

# **A Coach's Notes<sup>1</sup>**

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Greenwich and Simsbury High Schools  
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**Resolved: Cities, states and other local governments should cooperate fully with Federal authorities to enforce Federal immigration laws and policies.**

## **Contents**

- **Introduction**
- **What Are We Talking About, Again?**

## **Introduction**

This is the first edition of the 2015-16 CDA season. Previous year's editions can be found through the [Training Materials](#) page on the [CDA web site](#). Accompanying this document are my notes from the demonstration round at Simsbury presented in two formats, transcript and flow chart.

These Notes are intended for your benefit in coaching your teams and for the students to use directly. I hope that you will find them useful. Please feel free to make copies and distribute them to your debaters.

I appreciate any feedback you have, good and bad. The best comments and suggestions will find their way into subsequent issues. I would also consider publishing signed, reasoned comments or replies from coaches or students. So if you would like to reply to my comments or sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, I look forward to your email.

## **What Are We Talking about Again?**

In the demonstration round at Simsbury the First Affirmative never stated the resolution in his constructive. That isn't necessarily wrong. In most debates the speakers reintroduce themselves and restate the resolution every speech, wasting 10 or 15 seconds they could be making arguments, one of my pet peeves. But simply launching into your case in the 1AC seems a bit spare.

The 1AC also only defined one phrase in the resolution, "cooperate fully," which was intended to serve as the basis for their plan, though that isn't cleared up until near the end

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of the round. As a result much of the debate was a bit fuzzy because neither team was entirely clear what each side stood for.

Does this sound like some of your debates?

If the round seems fuzzy to the debaters, how is it going to appear to the judge? the audience? Assuming that the judge, your opponents or the audience know what you are talking about is a mistake. Granted, you can spend too much time explaining things to your listeners. Knowing what you must include and what you can safely leave out is an important decision you must make whenever you speak. In this piece I talk about this problem.

### ***The Communication Problem***

In a debate, you and your partner walk into a room to debate two contemporaries that you probably don't know, judged by an adult you also probably don't know, with, perhaps, some observers who might—rarely—include your coach or someone else from your school but more likely whom you also don't know. You also have no idea what they know about the topic or about debate. You need to communicate with them: in particular, you need to persuade the judge to vote for you. This requires you establish common ground, common meaning and common language.

We normally do this by starting a dialog. You say something, then you pause for feedback. If your audience indicates that you were understood, you continue; if not you try again in a different way. At least, that's the idea.

A debate isn't a normal conversation. Your dialog with your opponent is constrained to alternating timed speeches and some cross-ex. Your opponent's goal is opposed to yours, so they have no reason to help you communicate, and may benefit if you communicate poorly. You don't have a dialog with the judge at all. In most debates he just listens quietly to both sides. His facial expressions may not tell you anything useful.

We all have a tendency to assume that the people we are talking to know what we are talking about. After all, we know what we are talking about, right? And we assume they will stop us if they don't understand. Debaters, all wound up from prepping their cases, are especially prone to this mistake. They are in such a hurry to present what (they think) they know, that they forget that the judge hasn't read the packet or any other sources on the topic. And the judge isn't permitted to stop and asked for clarification if he is confused.

### ***The Problem with Defining Terms***

Every debate text book and every debate coach emphasizes the importance of defining terms. Most Affirmative teams do define terms by referring to particular words in the resolution. Negative teams often respond with their own definitions, and often the two sides quibble over them in ways that are unimportant to the arguments they make or the decision rendered. The precise meaning of specific words can be important, but I haven't seen it happen often in CDA.

Another approach, one that I have often recommended, is rephrasing the resolution in a way that encapsulates what Aff intends to argue. To do this Aff has to look at the

resolution as a whole, rather than as individual words. To be useful, the restatement has to add precise meaning and help advance the Aff case. If it is simply the resolution in other words, it adds nothing and doesn't help. But I do think a wholistic approach is superior to taking words or phrases in isolation.

Sometimes Aff gives definitions in the form of a plan. Aff adds details intended to explain their intended implementation of the resolution. This is useful if it clarifies the arguments that follow by making it clear what the Aff is advocating. But the Affirmative must fully and honestly embody the resolution in that plan. In my experience Aff often attempts to avoid the burden of the resolution and limit its potential negative impact. This is defensive rather than offensive. Another error is to include details in the plan that are not essential to implementing the resolution, possibly confusing the source of the Aff impacts.

