

1. *Overview and identification of information.* What issues do you need to address in your case? What are well-known areas of concern on this subject? Have you read or seen anything particularly interesting on the subject recently that will help? What are the key considerations that your position will need to address?

For the moment, brainstorm ideas; nothing is “too stupid to mention.” What do you know and what can you find out? During this stage, you should start to get a sense of the general shape of your case and the direction your team will take on the motion. For the Affirmative team, what exactly—be as precise as you possibly can be—is the problem you are trying to address or the question you are trying to answer? How are you going to answer it? Once you have made decisions about these two questions, you should have your definition. Then think about the advantages of your proposal: What are the general benefits of pursuing a course of action, whose lives will be improved, how will they be improved, and why should they be improved?

Negative teams can take a fairly reasonable guess as to what the opening Affirmative speaker is going to say and begin to develop some ideas about how to respond. Determine what questions the Affirmative will need to answer and what problems might lie within the specifics of a possible case.

2. *Case structuring and division.* Next, prioritize your arguments. If it’s a lovely point but you have no evidence, toss it. If it’s an interesting fact but doesn’t support your case, ignore it for now but hold on to it in case it touches on a point that the opposing side introduces. You want to present about three arguments, so if you have a list of eight or nine after the brainstorming, winnow it down. Determine which you can support with strong evidence and which you can’t defend adequately.

Having decided what your best arguments are, rank them and divide them among the team. Your opening speaker should take the strongest, best-supported, most logically rigorous argument—the one for which you have ironclad evidence and rock-solid warrants.

For second teams in BP, decide what arguments you think the opening teams will definitely make and how you can extend them. It’s worth spending some time on arguments that you think you may not need to make. If the opening teams don’t mention an obvious or vital point, then your extension, and probable victory, is sitting there waiting for you to pick it up.

3. *Speech development and rebuttal planning.* This step could just as easily be called “write it down, tidy it up, and check before takeoff.” Write down what you know you need to say. Write it in note form and, if you’re a later speaker, leave space to add notes on what earlier speakers say as the debate progresses. Look at the arguments you have.