**BLOCK PREPARATION**

**WHAT ARE BLOCKS?** Blocks are documents created by debaters to answer arguments they anticipate being made by other teams. The art of block writing includes three parts: initial drafting. updating for linguistic and strategic purposes, and in-round adjustment. Blocks can and should be used by younger debaters in the 2AC,2NC, 1NR, and 1AR always and to a lesser extent for framing the 2NR and 2AR.

**WHY ARE BLOCKS BENEFICIAL?** Debate rounds are all about pressure. Time constraints create pressure to think clearly, respond clearly, and generate the best possible impression of your positions versus your opponents. Blocks that you write beforehand save you that time since you don’t have to think of arguments on-the-spot and if you’ve been updating them, they are well-crafted to convey your meaning in a best possible light. This creates a positive trade-off for you to spend more time thinking about new positions that you didn’t/couldn’t anticipate and to take a macro-view of the strategy of the debate round so your decisions aren’t “trapped” in the moment leading to a crucial error by the 2AC or in the negative block.

**HOW ARE BLOCKS CONSTRUCTED?** Debaters and coaches make blocks throughout the year as the topic develops and changes. Sometimes, they stumble upon evidence that is useful to add to blocks, by accident, while researching something else. At other times, a loss has triggered specific research to fill a gap. Debaters can also conduct self-examination of what they would say if a block was read against them to determine where it’s weakest and how to improve it. Blocks are never complete. In all cases, blocks are a mix of offense, defense and observations that help your side. The contents of blocks differs with type of argument.

**HOW TO HOST A BLOCK PARTY?** Blocking does not have to be a solitary activity. If you and other teams are reading the same affirmative, divide and conquer.

**DEPLOYING YOUR BLOCKS, SECRETS OF DEBATE MATH**

Ideally, the 2AC could stand up and read all of the prepared answers to their two disads, counterplan, kritik and also extend the case. In reality, this is seldom the case either because the debater is not fast enough to do so or the number of available answers exceeds what can be read in a nine minute speech. So the question always exists, how many answers to read on which positions. Given that you have nine minutes to divide up, there is an implicit math question here that requires a little background.

In the 70s and 80s, “debate math” was a big concept. Teams understood that since there was a limited amount of time and a lot to do in speeches, there would be optimal numbers of responses to yield the desired benefits. If you had eight minutes to answer 3 offcases and case, you would spend 2 minutes on each sheet. If one position was less relevant (poor link or poorly developed), you would decrease that to 30 seconds and up the others to 2:30 each and so on. As debate moved from static line-by-line to embedded line-by-line, coaches stopped teaching those strategies and focused more and more on quality of cards. However, several debate math concepts still apply today.

In a round where the neg only reads one off-case, spend SEVEN minutes reading 15-20 discreet answers (2/3 should be evidenced, the others should be analytics including perms). Always remember to spend TWO minutes on a case overview and reading new offense so you are covered depending on how the debate develops.

In a round where the neg reads one off plus five or more case answers, spend SIX minutes reading 12-15 discreet answers (2/3 should be evidenced, the others should be analytics including perms).

In a round where the neg reads 2 or 3 off-cases plus case answers, spend 7:30 minutes reading 8-10 discreet answers on each off-case (2/3 should be evidenced, the others should be analytics including perms).

In a round where the neg reads 4 or more off-cases plus case answers, spend 7:30 minutes reading 6-7 discreet answers on each off-case (1/2 should be evidenced, the others should be analytics including perms). If you need to compromise on numbers of responses, choose the least threatening position to do so (a Da or K with a nebulous link, a top arg when you are clearly topical, etc). Never have less than 4 arguments on any position.

**IN-ROUND ADJUSTMENTS**

Your blocks are not static documents. Every round you can change them to make your case more compelling. Here are some examples:

Re-Tagging—Since tags are never inclusive of every warrant in an excellent piece of evidence, the particular round you are in may call for you to highlight a different aspect of the card. If that’s correct, make the judges work easier by reflecting that warrant in a new tag that you write up for that particular debate.

Re-Highlighting—You may not need to read all of the card in your round or you may need to read different sections of it. Once you get the pairing and begin your strategy work, use a different color highlighter and highlight the section you want to focus on in that debate.

Re-Order—You’re hitting a team that has a rep for reading a whole bunch of off-cases. Since you know you won’t get through everything, you and your partner should go through your blocks and mark the key answers which must be read.

