

A GUIDE TO **IPDA/NPDA**

DEBATE

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So you want to learn IPDA or NPDA debate.

Awesome! The following guide should serve as a starting point for collegiate competition.

However, while IPDA and NPDA events are relatively standardized, norms and rules may differ based on region and tournament. I would encourage you to consult with your coach or a tournament organizer to ensure that you understand any specific rules that the guide may not cover.

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Rules Overview

Both IPDA and NPDA are meant to be accessible and approachable forms of competitive debate. Both are limited-prep events – the topics are decided shortly before the debate commences, and all debaters are granted the same amount of time to prepare a case. Fundamentally, IPDA is a one-on-one debate format, while NPDA pits two teams of two against each other. IPDA and NPDA have other differences though, outlined here.

IPDA

Prep time: 30 minutes

Sides: Affirmative (AFF) and Negative (NEG)

Speaking Times:

AFF Constructive (AC) – 5 minutes

NEG Cross-Examination (CX) – 2 minutes

NEG Constructive (NC) – 6 minutes

AFF Cross-Examination (CX) – 2 minutes

1st AFF Rebuttal (1AR) – 3 minutes

NEG Rebuttal (NR) – 5 minutes

2nd AFF Rebuttal (2AR) – 3 minutes

NPDA

Prep time: 15 minutes

Sides: Government (GOV) and Opposition (OPP)

Speaking Times:

Prime Minister (GOV 1st speaker) Constructive – 7 minutes

Leader of Opposition (OPP 1st speaker) Constructive – 8 minutes

Member of Government (GOV 2nd speaker) Constructive – 8 minutes

Member of Opposition Constructive (OPP 2nd speaker) – 8 minutes

Leader of Opposition Rebuttal (OPP 1st speaker) – 4 minutes

Prime Minister (GOV 1st speaker) Rebuttal – 5 minutes

Resolutions and Topic Strike

A debate resolution is a topic to be debated, formatted as a statement. The AFF (or GOV) must agree with and defend the statement, while the NEG (or OPP) must disagree with the statement. Topic strike occurs before the round to determine the resolution that will be debated. A sheet of paper will be given to the debaters, typically with either 3 or 5 resolutions on it. The NEG (or OPP) strikes first by picking a resolution they do **not** want to debate. Remember, as NEG (or OPP) you are disagreeing with the resolution, so you would want to pick statements that will be hard for the AFF (or GOV) to make a case for. The AFF (or GOV) strikes next, picking a resolution they do not want to debate. Sides take turns striking until one resolution remains. The remaining resolution is the resolution for the round. Both sides should take a picture of the resolution or write down the resolution exactly before heading to prep.

Types of Resolutions

Three types of resolutions are commonly found in IDPA/NPDA debate: Policy, Fact, and Value. The type of resolution being debated will influence everything from the weighing mechanism chosen to the types of arguments

made. Typically, one should define the type of resolution at the beginning of the round. Other times, the type of resolution will become relevant during the round itself (for instance, if the debaters define the type of resolution differently). In such instances, be prepared to defend your interpretation of the resolution.

Policy Resolution: Policy resolutions involve an actor and an action. The debate centers around whether the actor should take the specified action.

- "The United States ought substantially increase their nuclear arsenal."
- "NATO should be abolished."
- "We should be honest with children about Santa Claus."

Fact Resolution: Fact resolutions will have debaters arguing over the truth of a statement. Typically, the AFF (or GOV) will argue that the statement is true more often than not.

- "Marjorie Taylor Greene is the future of the Republican Party."
- "Globalization is a net benefit to developing nations."
- "Baseball is no longer America's sport."

Value resolution: Value resolutions are more abstract than policy or fact resolutions and ask us what we ought to value morally or philosophically. Note that overlap exists between value and policy/fact in the way in which value rounds are written. The key distinction indicating a value round is that a value round centers the debate around either broad societal values or big-picture themes (such as love or truth). While value resolutions can get a bit murky, a good rule of thumb is if you can boil your argument down to "we should value X over Y", the resolution should be defined as a value round.

- "When in conflict, governments ought to value civil liberties over national security."
- "The law ought to be blind."

- "Follow the yellow-brick road."

