

You want to compile as much useful information as possible, but if you don't have arguments to offer by the end of your prep time, all the evidence in the world will avail you nothing. So, consider the overall shape of your case: What will you need to demonstrate? Then go back to your evidence and see if it supports what you've developed—if it doesn't, refine your case and work through it again. Your case and the evidence feed each other, neither will work without the other.

- *Be inquisitive.* When you discuss your ideas for a case, be prepared to ask questions. If you don't understand an argument your teammate is suggesting, ask her to explain. Questioning is important for several reasons. First, you'll need to understand your teammate's point to be able to defend it. Second, if you don't understand the point, an adjudicator won't either, thus questioning will help your teammate clarify the argument in her mind. Finally, the argument might be bad, and it's better to discover that while talking among yourselves than when you're in the debate. There's very little to be gained in losing a debate because you didn't like to ask a question.
- *Think about structure from the start.* How does your case tie together? If you're using the same evidence for several different lines of reasoning, you quite probably have several versions of the same argument. Your objective is to have a range of arguments that support one another without overlapping to the point of replicating each other.
- *Don't be too spontaneous.* Generally, blinding flashes of inspiration just before the debate are best ignored.

Short-Notice Preparation

Preparation within a limited timeframe requires discipline and focus. This can be difficult at competitions where teams may also have to use that time to find the debate room, so it's worth planning in advance how you will use prep. Don't be hostage to the plan, however. Be flexible. Remember, the objective is to have a practical set of notes by the end of the process. When organizing short prep:

- *Be disciplined.* Make whoever is speaking last responsible for keeping everyone focused during prep time. If you've spent two or three minutes discussing an idea and getting nowhere with it, she can move you on to something else and stop you wasting your time.
- *Think with your hands.* We think more clearly when we take notes. Write ideas down as you discuss them. Then go back over your notes and choose the best arguments before organizing them into a case.