



## Affirmative Casing: The Most Undervalued Tool

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*Abstract: A trend many debaters notice, at least, as they initially start debating is that they are losing a significantly higher percentage of affirmative rounds compared to negative rounds. In case it's not readily obvious, that is seemingly problematic considering most tournaments require that you win at least one, if not two affirmative rounds to make it to elimination rounds. And even that assumes you win all of your negative rounds, which is rarely ever done. Thus, it is extreme importance that you equip yourself with the ability to win affirmative debate rounds, and that is the purpose of this article.*

### **I Am Losing Too Many Affirmative Debates, Why?**

The main reason that people lose debates when they are affirmative is because they do not put enough effort and time into strategically crafting their affirmative cases. If you are not thinking about what your 1AR and 2AR strategies will be when you are writing your affirmative case, then you have already set yourself up for failure.

Somehow it's become a relatively well accepted belief that if you just mash a bunch of evidence together with pre-written frameworks, that you have written an affirmative case. If this is your mindset or case-writing philosophy, then I guarantee you are always going to lose to a negative that has more than three cards and a negative case because you've just enabled the negative to capitalize on their massive time advantage that they have due to the time structure.

Your affirmative case should tell a story. If your strategy relies on 7 different arguments with no relation to one another, then you're giving the negative the ability to tee off on any one of them and bury you under a mountain of arguments that you'll have no chance answering. If you are not preempting common negative arguments in your initial speech, then you are doing yourself a disservice. Think about it strategically—currently, you probably spend precious time in the 1AR answering negative arguments that you knew from the beginning of the round that they were going to make. Why wait? If you put answers to those arguments in your affirmative case, then they HAVE to answer it or else they won't be able to win that argument.

You may ask, "But why would I waste time making defensive arguments in my affirmative case?" The answer to that is simple. First, there is no reason why these arguments have to be defensive. They just as easily could be turns to common negative arguments that you could also extend as offense even if they don't make the argument you were intending to preempt. You lose absolutely nothing by making these kinds of arguments in your first speech, especially if you strategically place them throughout your case so that they become part of the overall story that your case is trying to tell. This will help segue them into your case, making them seem like just another argument (which they are, regardless), but also increasingly the

likelihood the negative won't even realize the purpose of those arguments is to answer arguments they will make.

You should love being affirmative. You get the first and last speech, you get to set the grounds for the debate, and pick the issues that the very last speech the judge hears gets to focus on. The most important thing to remember when writing an affirmative case is that it should be set up so that the 1AR can blow up mistakes made by the negative, and collapse to a specific issue in the 2AR.

### **New Affirmatives: The Trendy Nightmare**

Too many debaters are losing debates because they're relying on reading new affirmatives, cases that they have not previously read, in hopes of achieving a 'surprise' factor. This is flawed. At the Cross-Examination Debate Tournament of Champions in 2011, 17/29 new affirmatives lost in elimination rounds. Admittedly these statistics are a bit skewed/not as relevant to LD, but we can reach general conclusions independent of the statistics.

There are a few reasons why new affirmatives are losing debates. First, people are not preparing blocks specific to their case. These should be your best friends. If you are going to write a new affirmative that you think is extremely strategic, and naturally favors your side of the topic, why wouldn't you also prepare blocks so that you're ready to answer anything that the negative could possibly say?

Second, debaters are reading new affirmatives without becoming comfortable with that argument. If you don't know what the case says, you do yourself no good by reading it in a round because you're going to know just as much as your opponent about it, if not less. The strategy behind new cases relies on being able to explain your argument, and know every detail regarding the issue it addresses. You wouldn't read your original case if you knew nothing about it, why would you be so willing to do so with something just because it was a "surprise"?

Accompanying that previous point is that you need to be an expert on the literature that deals with your case. You should be familiar with the background of the argument, what authors on both sides say, and the best justifications for your argument. If you don't know these details, you are very likely to look extremely foolish in cross-examination, and undermine whatever strategic value your case may have had.

Third, you must be prepared to extend and explain your argument to the judge in rebuttals. Even if you have an amazing case, it's entirely irrelevant if you can't extend it and explain it. At the end of the day, it's up to the judge to determine whether or not what you're saying is right, and if you don't have the capacity to communicate with the judge, then you've just lost. This may mean pre-writing your extensions without just repeating the evidence so that you can explain your position in a succinct manner, or it may mean something else. Regardless of what it is, know what your argument is, be able to explain it in an efficient manner, and communicate with your judge.

