

percent have been policy topics and 29 percent have been resolutions of fact. No true resolutions of value have so far been selected for use in public forum debate.

The resolutions of fact that have been selected for public forum debate generally follow this formula: “x is beneficial to y,” “x aids y,” “x negatively influences y,” or “x positively affects y.” Twelve of the thirteen public forum resolutions of fact have followed this model. The only exception is the 2004 topic “Resolved: The United States is losing the War on Terror.”

Analysis of any resolution (whether fact, value, or policy) must begin with a definition of the key terms. Consider the topic “Resolved: That big box retailers benefit the communities in which they are located.” What is meant by “big box retailers”? To answer this question, do some research using Internet search engines, placing the whole phrase inside quotation marks. Write down the kinds of retail stores that are returned in your search. Wal-Mart seems an obvious example, along with Kmart. Would Sam’s Club stores be included? The question is important because many people claim that Wal-Mart harms small businesses. Sam’s Clubs, on the other hand, are designed to assist small business owners. Yet would Sam’s Clubs be classified as retail or wholesale stores?

Resolutional analysis also requires adopting a point of view and a time frame from which to view the facts. It is impossible to say whether a thing is good or bad, beneficial or harmful, without asking some additional questions. As long ago as 350 B.C. Aristotle, in *The Organon*, referred to these questions as *topoi* (topics). Some topics—called *contraries*—could be paired with their opposites. Students of rhetoric were encouraged to analyze all of the available means of persuasion by thinking through these contraries. The following paragraphs list some of the paired opposites that apply to public forum debate questions.

*Short-term or long-term?* The things that seem to benefit a community in the short term might end up being harmful in the long term. Communities might benefit in the short term when a new Wal-Mart offers one-stop-shopping and low prices. It might, however, pay a larger price in the long term when small businesses go under, well-paying jobs disappear, and local school districts lose tax revenue.

*Economic or cultural?* Is it always possible to determine benefits in dollars and cents? Big box retailers can save consumers money yet create a monoculture in which every community soon comes to be the same. Something in the human spirit yearns for diversity; people travel to distant parts of the world just so they can experience cultural variety.

*Corporations or consumers?* Sometimes the interests of corporations and consumers work at cross purposes. A computer company might hold down its costs by outsourcing