Pre-Debate Setup

Generally, the AFF (or GOV) is granted the competition room for debate prep, whereas the NEG (or OPP) must find elsewhere to prepare their case. After prep-time has elapsed, debaters are expected to be in the room prepared to commence the round. After prep, evidence-gathering is strictly prohibited. If they have not already, debaters should set up their flow paper - the paper that will be used to "flow" (or take notes of) lines of argumentation. The best practice for flow paper is to take two sheets of computer paper and draw five columns on one sheet and four on the other. The five-column sheet will have a column for the AC, NC, 1AR, NR, and 2AR (for NPDA follow the same structure, but lump the Member of Opposition Constructive and Leader of Opposition Rebuttal together). The five-column sheet is used to flow the AFF's (or GOV's) argumentation and the NEG's (or OPP's) rebuttals to the AFF's arguments.

AC	NC	1AR	NR	2AR
AFF (or GOV) case goes here	NEG (or OPP) rebuttal goes here	AFF (or GOV) reinforces their AC points here	NEG (or OPP) continues to rebut here	AFF (or GOV) summarizes their points here

The four-column sheet will be formatted the same, minus the AC. The sheet will be used to flow the NEG's (or OPP's) argumentation, and the AFF's (or GOV's) rebuttals.

NC	1AR	NR	2AR
The NEG (or OPP) case goes here	AFF (or GOV) rebuttal goes here	NEG (or OPP) reinforces their NC points here	NEG (or OPP) summarizes their points here

With the two-sheet format, note the distinction between a debater's arguments for their case and a debater's arguments against their opponent. Having two sheets of paper will help debaters to distinguish between their claims and their refutations of opposing claims.

Before the round begins, it is good practice for debaters to ask if judges are comfortable with debaters timing themselves (a phone works fine if set to do not disturb). Additionally, debaters can ask a judge for their paradigms. Paradigms consist of a judge's judging criteria and preferences. If your judge does give you paradigms, listen carefully and incorporate their preferences into your case as best you can. Prior to your speeches, you should also ask both the judge and opponent if they are ready, as sometimes a judge or opponent will be finishing up notes. In your opening speech and closing speech, issuing a thank-you to judge(s) and opponent(s) is a conventional courtesy that is both good manners and frames you in a positive light to your judge.

Constructive

The constructive is where a debater puts forth argumentation for their side of the debate. The constructive consists of three key parts: Definitions, Weighing Mechanisms, and Contentions.

Definitions

The first part of the constructive involves the debater reading the resolution and unpacking definitions. Debaters should define each key term in the resolution (for instance, you should define “universal basic income” but not “the”). Definitions should be cited from a reputable source – typically a dictionary. For some terms, citing a definition from an academic journal or book is acceptable. When you define your terms, think about how defining each term in a certain way may be beneficial to your side, if even marginally.

For example, let’s take the resolution “Globalization is a net benefit to developing nations.” As AFF (or GOV), defining globalization as “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy” (Merriam Webster) as opposed to “the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations” (Peterson Institute for International Economics) may be advisable. The latter definition opens the door to arguments from the NEG (or OPP) about United States cultural hegemony and the tendency of the U.S. to disrupt other cultures. Despite offering a marginal benefit, one should not spend long periods of time finding definitions for the round. While some exceptions to the rule exist, often it is better to focus on finding evidence for your arguments as opposed to the perfect definition.

Weighing Mechanisms

Weighing Mechanisms (sometimes referred to as values or value criteria) are one of the most obtuse aspects of IPDA/NPDA competitive debate. With time though, they become an intuitive part of the debate process. In essence, a weighing mechanism provides a means by which the judge is able to “weigh” who won the round. The weighing mechanism clearly outlines what the debater thinks should be the top standard which

the debaters should care about, and what they are trying to prove they uphold. Basically – If I can prove that my side (AFF/GOV or NEG/OPP) best upholds *weighing mechanism*, I should win the round. Make sure you define your weighing mechanism!

To illustrate why weighing mechanisms are so important, consider the following resolution: "Broccoli is the best vegetable." The weighing mechanism used for the debate will shape how both the debaters and the judge view the round. Maybe the AFF (or GOV) will use the weighing mechanism of "nutritional value", arguing that broccoli is the best vegetable because broccoli offers the most nutritional value for any vegetable. As such, each of the arguments from the AFF (or GOV) should serve to reinforce that broccoli has the most nutritional value of any vegetable. In turn, the NEG (or OPP) may set a counter weighing mechanism of "taste", arguing that broccoli is not the best vegetable because broccoli does not taste the best. Of course, NEG (or OPP) arguments should be in service of proving that broccoli does not taste the best when compared with other vegetables. The debaters may then spend time debating which weighing mechanism is a better fit for the resolution. Alternatively, a debater may argue that they would win under either weighing mechanism. Be careful though, because while such a line of argumentation is a viable strategy the debater will have to do legwork under both WMs. Other options include the debater concluding that weighing mechanisms are similar enough to be considered the same for all intents and purposes (for instance there is no reason to debate whether we ought to value "preservation of democracy" over "democracy"), and a debater dropping their own weighing mechanism and accepting their opponent's. The latter is an advanced technique that can work well in particular circumstances but can also backfire and lose you the round. Typically, such a strategy will find use if a debater's case under their own weighing

