

I. Interpret the Resolution

Before you can debate a resolution, such as, “Developed countries have a higher obligation to combat climate change,” you’ll need to decide how your team will interpret the resolution. Debate resolutions are generally abstract statements that can be interpreted – legitimately – in many different ways. (That’s part of what makes debates so interesting to watch!)

Consider the wording of the resolution.

You’ve probably realized that the word “higher” is ambiguous. Higher than what? It’s up to your team to decide. The following interpretations of the resolution are all valid, for example, but they would lead to very different debates:

- Developed countries have a higher obligation *than developing countries* to combat climate change.
- Developed countries have a higher obligation to combat climate change *than to promote economic growth*.
- Developed countries have a higher obligation to combat climate change *than is demonstrated by these countries’ actions*.

When you interpret the resolution, you must define any ambiguous terms or phrases. You can choose to define things broadly or narrowly, as long as you leave the opposing team reasonable grounds for debate.

In this case, for example, you could define “developed countries” to mean “developed countries that have not signed the Kyoto protocol” or “the United States, Great Britain, and Japan.” You could define “combat climate change” to mean “cap CO₂ emissions at 1990 levels” or “invest in public campaigns to reduce consumer energy consumption.”

Next Step: Research ►

II. Research

Once you've decided how your team will interpret the resolution, you'll need to identify the best arguments and evidence in support of your position through research.

Step 1: Brainstorm

Start with a brainstorming session with your team. What do you know about the actions different countries are taking to combat climate change? What are the gaps in your collective knowledge? What information would you need for a good debate about whether developed countries have a higher obligation to combat climate change?

Tip: Make a list of questions you'll need to answer through research.

Step 2: Explore the Topic

Start filling the gaps in your knowledge by exploring the debates and references at the [Global Debates Climate Change Portal](#).

Through this portal, you'll gain access to more than 20 debates on climate change in a pro-con format. What are the arguments in favor of capping carbon emissions in China? What are the arguments against? Each article lists references for further research.

Step 3: Choose a Focus

As you explore the Climate Change Portal, think about how the causes and effects of climate change differ in developing vs. developed countries. Consider what obligation individuals and nations have to combat climate change. What do you want to focus on in your debate and service project?

Tip: Choose one or two key issues. Don't try to tackle everything!

You can use the Climate Change Portal to identify compelling arguments on both sides of the issue you choose to focus on. (Remember, two of your teammates will argue against the resolution in the public debate!)

Step 4: Research Your Chosen Topic(s)

Once you've chosen the topic or topics your debate and service project will address, you'll need to start gathering evidence. At this stage, you don't need to decide exactly what your arguments will be. Your opinions might change as you gather information. As you conduct your research, take advantage of as many different sources of information as you can. Here are some suggestions for online, library and community research:

Internet research

- Google (or your favorite search engine)
- Major newspapers & news magazines (many have online archives of articles)
- Google Scholar (a free collection of academic articles)
- Websites of different groups with a stake in climate change:
 - Governments
 - International organizations (i.e. UN, World Bank)
 - Environmental groups
 - Business organizations
 - Lobbyists

Library research

Librarians are excellent sources of research expertise. Explain this competition to your librarian and ask him or her for advice. Libraries

in your school, community, or local university may have subscriptions to online resources & databases you can't access as an individual. It's tempting to focus on online resources, but print materials (books, periodicals, newspapers, and academic journals) are also excellent sources of information.

Community research

Don't overlook rich sources of expertise, opinions, and information in your own community. Seek out members of your community who might have useful input:

- Government officials
- Farmers, foresters, ranchers & others whose livelihoods depend on resources affected by climate change
- Elders
- Representatives of local environmental organizations
- Business owners
- Workers in industries that emit greenhouse gases

Research tip: Record your findings

As you gather all this great material for your debate, remember to keep good notes. One effective way to track your research is to label individual index cards or sheets of paper with specific topics or questions and list the arguments & evidence you find as you research each area. As you gather more useful information, your arguments will start to take shape.

***Next Step: Develop a Case
for the Proposition ►***

III. Develop a Case for the Proposition

Once you've decided how to interpret the resolution, you'll need to create a debate case: a set of convincing arguments and evidence that supports a proposed position.

Types of debate cases

There are many ways to argue in favor of the resolution; this guide will explain two of the most common: the Need-Plan-Benefits Case and the General Moral or Ethical Principle Case. On the one hand, you could create a specific plan in support of a “higher obligation to combat climate change” and defend the merits of that plan. On the other hand, you could name a general moral or ethical principle that applies to the resolution and show why that principle must be upheld.