Free Time Updates—Every now and then, look at your blocks to see if you can improve the wording or make it shorter. An extra thirty seconds could make the difference between a win and a loss.

Overall, this prep can reduce your pressure, conserve your prep time to the last rebuttal and make you a much more dangerous opponent..

**DEVELOPING WINNING WAYS (WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A SPECIFC BLOCK)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ARGUMENT YOU’RE ANSWERING | **MUST HAVES** | **OPTIONAL** | **WASTE OF TIME** |
| **Disadvantages** | Offense-turns, kritiks  Defense-Non-uniques  Defense-no links  Timeframe arguments  Internal link takeouts | ties to their cp & ks  impact comparisons with case  cards for case solvency | Evidence which make common knowledge claims  Situational evidence that is more than 2 years old |
| **Counterplans**  Remember **S-P-O-T** | S-indict cp solvency  P-perms, perm solvency  O-read Disads to cp  T-condo, fiat, pics | Ties to the K & DA  Problematize wording of cplan | Uniqueness answers |
| **Kritiks**  Remember **S-P-O-T** | S-attack alt solvency  P-perms, perm solve  O-read Disads to alt, counter-kritiks  T-condo, fiat, floating pics, vagueness | No link  Ties to Cp & DA | Uniqueness answers |
| **Topicality** | “We meet” args  Counter-interpretation  Net Benefit to c/i  Disads to their interp  Reasonability  Counter-standards  Answer to topical version of the aff (TVA) | Impact turns  Inclusion/Exclusion  Model Cases request  Res context test  Vacuum test | Perms (only would make sense if the opponent says evaluate T like a cplan) |
| **Framework** | Counter-interpretation (what should debate be about, as opposed on T where it is a question of definition)  Disads to their FW  “We meet” args  Net Benefit to c/i  Reasonability  Answer to topical version within their framing (TVA) | Advocacy turns  Similarities btw what you did and a standard policy aff  Inclusion/Exclusion  Model Cases request  Cplan evaluation--Perm (use both FWs) | Definitions if they didn’t include a T shell |
| **Perm Theory**  (e.g. Intrinsic, Severance) | Prove perm doesn’t violate (severance or intrinsicness)  Reject arg not team  Answers to Disads or Impacts of perm abuse | Name action or strat by neg that justifies abuse  Identification of theory abuse by neg (which cancels out your abuse) | Words/Discourse doesn’t matter args  Aff conditionality good |
| **Other procedurals**  (e.g. Plan Flaw, FIAT abuse, Extra T, Effects T) | Prove plan doesn’t violate it (we meet)  Reject arg not team  Disads to their interp  Counter-standards  Function over text  No ground loss | Defend why x abuse would be good or makes debater better  Name action or strat by neg that justifies abuse  Resolutional feature that justifies abuse  Commonalties bet case and core affs | Discourse doesn’t matter args  Aff conditionality good  Reverse voting issues |

**DISADVANTAGE NOTES:** (1) The order that you put answers in depends on several situational factors. If you think you have really good offense and you are confident you are going to get to it, you might put it at the bottom so as to elicit a weaker answer from your opponent who faces time pressure at the bottom of the flow. If you have a judge who needs to know you’re “in the game” on the particular DA, you might put your most recent or most compelling non-uniques at the top of the flow. If there’s a lot to cover maybe you only have time to read 5 answers instead of 10 so you have to read your best answers without camouflage. (2) Top debaters update their uniqueness answers each week to reflect changing political scenarios.

**KRITIK NOTES**: You should always have, at least, two perms on the flow-perm do both and one other based on the round. Theory abuse arguments (conditionality bad, utopian fiat bad, floating pics bad, etc.) can be used to get rid of positions or sometimes win the round. Most negatives will include in their responses, “reject the argument not the team” so the judge does not have to vote against them for an abusive counterplans. This will be the default for 80% of your judges unless the abuse is noteworthy.

**COUNTERPLAN NOTES:** The answers on counterplans and kritiks are similar because they both represent alternative actions to the plan. These positions serve as negative advocacies which is why they can be combined (permed) with the affirmative. If the neg reads an advocacy, the first question from the 1A in c/x should always be what is the status of the alternative or the cplan so you know if its conditional or not. Do not perm a disad or a topicality argument since neither contain advocacies.

**TOPICALITY NOTES**: Many teams read combo violations (reduce & military presence, its & military, significantly & Extra T, etc). Sometimes extra-topicality and effects topicality are listed under standards instead of under violations). Read shells carefully and then ask how many violations there are in cross-x to re-confirm.