

Significance of harm: An examination of the harm from handgun use must ask “harm to whom?” The case could be framed around accidental deaths to children, crimes of passion in domestic violence cases, suicide, or victims of violent crime.

Causation: A policy debater’s term for causation is *inherency*, but the public forum debater should use language immediately understandable to a general audience. Why is it important to examine causes? The answer is that it helps guide us to appropriate solutions. Suppose, for example, the harm in the pro case on handguns is the accidental death of children. The true cause of these accidents might be the negligence of adults. If handguns are left unloaded or equipped with trigger locks, the harm to children might be avoided short of a handgun ban. Furthermore, if the true cause of childhood deaths is adult negligence, then children can just as easily be harmed by non-gun-related negligence—such as leaving medicines or poisons within the reach of children. To justify a ban on handguns, the pro side needs to show why solutions already available are unable to prevent harm to children.

Solution: Would adopting the resolution solve the problem cited in the pro case? It might be true that handguns are commonly used in suicides, but would a handgun ban help? Wouldn’t people bent on suicide simply use other methods?

Disadvantage: Would adopting the resolution create bigger problems than the ones it solves? When handguns are banned, law-abiding citizens will no longer have them, but criminals will continue to be armed. The benefit of lowering the risk of accidental harm to children (or whatever is the harm in the pro case) must then be weighed against greater vulnerability to violent criminals.

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a technique used to creatively generate ideas on a new topic. You can conduct a brainstorming session with your debate partner, with your whole debate team, or even as a project in your civics class. To maximize the value of brainstorming, you should set a few ground rules:

- All ideas will be written down in plain view of the participants, on a chalk board or white board.
- The goal during brainstorming is quantity, not quality—you will decide later which ideas are worth pursuing.
- Critical comments—even self-critical comments such as “this is probably a dumb idea, but ...”—are not allowed.
- Confine the session in time—fifteen minutes is a good time frame. You want to create the sense that ideas should flow fast and furiously, like popcorn popping. One idea should stimulate others.