

OPPOSITION STRATEGIES IN A POLICY DEBATE

1. Reject the existence of the problem:

- It is rare that this approach will be effective, as adjudicators generally set topics in response to a clear problem. You won't get very far arguing that there are no problems in Syria or that cosmetic surgery has no harms. Having said that, it may be effective to dispute the size or nature of the problem and thereby undermine the opposition team's imperative for action.

2. Accept the problem, but propose a counter-solution

- Adopting this approach requires opposition teams to outline a detailed alternative proposal for resolving the problem.
- Importantly, this still involves a departure from the current policy. For example, with reference to the examples above, counter-solutions may involve mandatory counselling rather than banning cosmetic surgery, and offering the Syrian leader an amnesty to leave the country rather than launching an invasion.

3. Accept the problem, but argue that the harms of the Government model are worse than the status quo

- This approach involves defending an imperfect status quo as superior to the Government model.
- Therefore, in the Syria debate, an Opposition team may argue that an invasion would create serious problems and the current approach of sanctions and isolation will take time but ultimately be effective. In the cosmetic surgery debate, an Opposition team may accept that these procedures cause harm to society, while arguing that the harms of an unregulated black market (created by a ban) are more substantial.

4. . Identify the Competing Principles

- This principle is the foundation of your case and is generally the first argument made by the first speaker in each Opening team.
- Let's look at some examples:
- 1) This house supports banning all recreational drugs • Government Principle: The Government has the obligation to protect people from their own harmful choices by restricting their freedom, in this case to consume recreational drugs.

- Opposition Principle: Individuals should have the freedom to make choices about their own body, including the choice to consume drugs for pleasure.

2) This house supports banning hate speech

- Government Principle: Individual freedom of speech does not extend to speech that causes serious harm to others and undermines social cohesion.
- Opposition Principle: Individuals should have the freedom to express their opinions, regardless of how offensive these opinions are, and the correctness of an idea should be assessed through a free process of debate and discussion

5. Winning the Clash of Principles

- Once you have identified and outlined your principle, it is important to keep a few things in mind to ensure that your principle wins:
 - I. Be Pre-emptive: In outlining your principle, make sure you prepare for the opposition team's principle and pre-emptively explain why your principle is superior. So, for example, if defending banning hate speech, you will need to explain why the government interest in protecting people from harm is more important than unfettered individual freedom and why it is insufficient for public opinion to reject harmful speech.

II. Be Specific: Principles often have limited impact on a debate because they are expressed in a generalised way.

- For example, if discussing banning hate speech, do not simply argue that actions that cause harm should be banned. Explain why hate speech itself causes significant emotional harms to individuals (providing examples) and then explain why emotional harm is something that the government should care about.

III. Identify clear limits for your principle:

- Debates often hinge on the exceptions to a principle. For example, if defending banning drugs, you may argue that bodily autonomy is an important right that should only be limited in instances of serious harm to individuals.
- However, in taking this approach, you need to consider whether you would also ban other addictive substances such as cigarettes and alcohol, which may also create harms.
- Ensure you have a clear idea of the exceptions to your principle and can differentiate similar situations if necessary.

6. Stakeholder Analysis

- If you are struggling to come up with arguments during prep time, it is worth considering a stakeholder approach. This requires you to consider all of the different groups that may be affected by a policy, making it easier to develop arguments.
- Let's consider the topic, "This house supports banning hate speech". The stakeholders affected include: • Victims of hate speech (who may benefit from this speech being banned); Members of extremist groups that spread hate, Members of the general public, and The Government.