

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHETHER YOU WILL BE AFFIRMATIVE OR NEGATIVE?

In each round of debate there is an affirmative team and a negative team. The affirmative team says “yes” to the resolution, while the negative team says “no.” Suppose the resolution is “Resolved: The United States federal government should establish a guest worker program for illegal immigrants.” The affirmative team must support the resolution, and the negative team must oppose it.

Almost all policy debate competition involves switching of sides, so each team must be prepared to debate both affirmative and negative. You won’t know whether you will be affirmative or negative in the first round of the tournament until a few minutes before the tournament begins. The debate *tab room* (meaning the persons assigned by the sponsoring organization to administer the tournament) post a schedule shortly before the round begins. This round schedule lets each team know whether it will be affirmative or negative, which opponent it will debate, the name of the judge, and the room in which the debate will occur.

By the end of the preliminary rounds of the tournament, you will have been assigned to the same number of affirmative as negative rounds. If you do well enough to qualify for elimination rounds, sides are determined in a slightly different manner. If the two teams meeting have not previously met in preliminary rounds, a coin toss determines who is affirmative and who is negative. If you win the coin toss, you are allowed to choose affirmative or negative. If you have already met the team you are assigned to debate, you switch sides in the second meeting.

HOW ARE FIRST AND SECOND SPEAKERS DETERMINED?

Ultimately, it is your debate coach who decides who is the first speaker and who is second. Following are, however, some of the factors used to determine speaker position:

- *Affirmative and negative speaker order can be different:* There is no rule requiring that the debater who is first affirmative also must be first negative. Some coaches choose to have one debater be first when the team is on the affirmative and second when the team is on the negative (or vice versa). Neither is there a rule requiring that a speaker who begins a tournament as first affirmative speaker keep that same speaking position for all the affirmative rounds in the tournament. A debate coach might decide that one debater will be first speaker in some of the debates but then switch to the second position in others (although this would be an unusual choice).