### *Is There Anything Strategic About New Affirmatives?*

Certainly. My point is not that you should never read a new affirmative, but rather that there are certain things you are going to want to think about before you put yourself in that position. New affirmatives give you the ability to catch your opponent off guard, which can serve a huge strategic purpose in instances

where you've been making the same argument the entire tournament and people have pre-prepared responses to your arguments.

Moreover, they can significantly increase your knowledge of the topic because they force you to delve into a niche of the topic that many debaters may have not yet explored, or it may open up avenues that lead to other interesting, relevant arguments. Even if you don't end up writing a case regarding that affirmative argument you had in mind, at the very least you did more topic specific research, which is an invaluable tool.

But remember, new affirmatives can hurt you if they aren't handled properly. New affirmatives aren't just about the surprise, they have to be solid, well developed, well supported positions. If you aren't ready to defend the case against a storm of generic arguments, much less case specific arguments, then prepare to get hosed. If you do not have blocks because you are counting on people not having answers to your argument, then I guarantee you are going to lose a vast majority of rounds against any relatively competent debater. Finally, if you have not practiced with your new affirmative, or someone did all the research for you and you do not have a working understanding of the literature, you will almost surely get beat because your opponents understanding of the argument is no different than yours, eliminating the strategic purpose in the first place.

### *Bad Reasons to Write New Affirmatives*

If you want to write a new affirmative solely because it's a cool idea and you want people to talk about it, don't do it. You may as well just talk about the cool idea you found because at least you won't lose rounds in that scenario. If you want to have a bunch of secret arguments, so you decide to write a new affirmative, save it. Unless that secret is a solid position that is well supported in the literature, it's not worth the time and effort it takes to write an affirmative. Finally, if you think that the only way that you'll be successful is by having a bunch of different affirmative cases, you're wrong. My senior year, going into the Tournament of Champions, which was the biggest tournament of my career, I only had one case and it was the same position I had been reading the entire topic. I had done more research than my opponents, was prepared for anything and everything, and thus it didn't matter that I only had one affirmative case.

### **How to Write an Affirmative - A Formula for Success**

Read, read, read, and then read some more. You should have read at least 30-40 articles to find the best potential affirmative argument. Once you have found that argument that you think is best, read more articles! Reading articles and being able to extract information from them is the most important skill that you can have as a debater.

Your research process should not be as follows: find an article, read it, cut the evidence from it, and then find another one. This process is much slower than the one I will offer, and won't help you gain a bigger picture of the topic, or of arguments. Instead, you should save about 25-30 articles that look like they will be helpful to you. You will be able to determine this by reading the abstract of the article, as well as the conclusion. As a side note, reading the conclusion is integral, as it will make it very clear to you whether or not the article you are reading concludes in favor of the negative or affirmative. Once you have saved these articles, go through them one by one, read the article and pull the relevant evidence from them, and then move on to the next article. For organizations sake, file every article you've read into a "Read" folder so that you have a way of delineating between read and unread articles.

As you are reading these articles, you should “cut” or pull the evidence that you think is the best. Don’t go into the article looking for specific arguments just yet, it’s a bit too early for that. Instead, you should be looking for several things:

1. Evidence or “cards” that could belong in a case
2. Frontlines<sup>1</sup>
3. Evidence that you can read as “extension evidence”<sup>2</sup>
4. Blocks

After you’ve cut about 75-100 cards, you should go through and quality check them, getting rid of the cards that, upon further review, would not serve much of a purpose or simply aren’t very good. After you’ve done that quality check, highlight and tag all of the cards that are left over.

Depending on the quality of the evidence that you’ve obtained, and how much time you have, you can start writing your affirmative case. If you don’t feel like you’re ready to do that, feel free to go back and repeat the aforementioned steps.

If you start to write your affirmative case, remember these few things:

1. Any card is replaceable. If you come across a card that makes an argument better than the card in the 1AC, replace it, and put the card originally in the 1AC into the extension evidence section of your filing.
2. Cards that don’t belong in your case still serve a useful, if not irreplaceable, purpose so **DO NOT GET RID OF THEM.**

Once you feel like you have enough cards to write a 1AC and construct solid frontlines, begin practice debates. By now you should know the literature on this debate pretty well, at least well enough to know a number of potential answers to your case, and you will want to make sure you have arguments prepared to answer those objections.

