

spread of HIV/AIDS. If the topic deals with health care in the United States, you might be unwilling to argue that everyone has access to necessary health care. If the topic is renewable energy, you may truly believe that more needs to be done to save the environment. The counterplan option gives negative debaters the freedom to escape from defending the status quo.

A third consideration in deciding whether to use a counterplan is the availability of inherency options. In some debate leagues there is a strong bias against the use of counterplans. Your debate coach might discourage the use of counterplans. Inherency arguments offer a traditional alternative to the counterplan. Consider the example of an affirmative case that attempts to solve poverty in sub-Saharan Africa by substantially increasing U.S. foreign aid. The negative team in this debate wants to advocate the use of a microenterprise solution—the system of giving small loans pioneered by Muhammed Yunus when he created the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. The power of the microenterprise solution is that it enables self-help, whereas foreign aid promotes perpetual dependence. Many negative teams would choose to advocate a microenterprise counterplan, but it could just as easily be advocated as an inherency argument. Many international agencies (including the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) are already actively pursuing microenterprise solutions in sub-Saharan Africa. By defending these solutions already underway, the negative team avoids having to defend the competitiveness of a counterplan. In those debate leagues where counterplans are discouraged, learn to use the power of advocating inherency alternatives.

A fourth consideration in deciding to use a counterplan is how comfortable you are with counterplan theory. Experienced affirmative debaters pepper the counterplan with theory attacks, questioning competitiveness and suggesting numerous permutations. Many of these theoretical issues become the subject of questions in cross-examination. Use a counterplan only if you are mentally prepared to manage the theoretical complexities involved.

The final—and most important—consideration in deciding whether to use a counterplan is a question of persuasiveness. The counterplan should be a persuasive alternative to the affirmative plan. Try to characterize the difference between the plan and the counterplan in a single sentence. The plan advocates more government regulation and bureaucracy; the counterplan proposes to use the power of free enterprise. The plan locks sub-Saharan Africans into perpetual dependence on the United States; the counterplan promotes dignity and self-help. The plan strangles experimentation in secondary education by insisting on federal uniformity; the counterplan returns the power to control education to states and localities. Use a counterplan when, by doing so, you can create a persuasive alternative to the affirmative approach.