

Flavors of Disadvantages and How to Write Them

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Abstract: Disadvantages are one of the biggest ways that negatives can layer the debate and generate offense. Understanding how to effectively write, defend, and answer disadvantages is critical to winning debates. This article will walk you through those steps and help further your knowledge, or offer you a foundation, regarding disadvantages.

What is a Disadvantage?

The General Definition

A disadvantage, generally defined, is a harm caused by your opponent's advocacy. It relies on an external link that you read in the disadvantage itself. Almost any kind of argument can have a disadvantage associated with it.

The Structure of a Disadvantage

A disadvantage is made up of four key components:

1. *Uniqueness.* Uniqueness is a description of the world prior to the link. Essentially, most of these arguments will be descriptions of the status quo. Uniqueness is incredibly important. If you cannot win that the world was better off before the affirmative triggered some link, then you have not generated a reason to vote for you.
2. *Link.* The link is the way in which your opponent's advocacy changes or revises the status quo.
3. *Internal Link.* The internal link is the intermediary link between two links or an impact. An internal link is just a smaller impact that triggers a bigger impact. For example, your argument could be that poverty is bad because people lose their jobs and their lives are worse, but you could also argue that poverty increases terrorism because people become more radical, and that is bad.
4. *Impact.* The impact is the significance of that change in the status quo.

Impact comparison happens at the margin. It's not just how big your impact is, it's the difference between the world of the affirmative and the world of the negative, after the link that we care about. Another important thing to remember is that the size of the impact is determined by the size of the link. Just because your impact is huge does not mean that you have access to that if your link to that impact is very small.

Why Run Disadvantages?

Disadvantages put huge pressure on the 1AR. Because they are big impacts and a new layer of offense, it puts the affirmative on the defense. Moreover, sometimes you may not have the greatest turns in response to the affirmative case. In these instances, you need to set up external links to different pieces of offense. A negative case is really just a disadvantage.

Some debaters don't do enough research. If you have a really specific disadvantage, you can expose how underprepared your opponent is. However, your disadvantage must always have a link to your opponent's case.

How to Write a Disadvantage

You should always make sure that you are structuring your disadvantage in the correct order. You don't necessarily need to label everything exactly (uniqueness, link, etc.) because that may turn some judges off to your argument; but it should always be written in the order listed above. This structure follows the logical progression of the argument, and thus makes the most sense.

When you are researching your disadvantage, you probably aren't going to find evidence for each step of the link story in the same article. If you do, this is great because it means that your link story is going to be much more airtight since the author will be writing very consistently, and it also means that you're going to have a much more credible impact.

However, if you can't find all your evidence from the same article, what you want to be looking for when researching is evidence with deep warrants. You want your evidence to have a few characteristics. First, you want it to be specific, especially the link evidence. The more specific you can make it in relation to your impact, the stronger the link you will have into your impact. Second, you want your evidence to be credible. The more credible your authors are in each step of the link chain, the more credible your disadvantage is since it doesn't just look like random guesses about hypothetical issues regarding the future. Third, you want it to be very vivid. The clarity of your impact should have an emotional impact on the judge, not make them look at you like you're insane. And finally, you want your evidence to be consistent. When you have more than one author, you want to make sure that each step is consistent and that the authors are talking about the same thing.

What Types of Disadvantages Exist?

There are several types of disadvantages that you can use in any given debate.

Brink Disadvantages

A brink disadvantage is a disadvantage where your uniqueness describes the status quo, and your link says that the affirmative does something to push something else over the brink and cause a large impact. For example, if two countries are on the brink of war in the status quo, and the affirmative does something to upset one side and push them over the brink into war, that's an example of a brink disadvantage.

Linear Disadvantage

A linear disadvantage is a disadvantage where the harm is technically non-unique, but something the affirmative does makes the impact worse. For example, if war is going on between two countries, people are already dying and that's bad, but it's possible that something the affirmative does increases the amount of deaths by increasing the scope of the war, so that's offense you can use against them.

Spending Disadvantage

If the affirmative proposes an advocacy that spends a lot of cash, you can make arguments about why that will lead to economic downturn and recession.

Federalism Disadvantage

If the affirmative proposes something that might upset the balance between the states and the federal government, then you have room to make arguments about why that upset in federalism could lead to really bad impacts.

Relations Disadvantage

There may be cases where the affirmative suggests that a country does something on the international arena. If you can show why that action the affirmative defends might upset another country, then you have a link for a relations disadvantage.

Politics Disadvantage

Politics disadvantages deal with the political repercussions of following through with what the affirmative advocates. Politics disadvantages are a great weapon for the negative because they generate huge impacts. Also, there is almost always a link because there is a political reaction to every political action, and most changes to the status quo require political actions. Moreover, they're incredibly educational since they force you to learn about current events.

There are a few different types of politics disadvantages:

1. *Political Capital*. When politicians push their bills, etc., that requires political capital. If Obama, for example, uses all of his political capital on the healthcare bill, then it's going to be hard for him to convince Republicans to side with him on other controversial issues.
2. *Public Popularity*. If something is really unpopular with the American public, then there can be a debate about whether or not that action is something that politicians are willing to sacrifice their popularity over.
3. *Winners Win*. This argument says that the more political wins that Obama has, for example, the easier it will be for him to pass other bills, and that could potentially be bad because it means that he could pass other harmful policies.
4. *Focus Disadvantage*. This argues that whatever the affirmative does diverts the President's focus to a different type of issue, which undermines his ability to pass important policies.

Conclusion

Understanding the different kinds of disadvantages and how to write them is extremely important. Disadvantages offer one incredibly effective way for the negative to layer the debate, and have a large piece of offense that the affirmative may not be ready to answer. Although they require a large amount of time researching, disadvantages can have a very positive affect on your win percentage as the negative.