If your affirmative is time sensitive (i.e. it relies on political decisions or international relations that change every day) make sure that you are reading new articles every other day at the latest, so that you can keep your evidence updated. Sometimes there are instances where the very best cards are written the day of an elimination round, and if you can read cards that were written an hour before your round it not only is likely to catch your opponent off guard, but also skyrockets your credibility.

*How Do I Know That I Have the Best Cards?*

Good question. You will know that you have the best possible evidence when your cards have deep (i.e. multiple) warrants justifying your argument that you can extend when the negative just answers the general

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<sup>1</sup> Frontlines are distinct from blocks in this way. Frontlines are typically only relevant as blocks in regards to a specific case that you are reading whereas blocks will answer all sorts of generic negative arguments. Often times these terms are used to mean the same thing, and while that’s not entirely incorrect, it is a bit imprecise, and thus I will distinguish the two.

<sup>2</sup> Extension evidence is just evidence that makes an argument similar to one that you have in a contention, but may make the argument in a shorter way, or may use a different warrant than the one in the case, and can be read in rebuttals as part of your extension of the initial argument.

idea your argument makes, and not the specifics of your argument. Your evidence should be up to date and written by qualified sources. You may have an amazing card, but if it's written by a blogger living in his mom's basement, you're going to be in serious trouble when someone points out that your author has no credibility whatsoever.

Once you have read a sufficient amount of articles related to your affirmative, you will be able to distinguish the best cards from the weak ones. If you look back at the cards that you cut at the very beginning of your research process, you will almost certainly realize that the deeper you get into the literature, the better your evidence will be.

### **How to Defend an Affirmative**

After you have written the affirmative, begin researching answers to your affirmative. This may seem counterintuitive, but it will do, at the very least, two very important things:

1. It will force you to think about how people are preparing to answer your affirmative, helping you come up with more blocks.
2. It will allow you to cut answers to your affirmative in case you weren't the only debater with that idea, and you'd be surprised how often you aren't.

If you have a teammate, start doing practice debates. Let them try and point out logical flaws in your arguments, or steps that you are missing for the affirmative to tell a complete story. If you don't have a teammate, read more articles, research debates between experts, etc. You should be able to predict which arguments negatives are going to make before they ever get the chance to reach their hands into their files and make those arguments.

If you go into a round with a new affirmative and you have not gotten into the literature, then you significantly increase your chance of losing. The reason that new affirmatives are strategic is not just because they shock people, it's because they surprise people AND you have a superior understanding of the literature surrounding that debate so that you can exploit the fact that your opponent is unprepared. At the end of the day, the thing to remember is that the purpose of your affirmative case is that it is, what you believe to be based on tons of research, the best argument on the topic.

### **Preparing for the 1AR – A Must-Do**

As I discussed earlier, your affirmative case should have preempts to common negative arguments in it. These can be placed at the top of your case before you even get into your framework, but the strategic disadvantage of this is that it's very obvious what you're attempting to do. Another place that you can make these arguments is embedded in your contentions. Depending on how smoothly you integrate these arguments, it's possible that they won't stick out at all as preemptive arguments, and will be dropped by negatives. Regardless of where you put them, they should be there. You will not have time to read a bunch of new cards in the 1AR, especially against a good negative debater, so you want to make sure you're prepared to give a strong, offensive rebuttal. Another location that you can place preempts is within the framework. In these instances, you can place relevant arguments that will allow you to exclude large chunks of the negative case by limiting down which arguments are relative under the topic and under your framework.

The next step in preparing for the 1AR is by having multiple arguments that you can extend to tell a story that will allow the judge to vote for you. This means having multiple arguments that may reach the same conclusion, but use different warrants reaching that conclusion, so as to be able to take advantage of negative debaters that just answer the general idea behind your argument. Start weighing your arguments in the 1AC – if the negative concedes this, it's a very easy way to make your arguments more important than the negatives.

Moreover, you want to know exactly what you want to say in the 2AR. To some extent you can have your arguments pre-written for later speeches and just read the relevant arguments. Your 2ARs can and should look very similar to one another, making it much easier for you to give them, but this requires that you set up in your 1AC a story that allows for this.

### **Conclusion**

If you can put together a solid affirmative case, there is no reason why you can't win as many affirmative rounds as negative rounds. Is it harder than preparing to be negative? In a way, certainly, but given that very few people put in the necessary effort to prepare for negative debates, if you put in the effort it takes to be affirmative in debates then you will have prepared yourself to win more debates be they early preliminary rounds, or even late elimination rounds.

