

PROBLEM-ATISATION IN A DEBATE

DESCRIBING A PROBLEM

Why was this topic set? What is the issue that the adjudication team is trying to raise?

Identifying the problem requires you to identify the failures of the current situation ('status quo'). Let's look at some examples

- This house supports banning cosmetic surgery: Cosmetic surgery may be harmful because it: is a risky procedure; creates low self-esteem among patients and the wider community through reinforcing unrealistic expectations about body image; and takes resources away from other, necessary forms of surgery.

- This house supports invading Syria: The Syrian government violently represses its own people; a civil war has broken out; and Syria continues to empower terrorists in other countries, such as Lebanon
- In the next slide, lets discuss some of the most efficient way of describing problems.

1. Use Evocative Language

- When describing the problem, it is worth using language that corresponds to your solution.
- For example, if you are defending military intervention in Syria, it may be worth briefly describing the horrific atrocities occurring to better justify this extreme step.

2. Outline Trends

- If the problem continues to get worse, this may be a trend in need of correction.
- For example, in defending an invasion of Syria, the trend of increasing violence by the Syrian government and reprisal attacks by the rebels may mean that immediate action needs to be taken to prevent an all-out civil war.

3. Outline Tipping Points

- A tipping point is a point of no return. For example, many people argue that we are at a tipping point when it comes to resolving climate change: if we do not act now, it will be impossible to prevent the most harmful consequences of global warming. Therefore, outlining a tipping point adds urgency to the solution and makes it harder for the opposition to defend inaction.

- It is not always possible to identify an obvious trend or tipping point. In the debate, ‘This house supports banning cosmetic surgery’, it is hard to isolate an obvious trend justifying a ban. However, you may point to society’s increasing obsession with body image as a subtle trend that needs to be redressed.
- In addition, sometimes it will be strategic for an opposition team to argue that the trend does not exist, that a contrary trend exists, that there is no tipping point or that the tipping point is far away.