BOSTON DEBATE LEAGUE

Introduction to Flowing

What is a flow?

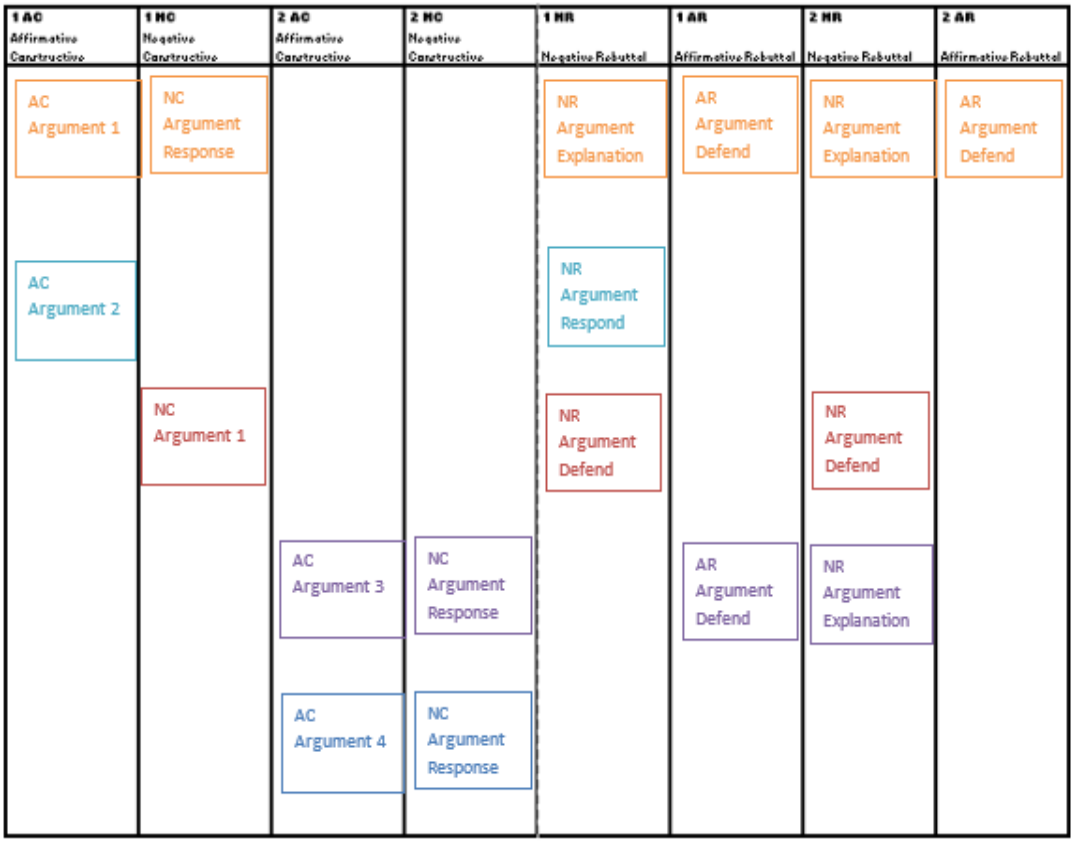
A flow is a way of taking notes that is specific to policy debate. It is designed to help judges and debaters stay organized and keep track of arguments. Having a structured note-taking guide is an easy way to keep everyone in a debate round on the same page.

A debate flow is linear: arguments are listed from top to bottom, with notes for each speech in a new column. This allows arguments and their subsequent responses to be side-by-side. Some people use different colored pens for Affirmative and Negative. There are a few benefits to this:

- It helps everyone see which arguments are the most important in a round
- It helps everyone keep track of the order in which arguments are being addressed
- It helps everyone see which arguments are being responded to and which ones are not. For judges, this might inform who you choose as a winner. For debaters, this will help you make sure that you are addressing all of your opponent's arguments.

Sample Flow

This model is condensed to show the entire flow, and uses different colors to illustrate how arguments are kept together. Most people use multiple sheets to take their notes: you could, for example, use two sheets side-by-side. It's not necessary to color-code arguments, though many people use different-colored pens for Affirmative and Negative arguments.



BOSTON DEBATE LEAGUE

What are signposting and roadmaps, and why do they matter?

A **roadmap** names the arguments that a speaker is going to address. Roadmaps are given before a speech, and tell everyone where on the flow they will be taking notes. Roadmaps are not timed. A **signpost** or **tagline** is a signal that the debater is addressing a specific argument. Signposts or taglines are given during a speech as a guide, and are included in speech time. For this reason, they are usually very short - usually just the name of the author and a short paraphrase of the idea.

It is a debater's job to provide a roadmap and to signpost, so if they're doing their job well you should be able to follow along as you take notes. That said, many debaters are developing this skill, so if a debater does not provide a roadmap or doesn't signpost, do your best to follow along and keep similar ideas together. If you feel comfortable explaining how to flow, this is a great skill to teach debaters during feedback!

How do I add new arguments to my flow?

Any time a debater introduces a new argument or idea, you should begin taking your notes on a new line within the column that corresponds to the speech in which the argument is introduced. All new arguments should be introduced during the constructive speeches: any constructive arguments that are introduced after the 2NC (or, sometimes, the 1NR) are considered "unfair," as the opposing team doesn't have the capacity to ask questions about them or properly respond to them. That said, debaters can continue to explain and clarify ideas all the way through the end of the debate round.

How do I flow Cross-Ex?

Simply, you don't. Cross-Ex is a time for debaters to learn information about their opponent's ideas. While Cross-Ex is important to the round, and may help you gain insight into what debaters are thinking, is not flowed or evaluated at the end of the round. If a debater makes a great point during Cross-Ex, they must bring it up during a later speech in order for it to be evaluated.

How can a judge use their flow to help evaluate the round?

As a judge, you can only evaluate arguments that made it to the end of the round (or are "extended to the end of the flow"). If debaters mention an argument in their first speech and never again, the argument is considered **dropped** (or conceded) - in other words, it effectively goes away. If a team stops addressing an argument and the other team brings it up, then the other team can "win" that issue. For example, if the Affirmative argues "the sky is green," and the Negative doesn't respond, then the Affirmative can reasonably say "the Negative did not respond to our 'sky is green' argument, so we win that argument."

When the round is over, take a look at your flow. How well did each side respond to their opponent? Which arguments within each horizontal line were the most compelling? Were any key arguments dropped? Answering these questions for yourself should help you evaluate the round and inform your feedback to students.