

CRITERIA FOR DEBATE TOPICS

The topic report should provide an introduction to the issues of the problem area. The criteria below should be used to evaluate the appropriateness of an area for high school debate. Please refer to the guidelines for report authors for additional details and specific report requirements.

Resolutions: The topic area should have an appropriate number of potential resolutions that can be debated. These resolutions should be neither too broad nor too narrow.

Timeliness: A good topic should be timely. It will be a topic that is being debated both in academic debate rounds, among the general population, and perhaps within government. Thus, topics that are likely to appear frequently in the media are generally good topics. However, it is important to note that the report will be written two years before the final debate on the topic takes place; it is important to choose a topic that will not be rendered meaningless (for example, by the passage of new laws) by the time the debates occur. New issues should arise as the topic is debated.

Scope: A good topic will address a problem that is significant in all sectors of the country, not merely in a single area or group of people.

Range: A wide range of skill levels exists among debaters who will use a topic. A good topic is one that can be understood and debated by novice debaters, yet will also challenge advanced debaters.

Quality: The topic should be one that enables high quality debates to take place. The issues involved in the topic should be ones that we want our high school students to be debating. It should be one that can be debated for a full year without producing repetitive debates. A good debate topic is one that will be of value to debaters, providing exposure to divergent points of view, experience in analyzing significant current issues and problems, and the opportunity to develop analytical and problem-solving skills.

Material: There should be a wealth of material available on the topic. It should help encourage debaters to utilize a wide range of reference materials. This material should be available to all debaters, not simply those with access to a large library or access to special Internet databases.

Interest: The topic should be one that can generate the interest of high school debaters, judges and community members.

Balance: There should be issues and arguments supporting both sides of the topic under consideration. Ideally, neither side of the controversy should have a significant advantage over the other side. Balanced affirmative and negative ground should exist. Examples of possible affirmative cases and negative positions inherent in the resolutions should be taken into consideration.