

Debate Flows

Flowing is one of the most important skills in debate to learn. Unfortunately, it can also be one of the most boring. There are so many moving parts to flowing that explaining to debaters the ins and outs of this skill is paramount. Breaking it down into a few key areas to make it digestible is a key component.

What it is → Basically flowing is writing down all the arguments in the round so that they can all have a response.

Response → It is important to underscore that flowing isn't about writing down everything your opponent says, it's about being able to respond to arguments made in the round. If debaters don't have notes on the arguments, then the likelihood of responding to them decreases dramatically.

Abbreviation → In flowing often debaters start to have their own personal shorthand. There are some things that will be universal, but others that will be personal to each debater. Some of the more common ones include:

United States Federal Government	USFG
Status Quo	SQ
Value	V
Value Criterion	VC
Advantage	Ad
Disadvantage	DA
Nonresponsive	NR
Nonunique	NU
No Link	NL

But then others are personal to the debater and even the resolution. A resolution about police brutality might have an abbreviation like 'pol.'

Structure → Thinking of flowing as a type of outlining helps. As students are writing out the arguments presented by opponents, the substructure can be equally as important in order to fully respond to all the arguments presented.

Flowing Exercises

- 1) Using music as one of the tools for learning flowing is helpful practice. Playing a song and having students flow the song can really help in round. In these cases we're often finding structure in situations in which the structure is not overt. This helps students deal with opponents that might not signpost their speeches as well as others. Picking out claims and warrants can be the second phase of this exercise.
- 2) The best flowing practice is to have students mock judge and flow other practice rounds or even real rounds (sending them to finals at tournaments).

Other Tips

- 1) Using two different color pens can be really helpful in flowing. Having the colors delineate between the affirming and negating arguments is a very useful when weighing things. It also means that students can see which arguments weren't responded to. The phrase 'hole in the flow' means that there is an argument written down that was not responded to by the opponent. If there is no response, that means the argument stands.
- 2) Some individuals like to flow on landscape paper and others like to flow with their notepad turned to portrait. This is dictated by each individual's style.