Some teams begin with a quote or an example intended to characterize their position. There may be both an emotional or moral component to this in addition to an obvious logical argument. While not a definition, this can prepare the audience and make them more favorably disposed to hear the case that follows.

The problem is that “defining terms” doesn't really describe what the First Affirmative needs to do. Like the term, “burden of proof,”<sup>2</sup> I think it's a poorly chosen phrase that is even more poorly understood.

What the judge really wants to know is what the debate is going to be about. The Aff has the first opportunity to make this clear and the advantage to do so in a way that favors the case it intends to present. That means more than simply stating what the resolution means, but also why it's being debated (besides the fact you were told to debate it) and the language you are going to use to talk about it.

## ***Context and Stock Issues***

The First Affirmative has the first opportunity to explain the resolution to the judge. The less the judge knows about the issue the more important it is for Aff to educate him and shape his views. The more the judge knows about the issue the greater the opportunity for the Aff to impress him with their understanding. The more the judge may personally disagree with the resolution, the greater the opportunity for the Aff to change his mind. Of course, there is an obvious down side you fail.

Most CDA resolutions call for a change in policy or the implementation of a new policy. Years ago debaters were taught to present what was called a “stock issues” case to support this type of resolution: describe a problem or harm; explain why existing measures can't solve it (inherency); present a plan that implements the resolution; explain how the plan solves the problem; present of list of good things (impacts) that happen if the plan/resolution is adopted.

The first two parts, harm and inherency, required Aff to set the stage for the judge. Harm is a call to action. Inherency explains why the harm exists and persists. Together they

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<sup>2</sup> We really can't “prove” anything in debate, in either a mathematical or legal sense. I prefer “justify” or “explain” or “persuade” to describe the overall burden on the Affirmative and the general burden on both teams to support their own arguments.

summarize what is happening today and provide a reason for having the debate and accepting the resolution. Done correctly, they should make clear why the resolution points the way to a solution. The judge sees a full analysis of the issue.

Debaters are not required to use this approach, and it fell out of favor a long time ago. Today most debaters skip to the end: present a brief plan implementing the resolution and a list of good things that happen as a result. Their plan is often no more than their definition or restatement of the resolution. But this means there is no context. It's like selling a car by talking about the sound system or the airbags, without mentioning transportation.

You don't have to present a stock issues case, but having all of the components in mind as you prepare and present your case can be very helpful. A brief statement of the problem you are trying to solve and the reason why it exists and persists prepares the judge to accept your arguments in favor of the resolution.

## ***Framing***

You probably know that your choice of language and presentation (as well as your dress, your expression, your body language, etc.) can influence how your arguments are perceived. Anything you can do to make your side sound better than the other helps. How you set the issue to be debated before the judge is just as important. This is sometimes called "framing the issue."

The Business Dictionary<sup>3</sup> defines "framing" as "setting an approach or query within an appropriate context to achieve a desired result or elicit a precise answer." Aff wants to present the issue so as to elicit a favorable answer from the judge. One way to do that is to provide an interpretation of the resolution which is easy for the judge to accept and hard to reject.

Framing is similar to "spin," providing a favorable interpretation after the fact. If you are presenting yourself as neutral, framing or spin that tilts to one side is dishonest. But if you are identified as being partisan, it would be foolish to not to put your arguments in the best light. As long as it is clear which side you favor, your arguments are honest and the information you present is correct, there is no sin in framing the issue to your advantage. In debate we require you to argue both sides during the day, so you will have look at framing from both sides.

I think that the term "framing" captures what the Affirmative needs to do better than "defining terms." The Affirmative advantage is not simply in selecting an interpretation of the resolution that is favorable, but having the first opportunity to present it in a favorable light. This means explaining why the underlying issue is important, why the issue exists, and how adopting the resolution, appropriately defined, is the right thing to do.

## ***The Immigration Issue***

At first sight the resolution for the Novice Scrimmage seems odd: why wouldn't local authorities cooperate with the Federal Government? If you have read the packet you

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/framing.html> .

know some have chosen not to cooperate because they disagree with US immigration policy and how it is applied. These cities see it primarily as a human rights issue, and secondarily as a legal and economic one.

Aside from the immigration issues, the US is relatively unique in having a system of government with power split among different levels of government, in particular the Federal Government and the states. In most countries the central government controls local government down to the municipal level so all follow national laws and regulations. Not everyone is familiar with this, and so it is also something you may want to explain to the judge.

