

Flowing 101: Basic Tips

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Abstract: This article will give you a few brief tips to help you get started off on the right foot as you begin to flow for the first time. Once you master these steps, you can begin to develop your own sort of flowing personality and look into more detailed flowing advice in the article, "Flowing: Why You Should Learn How To."

I've Never Taken Notes Like This—Help!

The idea of flowing and the way that it is implemented is certainly one of the more unique things you see in debate. Personally, I can't think of anyone other than debaters that take notes like we do, but it's one of those things that if you can get really good at it, it will have a positive impact on your performance.

Here are some fundamentals to keep in mind when flowing:

First, you should never be trying to write down every word that your opponent says. That's impossible. In fact, you shouldn't even try to write down complete words. Instead, you should abbreviate words in such a way that makes sense to you, and use symbols when possible. For example, if your opponent says something will "cause" or "lead to" X, you can just draw an arrow (→).

Second, you should be drawing arrows to link arguments and answers together. If you are going to make an argument in the 1AR that you made in the affirmative case, draw an arrow from that argument in your "AC" column into the 1AR column so that when you look down at your flow you know that you want to reiterate that argument.

Third, when you first begin flowing, don't use the backside of the paper. You will find that sometimes people use the backside of the paper and completely forget that they flowed an entire contention there, and they will just drop it. As I said earlier, at the end of the day, flowing is about making sure you, personally, understand what's going on. Nobody but you have to be able to interpret your flow, but make sure that you can. Thus, if you are not worried about forgetting that you flowed on the backside of the paper, feel free to save some trees and do that.

Fourth, the main things you should be listening to when you are flowing are your opponents main points (contentions, sub-points, etc.), evidence, and the source that their evidence comes from, as well as the claim it makes and its warrant and impact. For example, if your opponent reads a piece of evidence from Barack Obama claiming that we need to tax the rich to ensure equality, your flow could look something like:

Cont. 1 – tax rich ensures = Obama – taxing rich → distr of wealth → distr of wealth ensures each get due

Here you've managed to write down the crux of your opponent's argument in a concise manner so that you are prepared to effectively rebut it.

Fifth, quite honestly, the only way to become a better flower is by practicing. If you can, watch practice rounds between members of your team, flow the news and the arguments they are making, or watch videos of old debate rounds online. Regardless of how you do it, you want to begin training your ears and hands to be able to keep up with what your opponent is saying, and this requires practice.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, flowing is, although underrated, an incredibly important skill. Many rounds, including some of the most important elimination rounds, have been lost because debaters haven't flowed adequately and they have dropped arguments that they did not make note of earlier. If you can master the art of flowing, not only will you not lose rounds because you aren't dropping arguments, but you will be poised to take advantage of your opponents who do not answer your arguments.