mechanism is revealed to have substantial flaws, and their case would be better served under the opposing weighing mechanism.

Common weighing mechanisms include (but are not limited to):

Utilitarianism

On – Balance

More True than False (or 51/49)

(Preservation of) Democracy

Equality

Justice

Fairness

Quality of Life

Individual Rights

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Contentions

After going over definitions and a weighing mechanism, a debater then moves into their contentions – the meat of their arguments. A contention is a key point that forms a substantial argument supporting your side. The contention is comprised of the claim, the evidence supporting the claim, and the impact of the claim. Contentions should be clearly delineated from each other – any contentions that are sufficiently similar can typically be grouped under one overarching contention with two subpoints. Examples of contention formatting can be seen below:

Contention 1 – Drug Decriminalization Combats Cyclical Poverty

Evidence (Source 1)

More evidence (Source 2)

Considering that XX% of Americans live in cyclical poverty according to (Source 3), by decriminalizing drug use and possession we can end cyclical poverty for XX million people. Decriminalizing drug use and possession will create an overall higher standard of living for millions, as well as bolster our economy. (The final sentence is the impact statement, delivering a clear outline of the benefits of the plan).

Contention 2 – Drug Decriminalization Benefits Public Health

Subpoint A: Decreased Overdose Deaths

Evidence (Source 1)

Impact Statement

Subpoint B: Reduced Drug Use

Evidence (Source 2)

Impact Statement

Clearly then, drug decriminalization is an incredible help to public health outcomes, as drug decriminalization has been seen to reduce both overdose deaths and drug use.

Cross-Examination/NPDA PoI, PoO, PoPP

Cross-Examination

In IPDA, each debater is granted a two-minute cross-examination, in which one debater can ask the other debater questions. Questions can be intended to clarify (“Could you restate your definition of decriminalize for

me?”), probe evidence quality (“In your second contention, you cited a study from the Journal of Sciences stating that drug decriminalization in Portugal has not led to an increase in crime. What was the date of that evidence?”), or reveal weakness in the opposing case (“In your first contention, you cited a study from the Journal of Sciences claiming that Portugal’s drug decriminalization has not meaningfully decreased drug use. Would you say that the primary goal of the decriminalization policy was to decrease drug use or decrease overdose deaths?”).

NPDA PoI, PoO, PoPP

NPDA has no cross-examination periods. Questions (called Points of Information) are asked during speeches themselves. While the opposing side is speaking, either debater may stand up and wait to be acknowledged. The speaker may wait to acknowledge the questioner or do so right away. When the questioner is acknowledged, they say, “Point of Information:” and ask their question. Typically, debate teams are limited to three points of information per round, and the first and last minute of a speech is considered “protected time”, during which questions are not taken. Generally, it is advisable to use all three of your questions, as on top of giving you useful information to use against your opponents, well-placed questions can disrupt your opponent’s flow and take time away from their case.

Additionally, debaters may stand and declare a Point of Order (when a debater believes their opponents have broken the rules in some fashion, the debater must cite the particular rule that was broken) or a Point of Personal Privilege (when the opposing side has said something egregious or offensive). As with Points of Information, the debater must declare “Point of Order” or “Point of Personal Privilege” when they are acknowledged. The most common Point of Order is objecting to new information entered during

a side's last speech. Points of Personal Privilege are rare and seldom seen in NPDA rounds.

Rebuttals

Flows/Drops

During debate, flow your arguments as well as the arguments of your opponent(s). If at any point, your opponent "drops" (or fails to address) a point (an attack on the opposing case or a defense of your case), take note. Mark the dropped point on your flow by drawing an arrow across the flow (an arrow starting at the dropped argument moving across the columns).

