

Counterplans

What Is a Counterplan?

An affirmative case is based on challenging the status quo. Negative teams can defend the status quo or agree that the status quo should change and present a counterplan, often abbreviated CP.

A counterplan is a policy option offered by the negative team that is not the status quo and not the affirmative plan.

Elements of a Counterplan

There are three main elements to a counterplan that you should understand.

Text. The counterplan text is formal, precise language that says what the counterplan does. It is similar to an affirmative plan. You should not change it once you read it. Counterplans have fiat power, similar to the affirmative plan (this can be debatable).

Topicality. You should know whether or not your counterplan is topical. There are differing schools of thought on this issue. Some people think the counterplan needs to be non-topical because anything that is topical affirms the resolution. Other people think the counterplan can be topical because the fact that the counterplan does something different than the affirmative plan is key.

Competition. Competition explains why it is a forced choice between the affirmative plan and the negative counterplan. In other words, it explains why you can't or shouldn't enact both plans.

A counterplan is useless unless it competes with the affirmative plan. The counterplan can compete with the affirmative plan in several different ways.

Here are two major types of competition:

- *Mutually Exclusive.* If the counterplan and the plan are mutually exclusive it means you *can't* do them both at the same time.
- *Net Benefits.* A net benefit is an advantage for the counterplan but not the plan. A net benefit means you *shouldn't* do them both at the same time.

Most counterplans compete via net benefits. So the negative must win:

*the affirmative plan links to some offensive arguments such as a disadvantage

*the counterplan does not link to that offensive argument

Affirmative Answers

We think that the affirmative should always make four answers to any counterplan. These answers form the acronym **STOP**.

S: Solvency

Affirmatives should argue that the counterplan does not solve the advantages of the 1AC. Affirmatives can also read new add-on advantages in the 2AC that only the United States federal government can solve.

T: Theory

Theory arguments are analytical arguments that often claim that counterplans are unfair or decrease the education of debate.

O: Offense

Affirmatives should also run offense to the counterplan. Offense can be additional advantages the counterplan cannot solve or disadvantages to the counterplan.

P: Permutation

In order for a counterplan to be legitimate it must be competitive with the affirmative plan. A permutation is a test of competition. When you permute the plan and the counterplan you do both the plan and the counterplan. If the permutation achieves an advantageous combination, the counterplan is not competitive. If the permutation fails, the counterplan is competitive. If the permutation fails, the affirmative does not have to defend it throughout the round. A permutation is only a test, not an advocacy.

Affirmatives permute the plan and the counterplan because the perm may be able to shield the affirmative plan from a link to the disadvantage