I will present three openings for the 1AC: one based on the demonstration round I saw at Simsbury; one that I think is more a typical CDA constructive; and finally one that embodies the idea of framing the issue for the judge at the start of the round. In the first example, these are my words based on my notes for the round, not necessarily precisely what the debater said.

The Simsbury 1AC was spare, even by CDA standards, as it did not even include a reading of the resolution:

*Good morning. My name is Debater One and my partner is Debater Two and we are from Normal High School. We define "cooperate fully" to mean following Federal requirements during the normal course of law enforcement. Our three contentions are: first, failing to follow Federal guidelines lets criminals go free; second, a coordinated response to illegal immigration is superior; and, third, cooperation would not harm local law enforcement.*

At this point the judge knows who the debaters are, and has a definition for "cooperate fully" and three contentions. But the judge doesn't know what the resolution is or why anyone would be interested in it. And it isn't clear what Aff stands for.

The standard CDA opening adds a little:

*Good morning. My name is Debater One and my partner is Debater Two, and we are from Normal High School. We are here in support of the resolution, that cities, states and other local governments should cooperate fully with Federal authorities to enforce Federal immigration laws and policies. To clarify the debate, we define "cooperate fully" to mean complying with any Federal law or regulation regarding immigration, and any lawful request from Federal authorities based on these. In particular, this means inquiring about immigration status and complying with Federal requests to hold illegal immigrants arrested in the course of local law enforcement, even when there is no longer any local legal reason to do so. We have three contentions supporting our position...*

I've added two things here. The first, obviously, is a statement of the resolution. I have also extended the definition to identify the crux of the position taken by "sanctuary cities", which is to ignore the immigration status of anyone arrested for a local crime. But, as an actor might say, there is still no motivation, no background, no clear reason why the Affirmative is taking this position or why the judge should care.

So here is a third approach:

*Good morning. My name is Debater One and my partner is Debater Two and we are from Normal High School. Illegal immigration is a world-wide problem, no less in the US. There is much disagreement about who the US should allow to enter the country and who should be allowed to remain. Some cities, known as "sanctuary cities," have chosen to ignore Federal immigration law and regulation out of sympathy for the plight of illegal immigrants, some of them*

*known criminals. Because we believe that a fragmented approach to a major issue like immigration is a mistake, we support the resolution, that cities, states and other local governments should cooperate fully with Federal authorities to enforce Federal immigration laws and policies. We define “cooperate fully” to mean inquiring about immigration status and complying with any Federal law or regulation regarding immigration, and any lawful request from Federal authorities based on these. In particular, this means complying with Federal request to hold illegal immigrants arrested in the course of local law enforcement, even if there is no longer any local legal reason to do so. We have three contentions supporting our position...*

Same intro, some resolution, same definitions and contentions. What is new is that I prefaced the resolution with a condensed version of the problem that motivates the debate. I didn't have to look hard to find it—it's contained in the first paragraph of the packet and the Affirmative contentions. You can probably do better with a little work, and you would certainly have to tailor it to the specifics of your case.

But now the judge knows what the debate will be about illegal immigration. The intro reminds the judge that it is a world-wide problem and how the US should deal with it is a source of controversy. So much so that some localities are ignoring Federal immigration law. Aff hints this means criminals are being set free. The Affirmative believes that a unified approach is the best approach, and that justifies support of the resolution. The judge is now primed to hear why cooperation is the best policy. And, augmented by the definitions, neither the judge nor the Negative should have any doubt as where the Affirmative stands. Aff is still defining terms, but those definitions appear in context.

This type of introduction is analogous to the “opening sentence” or “opening paragraph” of a standard essay. Your goal is to draw the reader in with a preview of what is to come. You should do the same thing when speaking to a judge or an audience.

### ***What about the Negative?***

As with definitions, the Negative has a right to offer an alternative context. The Negative will want to do this even when they have no issue with particular Affirmative definitions. In this case the First Negative might start something like this:

*Good morning. My name is Debater Three and my partner is Debater Four and we are from Another High School. We agree that illegal immigration is a serious issue. But because there is disagreement in the US as to the best approach, we believe that local adaptation to local conditions with a compassionate approach to illegal immigrants and their human rights justifies differences in immigration law enforcement. For that reason we oppose the resolution. First I will present our contentions supporting that position, and then I will reply to the Affirmative case...*

Again, you can probably do better, and you would want to adapt the introduction to motivate your Negative case.