AC	NC	1AR	NR	2AR
Definitions	Rebuttal	Defense	Rebuttal	Defense
WM	Rebuttal	Defense	Rebuttal	Defense
Contention 1	Rebuttal	Defense	Rebuttal	Defense
Contention 2	-----	-----	-----	-----→

Seen above is a very simplistic example of a dropped argument on the flow. The NEG failed to address the AFF's second contention, and thus the argument has been dropped. Now, the AFF is given the opportunity to "extend the contention across the flow". During the 1AR, the AFF should explicitly mention that the NEG failed to address the point, and that the point has been dropped. From here, the debaters (and judge) should consider the dropped point forfeited. Essentially, the AFF's point is taken as true. For the remainder of the debate, the AFF can (and should) use the dropped point as leverage against the NEG.

As you move into your rebuttal, start with attacking your opponent's case, then move to defenses of your case. Ensure that every definition, weighing mechanism, and contention is addressed. In some instances, you

may “group” opposing contentions together and address them with a singular rebuttal point that encompasses both. When you do so, make the grouping explicitly clear – you don’t want your judge or opponent to mistakenly conclude you dropped a point. Sometimes, you may see fit to outwardly reject an opposing argument, other times you may instead argue that your impacts outweigh (or are more impactful than) your opponent’s. A good debater will find a mix of both weaved throughout their cases.

Roadmaps

At the beginning of a rebuttal, some debaters choose to provide a “roadmap”, in which they walk their opponent(s) and judge through how they will structure the upcoming speech. Roadmaps can be given on-time (with the timer running) or off-time (before the timer starts). Some judges have a preference though, so asking before the round begins is often worthwhile. Roadmaps are not required but can be helpful to help judges and opponents alike follow your arguments easily. Roadmaps may sound something like the following:

“To provide a quick roadmap, I will be beginning by refuting my opponent’s case, then moving to defenses of my own case.”

The above example will not apply in every instance. For example, in a roadmap before your final speech you should acknowledge that you will be addressing voters at the end (more on voters later).

Signposting

Signposting is a debate technique that applies to constructives and rebuttals alike. Signposting is when the debater lets the judge and opponent know where the debater is at in the speech. For constructives, signposting involves clearly outlining the contentions. Give a preview of your contentions, then deliver each one (including all evidence and impacts), and wrap up by restating the contentions. Generally, your constructive is

structurally similar to writing an essay. For rebuttals, clearly state the opponent contention/piece of evidence you are responding to. Respond to it, and then clearly signal when you will be moving on to the next contention/piece of evidence.

Crystallization

Crystallization occurs during the final minutes of speaking time for both debaters. During each debater's crystallization, they will attempt to summarize and clarify the round for the judge(s) and give them clear reasoning why they should win the round. Crystallization typically can be found in the final minutes of the NEG (or OPP) NR and during the AFF (or GOV) 2AR.

Summarization

During crystallization, each side should attempt to provide the judge with a summary of the round. Restate the resolution and your side at the beginning of your summarization. Each debater should paint a broad-strokes interpretation of the round framing them as the clear victor. During summarization, the debater should clarify any framework or definition clash left standing before moving to voters.

Voters

At the end of their speaking time, each debater should provide a short list of reasons for winning the round, called "voters". Each voter should have a quick and snappy tagline that the judge can easily write down and understand (i.e. "dropped points" or "quality of evidence"). After stating the tagline, the debater should offer a succinct explanation of what the voter refers to and why the voter matters for the round.

An example of voters may look something like the following:

“Now to wrap up and illustrate why the affirmative ought to win the round, I would like to offer some voters. Judge, my first voter is going to be ‘dropped contention 1’. My opponent dropped my contention 1 regarding broccoli’s health benefits. The dropped contention is crucial for your decision today judge, because in dropping the point the opponent concedes that broccoli is the healthiest vegetable, and the healthier a vegetable is, the more we should value it. My second voter is going to be ‘taste preferences’. My opponent attempted to argue that taste is subjective, therefore we cannot weigh broccoli’s taste in the round. However, I provided a study examining multiple countries and found that broccoli was universally regarded as the best-tasting vegetable. Therefore, we can objectively conclude that broccoli is widely considered delicious. The fact that broccoli is delicious to so many people is yet another reason why broccoli is the best vegetable, because by-and-large people prefer the taste of broccoli to the taste of other vegetables.”

After wrapping up voters, debaters may use any remaining time to briefly (and respectfully) urge the judge to decide for their side.