONUS – Watch out for low or high onuses. You do not have to prove that the UN has been successful in imposing world peace – this is impossible. The question is whether what it has done is acceptable or not.

- Make sure that the affirmative stick to their onus – prove what they set out to prove. If they do not, point this out.
- Alternatively, if their onus is very low, again point this out, ask if they are proving anything substantial.

[The NZ Schools' Debating Council thanks the Coaches of the Canterbury Speaking Union Team 2000 for making this document available.]