

## The Disadvantage

When you think about debating the opposing viewpoint of any situation what comes to mind? Whether you are debating Twinkies versus Ding Dongs or if national missile defense is a good idea, there are two main types of arguments that you can make: 1) you can argue that the alternative is better or 2) you can argue that your opponent's idea is a bad one. This is true in academic policy debate as well. One of the most popular and effective ways for a negative to debate is to make an argument that if the affirmative policy was enacted it would lead to negative consequences. This type of debate argument is called a disadvantage.

A disadvantage is a way for the negative to say not only is the affirmative plan a bad idea because it will not solve, but more importantly the affirmative plan will have huge negative consequences. Most disadvantages, or disads as the debate shorthand calls them, have a simple and reoccurring structure. What follows is an outline of the structure of a typical disad.

- **Uniqueness:** The uniqueness card is the first piece of evidence in a disad. This card functions as inherency does on an affirmative. Take for example a resolution on alternative energy, if the negative wanted to make an argument that alternative energy policies are very popular and that this popularity will translate into more legislative power for the president that he will use to get legislation passed that will have a huge negative impact. In this scenario the uniqueness card would be one that made the argument that the president's popularity is low in the status quo. The negative team would want to establish that the president's popularity is low so that when his popularity is increased by the affirmative plan then the reason for the popularity shift is uniquely because of the affirmative, hence uniqueness.
- **Link:** The link card is the second piece of evidence in a disad. This card functions exactly how it is named, it links the affirmative plan to the disadvantage. Remember the example from above, if the negative needed to increase the

president's popularity, then the link card would need to say that the affirmative's specific policy was very popular. In the example resolution, if the affirmative's plan was solar energy, the negative would want a link card that said solar energy was very popular. So, what happens when a negative can't find a card that is specific to the affirmative case? In this instance the negative might want to use a generic link card. A generic link card is one that links to the topic or a part of the topic as opposed to the specific affirmative policy option. For example in the sample resolution above a generic link card would say that alternative energy policies are popular.

- **Impact:** The impact card is the third and final piece of evidence in a disad. This is the card that spells out the negative consequences that will happen because of the affirmative policy option. In the example above the impact could go in many different directions. The negative could argue that with his increased popularity the President might get approval for an invasion of Iran. That invasion will lead to a host of negative impacts. The negative could also make the argument that the president will take his popularity and get more tax cuts passed which could kill the economy. The impact card is the reason that the negative team runs a disad, in order to access the impact.

In the example used above what if the negative team would like a card that says presidential popularity means that the president can get unpopular agenda items passed through congress, instead of just making the analytical argument in the tag of the impact card? Where would such a card fit and how does it relate to the rest of the disadvantage? The answer is simple, in some disadvantages you might want to insert a card between the link and the impact, this card as called an internal link card. In our example the argument that the negative would like to insert would be an internal link. This card functions as a bridge between the link and the impact. Some disads need this card and some do not. It is easy to determine if this piece of evidence is needed or not; just use the sense test. Does the argument make sense without an internal link? If so the negative doesn't need one. Does the argument

seem like there is a huge leap from the link to the impact? In this case the negative would want that internal link card to serve as a bridge between the link and the impact.

Some debaters insert another card either in place of the uniqueness card or as a replacement; this argument is called a brink argument. A brink argument is one that the negative makes that says, in essence, the impact is close to occurring and only needs a little push to ensure that it comes to fruition. In the example disad from above, a brink argument would say that the president has support to invade Iran, but only needs a little more in order to get his policy passed. In this example, the negative would argue that the passage of plan would give just enough popularity to lead to the impact. A brink card can be inserted in different places in a disadvantage or can be used as a substitute for a uniqueness card. The downside to using a brink card is that it is hard for the negative to prove that it will be the plan that uniquely leads to the disad's impact. Remember, that every day the president signs multiple pieces of legislation and how can the negative quantify how the affirmative plan really affects the brink. It is this difficulty that has led most debaters away from using brink cards.

The disadvantage is best utilized as a component of a larger strategy for the round. A disadvantage can serve many different purposes for the negative, for this reason it is probably the most used and effective argument in the negative's arsenal. The disad can be used as offense coupled with a whole host of case arguments. The disad can serve as the net-benefit to a counterplan. The disadvantage could also serve as bait for a negative team looking to use the affirmative's answers on the disad for an abuse story to win a topicality argument. But for whatever purpose you run the disad, it is all for naught unless you can win the disad.

When debating the disadvantage on the negative there are some important factors to keep in mind. The most effective way to win a disadvantage is with a good story. The best disads are those that make the most sense. From the uniqueness to

the impact does your disad story have wholes or logical leaps? If it does find the evidence to fill those holes or do not make the argument. Never allow yourself to be blinded by a huge impact; a large impact that has a bad story to access it is useless. A smaller impact with a tight, clear story will win many more rounds.

The affirmative team may want to debate on all or some of the levels of the disad and whether they want to be uniqueness, brink, link, internal link, or impact you must be ready to debate them. The negative can anticipate most of the affirmative's arguments by evaluating the disadvantage and trying to defeat it. If the negative is honest in its evaluation they should be able to predict where the debate might be headed. Once you have this information it is not overly difficult to find evidence and develop answers to this argumentation. What do you do, however, when you run a disad and the affirmative makes a host of arguments that you have never heard of? As in most cases the team that consistently wins debate rounds are those that can adapt to new arguments and changes to their pre-round strategy. The best way to do this is to be prepared. Know your disadvantage front and back, know the evidence in the file, not just the evidence in the shell, but the backup evidence as well. The more you know the easier it will be for you to adapt. Learn not just the evidence, but learn about the issues the evidence discusses knowledge is your best weapon, don't be afraid to use it.

If when running a disadvantage you decide that you do not wish to advocate the position any longer, then there are ways to make the disad go away. In the parlance of policy debate this is called kicking the position. There are some important things to remember when attempting to kick a disadvantage. The negative can never just stop arguing the disad. Doing this means that the negative has conceded all of the affirmative's arguments and it allows them to extend and expand them in any way that the affirmative chooses. If, for example, the affirmative had impact turned the disad and the negative just stopped arguing the position, then the affirmative would have a new advantage to the plan that the negative just gave them. So, how does a

negative team successfully kick a disad? The key is to extend certain arguments that the affirmative has made in order to get rid of the position. If the affirmative has made a non-unique argument simply go to this argument on the flow and extend the affirmative's argument. This is the one of the best ways to kick a disad. Another effective way is to extend a no link argument; this too would make the disad moot.

Both of these strategies work for every instance except when the affirmative has link turned the disad. When the affirmative is attempting to link turn the disad, there is no easy way for the negative to kick the disadvantage. In the case of the link turn the affirmative must win both their uniqueness argument and the turn on the link in order to win. This makes the offense harder for the affirmative to access, but it means that the affirmative has effectively cut off the two easy ways to kick the disad. In this case the best strategy is for the negative to just debate the disad; it is easier to debate it than to try to make it go away.

The disadvantage is an argument that is made in more rounds than any other negative argument and can be used to achieve many different goals for the negative. It is because of this universality that it is so important to understand the ins and outs of the disad. You should refer again and again to this article until you understand the disadvantage. The more you know about the disad the better and deeper you can debate and debating deeper equals more wins in more rounds!