In the next two sections, we'll show you how to prepare those two different types of debate cases. If your team doesn't have much debate experience, use one of these two formats. If you're an experienced debate team, you're welcome to use another type of debate case; just be sure to tell us which type of case you chose and provide a complete outline on the required worksheet.

DEBATE CASE ALTERNATIVE #1: NEED-PLAN-BENEFITS CASE Step 1: Describe the Need

If you choose to create a Need-Plan-Benefits case,

your overall objective is to show how your plan alleviates a need and creates benefits. Use the questions below to define the need.

What needs exist for changing the current policy? In other words, why do developed countries have a “higher obligation to combat climate change?”

What problems or harms exist in the present system? What problems or harms are created because developed countries do not have a “higher obligation to combat climate change?”

What is the extent and severity of those problems or harms?

Why is the current policy unable to answer those needs? In other words, why can't these problems be solved with the current level of obligation from developed countries?

Step 2: Propose the Plan

In order to propose a plan based on the resolution, you'll need to name an actor, describe the action, and possibly add some additional elements that you believe are important.

Describe the Actor

The “actor” is the individual, group, government, or other organization you think should enact your plan. Who should take action? An individual person? A nation? An international organization? You can choose any actor you want as long as you can defend the choice.

Define the Action

This is the crux of your plan: What policy should the actor adopt? What action should the individual or group take?

Define the action as specifically as you can. If you're proposing that the actor require decreased emissions in all developed countries, specify by

how much emissions should decrease. If you're proposing taxes or other financial penalties, how large will those penalties be? How long will the actor have to enact your plan? Will it happen gradually over 10 years or immediately?

If you choose a general statement without a target, a timeline, and/or other figures, your debate won't be as vigorous and your plan won't be as compelling.

Add Additional Elements

Your plan can include additional elements you think will strengthen it. Examples:

- Funding. Who should fund the plan?
- Enforcement. How should your plan be enforced?

Step 3: Argue the Benefits

What benefits will your plan have? At a minimum, the plan should help alleviate the need you've identified. Your plan might also have benefits not related to the need; explaining those extra benefits will only strengthen your case.

Out of the benefits your team identifies, choose 1, 2, or 3 to focus on. These benefits will be your primary arguments, so you should be able to back them up with compelling evidence. Evidence might include statistics, expert recommendations, policy analysis, examples, pilot studies, or other sources of credible information. You can decide to focus on only one benefit if you can provide varied, convincing evidence!

Don't assume that others will see the benefits of your plan on their own. You'll need to make the connections for your audience.

First, explain what will happen as a result of your plan: Will your plan reduce methane emissions? Increase carbon sequestration in soil?

Then, explain why this result is good: Why would

someone want to prevent a rise in the sea level? How would reduced coal use benefit society?

For the benefit or benefits you choose to focus on, compile your best pieces of evidence. Look through your research: which ideas, predictions, or expert opinions are most convincing? You'll rely on that evidence during the public debate.

DEBATE CASE ALTERNATIVE #2: GENERAL MORAL OR ETHICAL PRINCIPLE CASE

Proposing a specific plan isn't the only way to debate this resolution. You could also choose to name a general moral or ethical principle, explain why it's important to uphold this principle, and show how the principle applies to the case of a country's obligation to combat climate change. Here's how to create a debate case around a general moral or ethical principle.

Step 1: Name the general moral or ethical principle your team will support.

Common values include fairness, equity, and responsibility. Here are some examples of general principles:

"Those with greater financial resources have a responsibility to help those in need."

"The ends do not justify the means."

"Deception is never acceptable."

"Human beings are morally obligated to prevent the extinction of other species."

Step 2: Support the principle.

Why is it important to uphold this principle?

One way to support the principle is to imagine what the world would be like if everyone adhered to the principle. How would things improve?

How would climate change be impacted?

For example, consider the general moral principle “Human beings are morally obligated to prevent the extinction of other species.” If everyone adhered to this principle, biodiversity would be preserved. This would have all sorts of benefits. Scientists could find new cures for diseases in as-of-yet undiscovered plants. Poor countries could reduce poverty through revenues from ecotourism. Identify a situation in which upholding the principle led to positive effects, and/or a situation in which ignoring the principle led to negative effects.

Step 3: Apply the principle to the resolution.

Apply the case in the resolution to the broader moral or ethical principle you’ve named.

