Topicality Structure

The very first stock issue is Topicality. It is an *a priori* issue (it comes first!), and is a useful tool for defeating teams that you believe are straying from the resolution. Topicality can be argued in a variety of different ways, but the most popular way to argue Topicality is by following these four basic steps. Each step represents a vital part of winning and proving Topicality. Miss one of these steps and your argument becomes weaker. These are not rules, but they are a powerful strategy!

1. **Interpretation (or, Definitions)**

The first step is starting with the resolution. You must provide your interpretation of the resolution. What does the resolution mean? What is the scope of the resolution? You might use this time to pull out some definitions to specific words in the resolution. Definitions are not required, but they are helpful evidence for proving your interpretation of the resolution.

At this point you aren’t showing how the Affirmative team is outside the resolution. You’re simply explaining the boundaries of the resolution. Without an interpretation, it will be unclear if the Affirmative plan falls within or without the scope of the resolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without Interpretation</th>
<th>With Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Aff Plan</td>
<td>Resolution • Aff Plan</td>
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**TIP:** Reading the resolution is a good place to start! Some judges have only heard the resolution once. Reminding them of the exact wording of the resolution can help make your point.

2. **Standards (or, Warrants)**

The second step is to explain why your interpretation is better than the Affirmative team’s; why your definitions are better than the Affirmative team’s. Both you and the Affirmative team will have different interpretations of the scope of the resolution, and different definitions supporting your side. You must use Standards to show why yours is to be preferred. There are any number of reasons why your definitions or interpretations might be better. Whatever standards you choose, just make sure they are standards that only you can meet. A Standard can be any reason to prefer your interpretation/definition(s).

**Examples of Standards**

- Brightline / Clarity
- Common Man / Common Sense
- Grammatically Correct
- Framer’s Intent
- Better Source
- Field Contextual

- Reasonable
- Multiple Source Verification
- Real World
- Provides Ground
- Recency / Relevance
- ...and so many more!
3. Violation

Finally we get to the meat of the topicality argument: the Violation. The violation is where you demonstrate how the Affirmative team falls outside the resolution. You should have already explained (Interpretation) how big or small the scope of the resolution is, so the Violation is all about comparing the Affirmative team’s plan to your Interpretation. By demonstrating that the Affirmative falls outside the “circle” of the resolution, you demonstrate that they are off-topic, or, non-topical.

Reading the Affirmative team’s mandates is essential to proving they are off topic. Remember: it’s only the Affirmative team’s mandates that have to be topical. Harms and Advantages do not have to be topical. By reading the exact wording of the mandate, you can directly compare them to your interpretation; instead of getting lost in the rhetoric and analysis of the rest of the 1AC.

4. Impact

The last step to winning a topicality argument is convincing the judge that it’s important. You shouldn’t assume that the judge will vote for it, “just because”. Every good debater should be able to explain why topicality is so important. Why is topicality a stock issue? What would happen if we didn’t care about topicality? Explaining to the judge that there are important reasons to follow the exact terms of the resolution will help you win topicality.

**Examples of Impacts**

- Resolitional Integrity
  
  _The resolution means nothing if we don’t follow it._

- Social Contract
  
  _The Affirmative team read the resolution in their speech, thereby agreeing it is important and should be followed._

- Educational Value
  
  _The Negative team came prepared to debate the Resolution; we are better educated and improve more when we get to use our research._

- League Rules
  
  _The Stoa rules say, “It is the job of the affirmative team to uphold the resolution.”_

- Bad Precedent/Example
  
  _If we allow one non-topical Affirmative to win, it will create a precedent where no Affirmative will want to be topical._

- And more!