

Topicality

What Is Topicality?

The purpose of topicality is to determine the scope of the topic. The resolution is the assignment for the debate. Just like a paper in class, the affirmative has to discuss the assigned topic. The goal is that each team, affirmative and negative, has a reasonable chance of winning the round.

Parts of a Topicality Argument

Make sure your topicality argument has each of these points.

Definitions. The definition portion of the argument is usually presented first. Definitions can be contextual or denotative. Contextual definitions are definitions and meanings of words commonly used in the literature. Denotative definitions are technical definitions.

Example: "Substantially" means at least 50 percent.

Violation. Tell the judge which specific word or words from the resolution that the affirmative violates.

Example: The affirmative only removes 25 percent of the troops in Afghanistan, not the 50 percent needed to be substantial.

Reasons to Prefer. Describe why your definitions are the best way to interpret the words in the resolution. Explain what a topical affirmative looks like and what ground belongs to the affirmative and what ground belongs to the negative.

Here are a few common reasons to prefer:

- *Ground.* Debate needs to be fairly divided, with each team having an equal chance of winning.
- *Grammar.* Distorting the meaning and context of words and phrases makes the resolitional meaning difficult to determine.
- *Education.* The reason we debate is to learn. Limiting incentives to research is bad for debate.
- *Limits/Predictability*—Large topics are hard to research, and reduce chances that the negative can be prepared.

Example: If an affirmative that only removes 25 percent of military presence is topical, affirmatives can avoid links to the biggest disadvantages on the case.

Voting Issue. Tell the judge that the affirmative should lose because they are not topical. Describe topicality as a rule of the game that the affirmative broke.

What Are Effects and Extra Topicality?

Effects means that the plan isn't ON FACE topical, but instead leads to a topical action. This mixes the burdens between solvency and topicality. It increases affirmative ground and makes topicality a question of solvency.

Extra means a plank of the plan goes beyond the mandate of the resolution. It increases aff solvency and advantage ground. It forces the negative to counterplan to catch up.