How does the moral or ethical principle you’ve named apply in the case of obligations to combat climate change? For instance, if your principle is that “those with greater financial resources have a responsibility to help those in need,” then you might argue that developed countries have more financial resources and therefore should increase their obligations relative to the obligations of developing countries.

Why is your named principle an important thing to consider in this situation?

***Next Step: Develop a Case
for the Opposition ►***

IV. Develop a Case for the Opposition

The difficult part about being on the opposition side is that your primary responsibility will be to respond to the arguments of the proposition team, and you won't hear those arguments until the debate begins. As a result, you'll need to do as much preparation as you can...but also be prepared to think on your feet!

If you've reviewed the preceding guides on creating debate cases, you know that the proposition team can choose one of two primary ways to debate the resolution. First, the proposition team could create a specific plan in support of the resolution and explain why that plan is better than what's currently happening. Second, the proposition team could name a general moral or ethical principle, explain why that principle is important to uphold, and relate the principle to the debate resolution.

As the opposing team, you'll need to be prepared for both of these alternatives. In the next sections, this guide will show you how to argue against a case based on a specific plan as well as a case based on a moral or ethical principle. Before the debate begins, though, the opposition team can prepare by writing an advocacy statement.

A. OPPOSING THE NEED-PLAN BENEFITS CASE

Step 1: Choose your position relative to the proposition team's plan

When the proposition team uses a Need-Plan-Benefits case, the opposition team's job is to argue against the plan. The opposition team generally chooses one of three positions. The opposition team can: (a) support the status quo; (b) support the status quo in principle but with minor modifications; or (c) propose a counter-plan.

a. Support the status quo

In arguing against the proposition team's plan, the opposition team can choose to support current policies. To support the status quo, describe current policies and state explicitly that you support them.

b. Support the status quo in principle but with minor modifications

Alternatively, the opposition team can support the status quo in principle, but with minor changes or modifications. In other words, you could argue that the current level of obligation for developed countries is appropriate but some minor modifications need to be made regarding how countries carry out these obligations. If you choose this alternative, describe the policies of the status quo (in this case, the current obligations of developed countries) and clearly define the minor changes you propose.

c. Present a counter-plan

The final way the opposition team can create an advocacy statement is to recommend a counter-plan. The opposition team should argue that their counter-plan would solve the problem in a different way or avoid problems the proposition

plan would face. A counter-plan must always oppose the underlying principle of the proposition team's plan. (If the opposition team simply advocated for adjustments to the plan proposed by the proposition team, the debate wouldn't be very interesting).

Constructing a counter-plan is more difficult than defending the status quo or defending the status quo with minor modifications. If you've debated before or like a good challenge, though, creating a counter-plan can allow you to be more creative and persuasive.

Step 2: Create constructive arguments for the opposition

Once you've established your position relative to the status quo and the proposition team's plan, you'll need to develop powerful arguments against the plan. Here are two common types of arguments the opposition team may use to argue against a plan proposed by the proposition:

a. The plan will not fix the problem.

If you can show that the problem the proposition team described would persist even if the world adopted their plan, you've made a very strong argument against that plan. First, name the problem described by the proposition team. Then show how that problem would persist under the proposed action plan. Here are two common ways the proposition team's reasoning could go wrong:

Wrong cause: The problem is caused by something other than the current policy.

Example: "Cattle ranching, not timber harvesting, causes deforestation."

Alternate cause: Argue that although the current policy may be one cause of the problem, there are other factors that will cause the same problem even

if the proposed plan is adopted.

Example: "Electric cars might reduce emissions on the road, but the power plants that supply electricity will emit more CO₂ to power the cars, so overall CO₂ emissions will stay the same."

b. The plan will create more problems.

1. Choose a part of the plan you think is weak.

Example: The plan suggests that developed countries should close coal-fired power plants

2. Show that the part of the plan you're talking about creates a specific effect.

Example: "Closing coal-fired power plants would significantly reduce the supply of energy available to consumers."

3. Show how that effect will have negative consequences.

Remember that you must demonstrate to your audience not just what will result, but why that effect is bad. For example, it's not enough to say, in the example above, that closing coal-fired plants will reduce energy available to consumers.

You would need to show the negative consequences of the effect: "Sharply reduced supply would lead to high energy prices, shortages, brownouts, and blackouts, all of which threaten health and safety."

Using these two general types of arguments, identify 1, 2, or 3 key arguments for the opposition.

B. OPPOSING THE GENERAL MORAL OR ETHICAL PRINCIPLE CASE

It might seem difficult to counter a general moral or ethical principle, but the opposing team has several options.

1. Show that the principle is not universal.

If you take a principle to its logical conclusion, you can sometimes show that the principle doesn't always apply. For instance, consider the principle, "Deception is never acceptable." Imagine the case of a family in 1940s Nazi Germany that was protecting a Jewish family from persecution. If an agent of the Gestapo asked whether the family was concealing Jewish people in their home, would the family be morally obliged to tell the truth? Almost everyone would answer "no." So the principle "deception is never acceptable" doesn't always hold true.

2. Show that a different principle overrides the principle proposed by the proposition team.

At some point, principles collide. In the example of the families in 1940s Nazi Germany, for example, the need for honesty collides with the need to protect others from harm.

The difficult task is finding the point of collision between different moral or ethical principles. To identify points of collision, brainstorm other moral or ethical principles that could conflict with the principle proposed by the proposition team. Then think of different situations that involve different people, different places, and different periods of time. Come up with scenarios where other principles take precedence over the proposed principle.

3. Demonstrate that the principle does not apply to this case.

In order to use the General Moral or Ethical Principle type of debate case, the proposition team must show how the principle they propose applies to the resolution. Naturally, the opposition team could argue that the principle does not apply in the case of the resolution.

Let's return to the resolution: "Developed countries have a higher obligation to combat climate change." The opposition could argue that this principle would normally apply, but that in these difficult economic times, even developed countries do not have the financial ability to meet a "higher obligation."

***Next Step: Organize
Your Public Debate ►***

IV. Organize Your Public Debate

Step 4: Arrange Video, Audio, and Photographic Recording

You may be able to rent cameras and other equipment from your school. If you can interest local media outlets through your advertizing, they will probably be willing to share their photographs or footage. The more documentation, the better!

Step 1: Reserve a Venue

Your coach and school administrators can probably help you reserve a space where a public audience can watch your debate. Most competitors hold debates in their schools. Town halls and other meeting places also make good sites for public debates. Choose a day and time that doesn't conflict with holidays or major community events.

Step 2: Identify a Moderator

To make sure the debate runs smoothly, you'll need a moderator to keep time, introduce each speaker, and thank each speaker after he or she has finished. Your coach can serve as moderator. Just make sure the moderator knows the format and has a good stop-watch.

Step 3: Advertise the Debate

To maximize the impact of your debate, promote it with a press release to local media, invite important members of the community, or submit letters to the editor of your local newspaper

Next Step: Debate ►

V. Debate

Now that you have conducted research, defined your plan, developed your plan into a debate case and created a case for the opposition, you're ready to prepare for your public debate.

If you haven't debated formally before, the best way to get more comfortable is practice. After each practice debate, your coach and teammates can provide valuable feedback.

Step 1: Learn the Karl Popper Format

The debate format you'll use is a what's known as the Karl Popper debate format, the format used at the IDEA Youth Forum. The format consists of alternating speeches and cross examinations. Refer to the chart on the following page.

Here are the 2 types of speeches:

1. **Constructive speeches** set the stage for the debate by laying out each team's main arguments.

2. **Rebuttal speeches** develop each team's arguments, covering only the most important issues in the debate, and refute the arguments made by the other team.

Step 2: Practice, Practice, Practice!

In order to feel ready for your public debate, practice the full debate at least twice with your teammates. Each debater should get the chance to debate on both the affirmative and negative team. Before each debate, read through the plans you've prepared and review the debate format. Make sure you understand the roles and responsibilities you'll have in each role.

For more in-depth information about debate, check out these websites:

www.idebate.org (International Debate Education Association (IDEA))

www.nflonline.org (National Forensic League)

Step 3: Debate!

Capture your debate with video.

Karl Popper Debate Format

SPEECH	SPEAKER(S)	TIME
Affirmative Constructive	Affirmative Speaker 1	6 minutes
First Negative Cross : Examination	Between Negative Speaker 3 and Affirmative Speaker 1	3 minutes
Negative Constructive	Negative Speaker 1	6 minutes
First Affirmative Cross: Examination	Between Affirmative Speaker 3 and Negative Speaker 1	3 minutes
First Affirmative Rebuttal	Affirmative Speaker 2	5 minutes
Second Negative Cross : Examination	Between Negative Speaker 1 and Affirmative Speaker 2	3 minutes
First Negative Rebuttal	Negative Speaker 2	5 minutes
Second Affirmative Cross : Examination	Between Affirmative Speaker 1 and Negative Speaker 2	3 minutes
Second Affirmative Rebuttal	Affirmative Speaker 3	5 minutes
Second Negative Rebuttal	Negative Speaker 3	5 minutes